

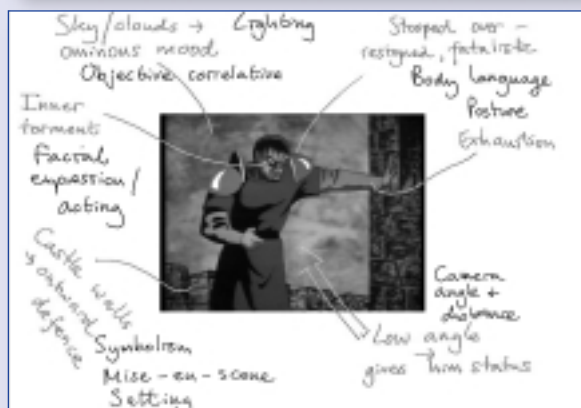
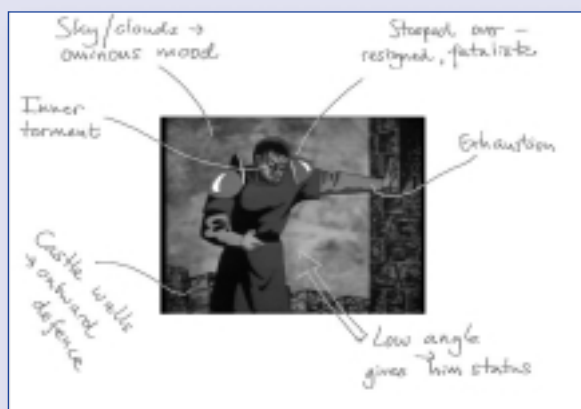
Teaching Literature through Moving Image

Teaching Moving Image through Literature

From Page to Screen and Back Again

James Durran and Craig Morrison report on their work in developing inter-textual approaches to literature and film.

Images 1-5 and 9-11 in this article are screenshots of projections and annotations on an interactive whiteboard.



A group of Year 9 pupils working on Act 5, Scene 5 of *Macbeth* look at a still from the BBC animated version, projected onto a whiteboard. Invited to describe what they can see, they begin consciously to disassemble the image – acknowledging elements of *mise-en-scène*, such as setting, character expression and gesture, colour, light, camera angle and distance. Asked to consider how each of these elements makes the character Macbeth seem, they begin as a class to make explicit their figurative reading of the image, agreeing on meanings, and linking these to their prior knowledge of the character and play (image 1).

Turning from the image on the board to the play-texts on their tables, the pupils then look for ways to root this reading of the image in the language of the scene, seeking an equivalence of imagery. They are guided by questions from the teacher: ‘How is this reflected in the language of the scene?’; ‘What does Macbeth say to suggest this?’; ‘How does the way the scene is written create a similar feeling?’; ‘Can you find any words in the scene which suggest this idea?’. The pupils highlight lines, phrases and words. They investigate, and may name, metaphors, symbols, pathetic fallacy, personification, etc. (image 2).

Turning back to the image, the pupils now make explicit connections between this language of literature and the language of film. They also name some technical

features of visual design – *mise-en-scène*, ‘camera’ angle and distance, framing, colour, lighting, and so on (image 3).

The pupils’ work with visual and written texts is dialogic: their imaginative and intellectual engagement with one informs and is informed by the other. Their learning is fuelled by the pleasure of uncovering and consciously constructing sophisticated meanings in two complementary media, neither of which is privileged above the other.

Film texts have often been seen as merely injecting motivation into the study of literature – providing access to a higher form. In this article, we are proposing ways of teaching the close reading of literature and film together, in which both are valued equally. We will describe ways of using increasingly common classroom technology – data projectors, PowerPoint and interactive whiteboards. However, the principles hold when only an overhead projector and a video are available. We will focus particularly on Shakespeare, where ‘the film’ is still often seen as a support for the printed text, or a reward for getting through it. At Parkside, we have experimented with radical approaches to Shakespeare, which abandon the presumed centrality of the printed text and use film as a starting point. To some extent, this has been a pragmatic approach in a crowded curriculum. However, it has also allowed us to approach the

Top to bottom: Image 1, image 2 and image 3.



James Durran (Advanced Skills Teacher in English and Media) and **Craig Morrison** (Head of English and Drama) both teach at Parkside Community College, Cambridge, which, in 1998, became the first specialist Media Arts College in the UK.

Parkside is committed to developing and disseminating innovative work with media and media technology across the curriculum. English, Drama and Media are taught together, disregarding traditional boundaries.

plays first of all as performed dramas, helpful for pupils writing about them at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, and it has allowed us to combine more easily the study of film with the study of literature.

From still to moving images: Shakespeare comparisons

The example above shows how looking at still frames as representative slices of film – carefully chosen visual quotations – is a powerful and accessible means to the close reading of film. They are relatively easy to subject to the same reading strategies which English teachers are used to using with verbal texts. They can be slowly released – uncovered bit by bit – so that pupils have to look at elements within them, to make predictions and to explore expectations. They can be annotated on a board, or on paper. They can be broken down, or rearranged. Importantly, they can easily be produced by pupils, who can discover for themselves, and rehearse, the principles of their construction: they can be drawn, or they can be enacted and photographed, as tableaux. And they can be a powerful way to structure close reading of a parallel literary text, of which they can offer a visual interpretation.

Of course, analysis of still images is necessarily limiting. Film is an audio-visual medium, working in real time; it operates in what Burn and Parker term the ‘kineiconic

mode’ (Burn and Parker 2001, 2003). When a still image is set moving, there is more to consider: speech, music, action and camera movement. At Parkside, pupils explore the language of moving images within various media schemes of work, but we also wanted them to explore and use these dynamic elements of film in the study of Shakespeare.

Conventional ways of using film with Shakespeare present some problems, however. Watching a single version of a Shakespeare play can flesh out the story for pupils in a way that constrains the imagination, yet there is rarely time to watch more than one version; and, although English teachers are familiar and comfortable with the idea of comparing adaptations to open up discussion of literature, such films are still generally read as extended, linear works, positioning the viewer through the force of the narrative.

We have been experimenting with focusing such comparison on single, moving camera shots from a number of different film versions of a Shakespeare play, as an exercise in close, technical reading – both of film and of Shakespeare. When pupils are asked to analyse very short clips, divorced from the subsuming nature of a whole viewing, comparison of different versions becomes possible, and pupils’ critical reading is more concentrated. This exercise makes strongly explicit the provisionality of the written text as something that can be read in many different ways; it also yields an enormous range of insights into film craft and language.

Macbeth: close reading through film

In our teaching of *Macbeth* in Year 9 we wanted to find a way of making moving image comparison just such a dynamic and responsive experience. After pupils had read and discussed key scenes from the play, we wanted to deepen their understanding by comparing how moments within those scenes had been interpreted in different film versions. These moments were

chosen for what they captured in terms of dramatic and character development.

Firstly, however, the cumbersome nature of the video cassette needed to be addressed: swapping and fast forwarding through videos is disruptive, and when comparing two film versions the impact of one is often lost by the time the next is played. Even with DVD technology there are problems with being able to enter the text at any point other than the beginnings or endings of ‘chapters’. We have found that a data projector (not necessarily connected to an interactive whiteboard) and widely available software held the answer. We digitise and compress single camera shots, just a few seconds long, into AVI files and then import them into Microsoft PowerPoint, where they can be activated with one click. They can either be displayed full-screen, or they can be tiled side-by-side, for comparative work. The latter encourages very focused comparison, the key being that clips can be viewed side by side or even simultaneously: differences and similarities are starkly obvious (image 4).

Images of *Macbeth on the Estate* are reproduced courtesy of BBC; images of *The Animated Macbeth* are reproduced courtesy of S4C.



Image 4

We have found it powerful to analyse the frozen shots as still images first, as above. Charged with ideas from this initial reading, the pupils then set the shots moving on the PowerPoint slide. Such a mode of viewing leads seamlessly into the mapping of thinking. On an ordinary whiteboard it is possible to annotate around the projected clips; on an interactive whiteboard it is possible



Image 5



Image 6

to embed these handwritten annotations on the slide, which can be saved and recalled in later lessons, or printed out.

How can such discussion be structured in a way which accelerates pupils' skills of reading both print and film texts? From experience, the most effective way of engaging pupils' thinking is to begin with the subjective: 'Which Macbeth is most likeable?'; 'Which version grabs your attention the most?'; 'Which version is most like you imagined this scene?'. Quick-fire brainstorming of adjectives works well in the initial stages: giving groups ten seconds after viewing each clip to agree upon one word that sums up how the character seems. Such initial responses lead organically into more analytic thinking: 'What in the clip particularly gave you the feeling that Macbeth was nervous at this moment?' As pupils find evidence from within the clip with which to

back up their assertions, they find themselves talking in sophisticated ways about the language of film. Macbeth's nervousness may be represented by his facial expression and movement; it may also be suggested by agitated camera movement and by an uncomfortable close-up shot. And this initial subjective response also leads directly into sophisticated discussion of interpretation: in one version, Macbeth is resolute rather than nervous; in another he is plotting; in another he is readying himself (image 5).

The analysis of film makes pupils re-evaluate the print text, and look for complexities in it. Arguing about and looking for synonyms for the descriptive language suggested to pupils by the clips generates a rich shared vocabulary about the single narrative moment. Using this bank of language to form the basis of a short piece of writing about the moment is very powerful indeed, as each key word has been negotiated or fought for.

Whereas with video tapes each clip might be viewed once, on the PowerPoint slide each clip can be viewed again and again. This can be playful, but also very productive. Clips can be viewed without sound, or without vision, and pupils can explore how this changes their reading. Pupils can be asked to choose the two least similar, or most similar, clips, to play and to compare. Using the abilities of PowerPoint to the full, it is possible to play all five or six versions simultaneously. Apart from the undeniable impressiveness of this, real learning can be drawn out of it. One quick activity is to play all at once and ask pupils which drew their attention the most on the screen – observations often focus on the level of physical action and the volume of speech. Asked to notice which clip ends first, pupils start to think about the relationship between pace and the portrayal of temperament, from the rash to the contemplative.

Even in whole class teaching, pupils can feel in control of the clips when they can be played so easily,

and will call for repeated viewings. They often particularly enjoy clips from *Macbeth on the Estate*, a contemporary and provocative retelling. When the looming figure of Ray Winstone as Duncan pushes Susan Vidler's Lady Macbeth up against a door frame in the cramped hallway and leers, 'Dear and noble hostess, we are your guests tonight', we are shocked. From our reading of the play this is not what we expect from Duncan: isn't he meant to have 'borne his faculties so meek'? Our pupils are intrigued when they see this and other such clips because they challenge their preconceptions about the characters (image 6).

At such points pupils naturally demand a wider reading of the written text: they want to see if there is anything elsewhere in the script that could justify such a cold interpretation of Duncan's character. After viewing Winstone's performance in *Macbeth on the Estate*, pupils soon seem to re-evaluate episodes such as the king's swift condemnation of the original Thane of Cawdor, or the fact that he keeps a bleeding captain talking for an age when he should be receiving medical attention.

The learning which grows out of such whole-class and group discussion is developed and crystallised in pupils' writing. Here, Kanika – an able pupil in Year 9 – gives an account of her reading of a single camera shot from Polanski's *Macbeth*: 'If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.' (Image 7).

In the first clip, Macbeth is having dinner at his party with King Duncan. Everyone is laughing and eating merrily, but Macbeth is nervous and distracted. The camera pans from left to right, and moves from Lady Macbeth, across Duncan, to Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth is on the right side – the future side. She is wearing a white dress which connotes purity and goodness, although she is planning to murder someone. It shows that she is living her lie, and deceiving everyone with the idea of her being innocent and good. She

also has her false face on, and fits in with the crowd. There is meat on the table, which hints that there will be another dead body soon. Lady Macbeth is eating ravenously – it is like her hunger for power – she can't get enough of it and will be as ungracious to get it as she needs to be.

Firstly, there is evidence of the power of the audio-visual mnemonic. Pupils were asked to root ideas about a character in a key symbolic action from film. Vitality it was up to each pupil to decide which action, within which version, they would recall later as a shortcut to remembering the character's qualities. To Kanika, Lady Macbeth's eating is akin to 'her hunger for power'. Kanika has also developed sophisticated ideas about the contrast between private thoughts and the wider situation, including the notion of dramatic irony, and has engaged with key themes of the whole text, such as appearance and reality. In terms of developing an understanding of the language of film, there is evidence of thinking through the act of reading/viewing the moving image, including complex thoughts on how the viewer reads the moving image from left to right and the implications of this. She consistently thinks about audience reaction, and how and why the viewer is guided to focal points of the moving image through camerawork. Most importantly, her understanding of moving image is, here, inextricable from her understanding of the play.

Kanika's piece also illustrates how the emphasis on comparison is developing complexity in pupils' writing, including the use of connectives to further argument – 'this relates back to...'. She is also practising economy of language, to express concisely the connection between moving image and text: 'the camera is angled so you can just see the crown on Duncan's head in the background, like it is in Macbeth's thoughts'.

The richness of Kanika's response comes in part from the richness of class discussion, but also from opportunities to explore the text independently. As already

mentioned, pupils enjoy choosing clips to play and replay in whole-class discussion, but it is important to challenge the idea that such shared reading of moving image texts is necessarily a whole class activity. Once an understanding of the dialogue between literature and film has been established together, it seems natural for pupils to go on to explore this themselves, or in small groups. Yet this is difficult when the film text is on one screen at the front of the classroom. Not only are pupils unable to navigate the film independently, in the way we expect them to navigate any print text, but a classroom principle is instilled, by which print is democratised but the control of film is exclusive to the teacher. This denies the expertise and ownership which pupils have over moving image at home, where video, DVD and electronic media allow them to choose at every level of activity: to wind forwards and backwards, to replay moments again and again, and to freeze images to show to others.

We have therefore experimented with the use of laptop computers in the classroom. Giving pupils access to the PowerPoint 'comparison slides' on laptops, as well as on a shared screen, allows for a much more dynamic learning experience. Pupils can be asked to justify their initial responses to the projected clips in paired or group discussion, explaining to each other their reasoning, using the clips on their laptops as evidence. Making a text file of the play available on the laptops is also very powerful – pupils can tile the windows on the desktop to enable comparison between the print and film texts (image 8).

Equipping pupils with cue cards, which ask them to observe particular elements of film, and note-taking sheets – for instance, on the use of camerawork – provides enough scaffolding for groups of pupils to analyse longer sequences of film independently. It is, for example, important to concentrate on one version at length in order to understand how directors structure dramatic action. One Year 9 class,

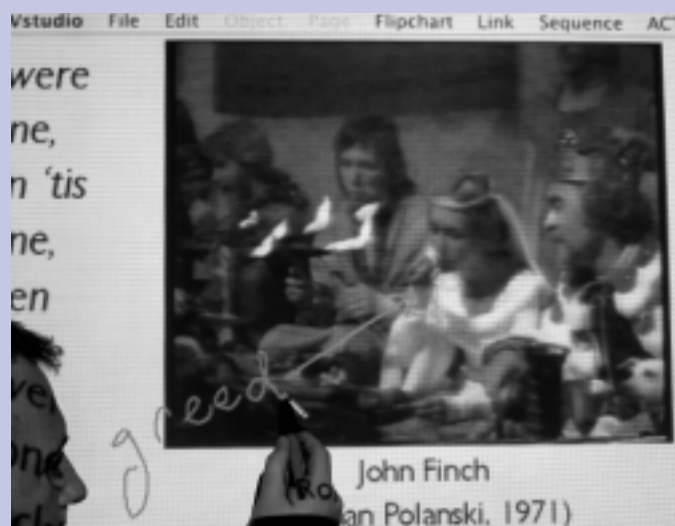
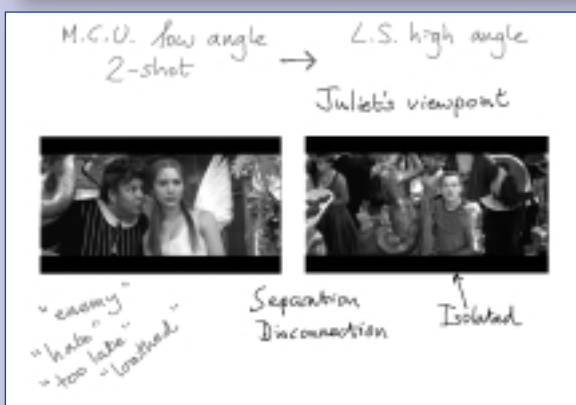
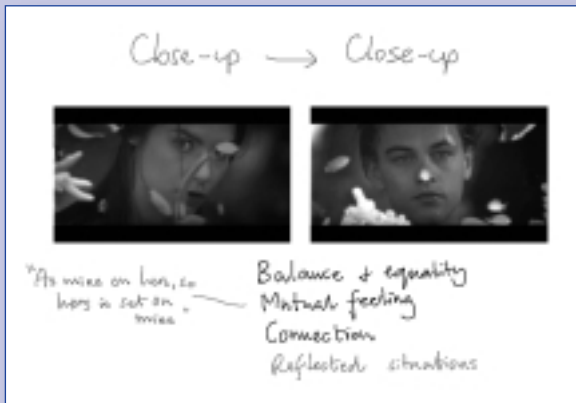


Image 7



Image 8

exploring Act 1, scenes 6 & 7 from *Macbeth on the Estate*, found that the director cuts backwards and forwards between Duncan's entrance and Macbeth's indecision, experiencing the power of editing in generating dramatic contrasts and juxtapositions. Returning to the printed text, where Duncan's entrance is separated completely from Macbeth's torment, pupils consider where and why the scenes are divided, according to action or mood. Such activities are indicative of the fact that film does not just serve the study of literature in providing neat snapshots of key moments. Indeed, in the course of finding five or six versions of one key line for our PowerPoint slides we had to search hard: they were to be found at various points in narrative structures diverging from the scripted original. Each film version asks students to consider its own textual structure, and the reasons for its construction.



Top to bottom: Image 9, image 10 and image 11.

Editing film; editing Shakespeare

This latter example points to the importance of being able to extend analysis beyond single camera shots, to several camera shots in sequence – edited together to create complex meanings. In Year 8, pupils look particularly at this grammar of shots in sequence (or horizontal montage) in Baz Luhrman's *Romeo and Juliet*. This is a media scheme of work, but does prompt some close consideration of the Shakespeare text; and we would suggest that the activities described below would combine powerfully with literature work, at Key Stages 3 or 4, or at A Level.

Pupils first look at pairs of shots in sequence, each represented by a still frame – in this example, projected onto a whiteboard (image 9).

The composition and the meaning of each shot on its own can be discussed with pupils. However, placing the shots in sequence opens up new ideas. The shot of Juliet, as seen by Romeo through the aquarium, cuts to a reverse angle, with almost identical mise-en-scène – setting, lighting, framing, characters' expressions. This presents, in filmic terms, a simple switch of viewpoint; aesthetically and grammatically, it suggests balance and equality. This, in turn, asks for literary analysis: in what ways do Romeo and Juliet as characters reflect in each other? How are their situations mirrored? How does the language of the scene suggest equality? 'As mine on hers, so hers is set on mine.'

In this other example, from the end of the ball scene, a low-angle, medium close-up two-shot of Juliet and the Nurse cuts to a high-angle long shot of Romeo. Grammatically, this privileges Juliet's viewpoint; the audience is kept close to her experience. Meanwhile, Romeo is

removed, isolated and diminished (image 10).

An effective way to reinforce pupils' understanding of how this works would be to play with the image on the board, cropping and zooming, to change the framing. For example, if Romeo is brought closer then the sense of shared experience and balance is maintained. Again, the editing decision is consonant with the dramatic development of the scene. At its tense conclusion, the two protagonists' viewpoints are explored alternately and separately, and the language of connection and balance gives way to language of conflict and separation.

To investigate how longer clips have been edited, we have used sequencing activities, with separate camera shots represented by cards, which can be arranged on a table-top, and – as illustrated – by images on an interactive whiteboard. These can be moved about by pupils, to investigate how different combinations create different meanings, and how images in sequence carry narrative. Helpful grammatical conventions can be introduced: the reverse angle; the point-of-view shot; the cutaway, etc. (image 11).

Again, the process of sequencing, and the discussion of editing decisions, inevitably folds back into discussion of the characters and of the drama. In this example, Year 8 pupils studying *Romeo and Juliet* explore the way close-ups, camera angles, cutaways and point-of-view shots emphasise Mercutio's experience, at a moment in the text when he does not actually speak or act, but when the imminence of action is crucial. Written commentaries by Year 8 pupils show the way this approach differentiates well for

Technology and practicalities

pupils of different abilities, in a mixed ability class. Less able pupils, with excellent understanding gained from the work with the images, are stimulated to find a language to express these ideas.

...when it cuts to Mercutio's reaction it builds up the feeling that he's going to do something.
(Laura, Year 8)

Meanwhile, an exceptionally able pupil is challenged to express some very sophisticated ideas about audience positioning, in the film and in the play:

...when the camera tracks up, it is the first time there has been any significant movement in it. The camera has stayed still to reflect the movement of the most significant character in the sequence; like Mercutio, the camera has witnessed everything, but has done nothing about it. Again the camera is placed at a front angle to swallow up all the emotion issuing from [Mercutio's] expression.

The final shot is of a new character in the sequence, Samson. The camera is placed at an oblique angle to him. He is not an important character, he is at the side of the action. His emotion, his fear and anxiety, needs to be acknowledged – not felt – by the audience. He simply watches, but does not act.
(Joe, Year 8)

This is a point which we would make strongly: the power of such work with film and with visual images, in combination with literature, to challenge and stretch pupils of all abilities, including the most able. Far from being just a means of access for reluctant readers, it can develop highly sophisticated analytical and imaginative responses. Fluid movement between the languages of film and play-text successfully engages pupils at Key Stage 3, helping them to get to grips with story and language, and it should challenge and stimulate A Level literature students exploring fine and subtle developments within a scene.

Reference

Burn, A. and Parker D. (2003) *Analysing Media Texts*, London: Continuum



Screenshot showing Adobe Premiere in use by pupils

All of these approaches to integrating the study of moving image and literary texts require no more than an overhead projector and a video player. Still images can often be found on the internet, scanned or photocopied from books, or even photographed on a screen. However, it is very easy to grab still images from a film. Any PC DVD drive will allow you to grab a still frame at the click of a mouse. This can then be printed out, or inserted into PowerPoint. To grab a frame from VHS, or to capture a moving sequence to insert into PowerPoint, you need a capture card. A cheap and very easy solution is an external TV card, such as the Hauppauge 'WinTV USB' – about £60 from PC World – which simply plugs into the computer, and into a VCR or DVD player, and allows instant creation of clips.

The card-sequencing activity described above prepares our pupils in Year 8 for attempting their own

editing. Equipped with a more developed understanding of how the sequencing of shots creates meanings, and a ready set of terms for describing their own decisions, they sequence a longer section of the film, which has been chopped up into separate shots, on computer editing software. At this point, they can depart from the mere 'puzzle-solving' of reconstructing the original version, and start to create new meanings, by editing in ironic or more emotive ways. They play with slow motion, with transition effects and with sound.

This is pushing at the edge of what is easily possible in the classroom; but even this use of technology is increasingly realistic. For this activity, we use Adobe Premiere editing software, but any new computer comes with free editing software (iMovie on Macs, and Windows Movie Maker on PCs) which is easy to use and present in more and more children's homes.

Coursework and course structures

At Parkside, we have made work such as that described in this article central to our work with Shakespeare. In Year 9, pupils use the comparison activities described above to structure their study and, later, revision of 'key scenes' for the tests. For coursework, they write as 'directors' to propose and justify a new film version.

At Key Stage 4, pupils choose to study *Richard III*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, or *Hamlet*. Whichever play they work with, the course is structured around the study of one film version, and extracts from the written text. They then study one scene in detail, comparing film versions and closely exploring the literary language. This leads to a piece of Shakespeare coursework for GCSE English (En 2) and GCSE English Literature. Pupils are guided to support their writing

about the scene with references to the film text. To less able pupils, this can provide a liberating structure for their thinking. To all pupils, including the most able, it demands sophisticated thinking about the relationship between verbal and visual imagery. Emily, writing about Richard Loncraine's version of *Richard III*, Act 1, Scene 1, notes:

Viewers can see both Richard and his reflection in the mirror; making his two-faced personality, for a moment, literal. His words at that moment are:

'I have no delight to pass away the time / Unless to spy my shadow in the sun / And descant on mine own deformity.'

In this shot it is as though he is replacing 'shadow in the sun' with 'reflection in the mirror.'

It also enforces a proper consideration of the play as

performed drama. Emily goes on:

He then turns around and looks directly at you; no longer is he just a projection, but the real Richard that is 'determined to prove a villain', and his determination reflects in his face.

For oral coursework (En 1) pupils prepare group presentations on single moving images from the film, relating them to their understanding of the character, language and themes in the play. For their media coursework for GCSE English (En 3) they develop this oral presentation into a piece of writing. This integration is, of course, time-saving in a very crowded programme of study. However, we believe that it is also highly productive, enhancing pupils' work in all three pieces of coursework.

media & education

A New Course in Media and Education

The MA in Media, Culture and Communication at the Institute of Education offers an exciting mix of courses, including an introduction to media education, practical work in digital video and multimedia production and courses in computer games, children's media culture, youth culture and media education, and the ideology of the media.

The IoE have teamed up with bfi Education (www.bfi.org.uk/education for more information email: education@bfi.org.uk) and the English and Media Centre to offer this unique suite of courses of particular relevance to teachers of the media in any form. You can do individual modules or the whole MA, whichever suits your time, purse or inclination. What's more, you can study online, wherever you live in the UK.

For more information look at www.ioe.ac.uk, under 'courses', 'masters', and 'media', or contact Sara Mallett on 020 7612 6314 or s.mallett@ioe.ac.uk

**English
& Media
Centre**

bfi Education

e INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

over 100 years of excellence in education