

## LESSON PLAN 3 – TONE, MOOD & PALETTE

In this session, the students will learn about the visual and subtextual language of storytelling. This session allows them to incorporate other useful skills like art and emotional literacy into their storytelling and recognise when stories are trying to evoke emotion in them.

**Tone:** A filmmaker's point of view about their film's subject matter, conveyed through filmmaking techniques such as cinematography, camera movement, editing, music, dialogue, and atmosphere. Do they view a certain scene as comedic, or dramatic, or suspenseful? How do they feel about certain political ideas, certain jobs, certain events in history?

**Mood:** Mood, in contrast, is what the filmmaker wants the *audience* to feel, scene-by-scene. There is some crossover here with tone, but mood is about the audience, not the filmmaker.

**Palette:** These are the tools you might use as a filmmaker or writer to achieve a certain mood or convey a certain tone. Colour, music, dialogue – all of these can tell us that a scene is sad or happy or meant to be funny.

### 1.1 – DISCUSSING TONE, MOOD & PALETTE

This is a complicated topic that entire books have been written about, so you can spend as much or as little time on this with your class as feels appropriate.

It can be a simple discussion of colour - most movie posters tend to mix together a cold, bright blue and a warm, golden orange, because the warmth and the brightness of the orange contrast powerfully with the cold of the blue. The heroes are often put in the orange light and the villains in the blue, to further push that contrast and combativeness.

Or it can be a discussion of soundtrack and music - how no music, sad music or upbeat music can completely change a scene.

The important lesson here is that creators are trying to speak to their audiences. Every detail of a story is a brushstroke in a much larger painting, all coming together in a composite whole.

### **3.2 - CLASS EXERCISE**

Show the students a trailer for an age-appropriate movie. Trailers are a great example of tone in miniature as their entire purpose is to give an audience an indicator of tone and mood.

Studios are very invested in making sure they reach the exact audience for their movies, particularly in movies for young people. If the tone is wrong or misleading, and a movie is not appropriate, there can be a huge backlash.

Some good examples from YouTube, depending on your class's interests.

1. Moana Trailer 1
2. Avengers Infinity War Trailer 1
3. Encanto Trailer 1
4. Spiderman Homecoming Trailer 1

Once the students have watched the trailer through once, ask them two questions.

1. How did the trailer make them feel?
2. How do they think the makers of the trailer wanted them to feel?

The answers you get will be immediate, and vague - on one watch, their reactions will be instinctual and emotional. This is good, though - get them to write them down, and then compare how they feel on a second and third watch.

Using the Spiderman Homecoming trailer as an example, you can then return to the start of the trailer, and go through it scene by scene, asking that same question.

Examine the use of colour, dramatic music, dialogue, the tempo of a scene (long, slow shots or short, choppy shots) what people are wearing, the lighting, as much detail as you like.

In the case of Spiderman, we start with an exciting scene of Spiderman easily defeating some bank robbers. Some sample questions include;

1. Why start with this scene?
2. What do we learn about Spiderman *at this point* in the trailer?
3. Why is it set at night?
4. What effects do the music and the choppy editing create?
5. Is Spiderman in any danger or difficulty?

Then we move to a school scene. Upbeat music, Peter and his friends, his crush;

1. Has the mood changed?
2. Is it very different from his life as Spiderman?
3. What new details do we learn?
4. Is Peter a confident hero or an awkward teenager?

This is also a good opportunity to reinforce previous lessons. A trailer is like a living elevator pitch. Do we know the setting? Do we know the character? Based

on only the information we're given, what we think the problem is for Peter by the midpoint of the trailer?

(Answer - he is a teenager who wants more respect, who wants to be treated like an Avenger, not a kid)

Ned in Spiderman Homecoming is a perfect example of how a character can come with their own tone. Even watching the trailer, students can see that every scene with him in it is lighter and more fun. You can balance out horror or peril with a character making jokes or being inherently funny.

Then, midway through, the tone changes.

We see a glimpse of the Vulture - and this is a useful scene in all sorts of ways to dissect. The first glimpse we get of our villain is him descending from a height. This makes him look bigger. It makes us - the camera - feel smaller, like we're a mouse under threat from a literal bird of prey.

The music in the second half of the trailer is far more ominous. We have more nighttime shots, which give the feeling of danger to the viewer. Things get more serious. The music gets darker. We see shots of the hero being thrown around. Spiderman isn't winning fights anymore. He's losing them. He's being threatened.

This conveys a tone of danger and peril. A tone of fear. The makers of this trailer want you to worry that Spiderman won't win this fight, even though it's a Spiderman film, so he will. Was it successful? Did it make the students - the viewers - worry and be excited, even though they might know that the heroes always win?

### **3.3 - GROUP EXERCISE**

Now that the students understand how tone and mood work, you can give them the project of deciding on the tone for their own movie treatment by creating a **look book**.

This, more than almost any other, is an exercise that they should constantly be returning to over the course of the lesson plan.

A look book is a crucial part of selling a movie. People respond visually before they respond to text, and so any pitch for any movie comes alongside a presentation or collage of imagery and music that shows the audience what they can expect.

To practice this, students can practice creating their look books by creating look books of movies that already exist. This can be assembled physically as a collage, or as a PowerPoint presentation, or even a digital collage using a website like Canva or a program like InDesign.

They can use pictures of characters, pictures of favourite scenes, printed out lines of dialogue, or just art that reminds them of the way the movie made them feel. If it's a comedy, the music should be upbeat. The pictures they choose should be bright. If it's a horror, we're looking at dark pictures and scary music.

This is a good opportunity for some literacy exercises where the students might look up keywords that describe the tone of their movie. Sad, gloomy, dark, decrepit, haunting, eerie - all of these are easy terms to search in order to build a look book.

The teacher can even assemble a library of pictures and challenge students to only pick three or four, along with some songs. A good source for artwork is the website Artstation, searching 'concept art' or just using Google Images.

Remind the students that they are not looking for work that directly references their ideas - a picture with a dragon does not necessarily only suit a movie about dragons, for example.

It just needs to convey the tone and invoke a mood - danger, peril, fantasy, excitement.