

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

A Series of Lesson Plans on Film in the Classroom

Suitable for: 5th/6th Class

INTRODUCTION

This series of lesson plans are designed to educate students on the core concepts underpinning creative writing through the medium of film and TV.

Specifically, each lesson plan is designed to guide students through the official industry process of creating a **treatment** for a creative project, showing students the practical application of creative writing skills using existing stories they already know.

Treatment: a document that presents the story idea of your film before writing the entire script. Treatments highlight the most important information about your film, including title, elevator pitch, story summary, and character descriptions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Literacy:

Students at 5th and 6th class level already have a wealth of knowledge about creative writing. They have watched a hundred movies, read dozens of books, read comics or manga or even watched music videos with a narrative.

They know how stories work.

However, like chefs who understand what an ingredient tastes like but not what it's called, students often need guidance in recognising just what they know. In over nine hundred school visits, I've seen the genuine surprise in students' faces when I call out complicated terms like foil, antagonist, mentor, heel turn, denouement, and arc, and show them how they already understand these terms, just not their fancy titles.

Almost anything we discuss using film and television can be applied to literature. Stories are stories, no matter the medium. The tools they learn here can be applied to studying class texts and writing their own stories.

Empowerment:

Students also already have taste. They have concepts and characters that they hate and that they love. These lesson plans empower students to recognise that listening to those instincts is exactly what professional creatives do, and that there is no difference between them and a visionary director or writer, except practice.

Iteration:

Practice is what makes a writer. Talent can be part of it, yes, but if you want to be a working creative, even talented people have to practice over and over again to hone that talent.

When you first begin writing, you worry and value every word and every idea. This is actually counterproductive. I use film writing specifically with students because it trained me to be less precious. You throw fifty bad ideas into the mix, argue over them, bat them back and forth, and then idea fifty-one is the one that works.

Students should not value ideas to the point where they mythologise them. These lesson plans encourage students to treat ideas like Lego - rummage around for them, try and fit them, toss them back when they don't work, find the one that does.

These lesson plans also highlight that no idea is fully-formed. You have to have it, consider it, dismantle it, put it back together. This is actually very useful for students because there should be no such thing as getting it 'right' on the first try.

A bad idea can be fixed. A good idea can be improved. The only thing that can't be fixed is a blank page.

Structure:

Creating work for screen is an extremely formulaic process. Structure is everything. There are beats you need to hit, there are tropes you need to lean into, and everything must be built off stories that are already successful.

This makes it a really useful tool for working with students because there is a blueprint to follow. A blank page can be terrifying for reluctant readers, or for students who do not see themselves as confident writers. Teaching structure allows for students to have a creative scaffold for their ideas if they're less confident and allows confident writers to play with and dismantle the structures that they see all around them.

Media Literacy:

Once you learn how films are made, you cannot help but see that process in every film and TV show you watch. This is incredibly useful in discussions about diversity, about bias, about politics in art, and simply about culture itself.

These lesson plans gently offer the tools students need to interrogate media - to learn from it, and to question what it is telling them.

Emotional Literacy: Students will be empowered by these discussions to talk about how media makes them feel - what events or characters they connect to or are emotionally affected by. Having an emotional response to a movie isn't bad or negative - it is absolutely what the creators intend to happen. It also promotes a diversity of opinion - everyone's emotions are valid, and if you were affected by something and somebody else wasn't, that just means you are different people and not right or wrong.

Teamwork:

Unlike the majority of novels, TV and film writing is a collaborate art. You have writer rooms, you have production teams, you have collaborations between writers, directors and actors. Having students write stories together normalizes talking about ideas and creativity, as well as taking some of the pressure from individual students who might be strong in some creative areas but less strong in others.