



Basic Teaching Techniques

We all know how frustrating it can be to show a video to pupils and get nothing much back in response apart from ‘it was boring’ or ‘I liked the bit where...’. And what kinds of question can you ask of pupils other than ‘look out for...’? Using video more productively is not just a matter of knowing some technical terms – though these can help. It depends upon recognising that the moving image has a complex and dense language of its own that we have all learned to ‘read’ with such ease while not necessarily being aware of our own skills.

The eight basic techniques described on the following pages are designed to help you unravel the codes and conventions of the moving image, and enable you to use a wider range of film and video texts in the classroom. As you and your pupils unpack the layers of meaning, you will be helping them to develop their general skills as more critical, attentive and knowledgeable readers of the moving image.

The techniques are not age-specific. You could use any of them with any age-group depending on the topic in hand, the moving image text you want to base them on, and how far you want to follow through each activity. But you may feel that Techniques 7 and 8 are inherently more sophisticated and thus more appropriate for Key Stage 4. In each of the nine ‘subject grids’ which follow on pages 13-33, you will find some of these techniques explained and illustrated in subject-specific terms which should bring them to life for you as a subject teacher.

The first three techniques concentrate on the language of the moving image. They offer you ways of encouraging pupils to see how *everything* in a moving image text is

saying something, and contributes in some way to its overall meaning. Technique 1, **Freeze Frame**, concentrates on the visual language of moving images. Technique 2, **Sound and Image**, helps pupils see how important sound is in the interpretation of moving image texts. Technique 3, **Spot the Shots**, draws their attention to the editing process. Any of these techniques can be used from time to time in very short sessions to build up pupils’ critical awareness of how moving image texts work, and your confidence in using the technique to develop more critical and thoughtful ways of working with moving images.

The next two techniques, **Top and Tail** and **Attracting Audiences**, deal with the ways in which moving image texts are produced and circulated to audiences. Whatever your subject area, it is important to point out to pupils that any moving image text need not necessarily be taken at face value. They should think about where a film or TV programme comes from and whose interests it may be serving, if they are to use its information critically and constructively. **Top and Tail** in particular is a technique you could use quite quickly and informally whenever you use a video, to establish the habit of checking out a text’s sources.

Techniques 6, 7 and 8, **Generic Translations**, **Cross-media Comparisons** and **Simulation**, offer you more substantial classroom activities to explore ways of making changes to moving image texts and relating them to other media. In subject-specific contexts these can thus form the basis of coursework pieces at Key Stage 4, or could be used to set up class projects to explore an issue or topic.

Each technique is set out across three columns. The first column describes the activity itself and the second column provides some simple questions, which should help you to start the ball rolling in setting work or guiding whole-class discussion. Learning objectives are listed in the third column. These are moving-image specific, but if you accept our argument that ‘cineliteracy’ supports any subject, then you should find these useful insights that will contribute to communication and understanding in your subject area.

We have avoided media jargon as much as possible, but the techniques necessarily introduce some simple and useful technical terms, which are explained in the *Glossary* at the end of this book. To use the techniques you will need, at minimum, a VCR with a good ‘pause’ facility that enables you to view single frames. A ‘frame advance’ feature would also be useful. Some of the follow-up activities also require ICT software that can handle moving image material; there is more detail on this in Chapter 4 – *Making moving images with digital media*. Overall advice on how to manage moving image work can be found in Chapter 5 – *Managing teaching and learning about the moving image*.

Above:
Not part of the curriculum: David Bradley in
Ken Loach’s first feature film, *Kes* (1969).

Courtesy: bff Stills

BASIC TEACHING TECHNIQUE

1 Freeze Frame

- ▶ Use the video pause button to help the class discuss each shot of a short moving image text or extract (eg 60 seconds long) by looking at and discussing:
 - ▶ What they can see in the 'frozen' image; how the elements of the image are positioned in the frame; how lighting and colour affect what is seen.
 - ▶ Distance between camera and subjects; camera angle; movement of the camera during a shot.
 - ▶ How many shots there are and how the sequence of shots builds up information and ideas or impressions.

Possible follow-up:

- ▶ Use a storyboard or moving image software to change the order of the sequence or eliminate some shots.

2 Sound and Image

- ▶ Cover the video screen and ask pupils to listen carefully to the sound track of a short moving image sequence and describe exactly what they hear in this sequence.
 - ▶ Pupils should identify the type of text they think it is and identify and describe all the sounds they can hear.
 - ▶ They should then guess at the content and style of the images in the sequence.
 - ▶ Finally show the complete sequence and invite discussion about how sounds and images affect each other.

Possible follow-up

- ▶ Try out any or all of: different music, different sound effects, a different voice reading the same words, or different words; or eliminate any of these elements. Discuss how this affects the ways the images can be interpreted.

KEY QUESTIONS

- ▶ Why is the shot composed like this? What difference would it make if it were composed differently?
- ▶ Why is the camera positioned in this way? What difference would it make if it were somewhere else?
- ▶ What difference does it make if the order of shots is different or some are missing?

About music:

- ▶ What kind of music is this? What feelings/images does it suggest to you?

About sound effects:

- ▶ What exactly can you hear and what might it represent?

About words:

- ▶ What is said and what can you tell about the speaker(s) from their voice(s)?

About silence:

- ▶ Why do you think the sequence is silent at this point? What might be going on?

About the final viewing:

- ▶ What difference does the sound make to the sequence? What difference would it make if some elements were missing?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Pupils should learn that:

- ▶ Every element of a visual image can carry meaning.
- ▶ Visual images can be 'read' like other texts
- ▶ The position of elements within the image, the colours used, and the lighting, can all affect interpretation.
- ▶ Camera distance (eg close-up, long shot etc), camera angle and camera movement all affect meaning.
- ▶ The number and order of shots affect meaning.
- ▶ Moving image sound tracks can have four elements: music, sound effects, voice and silence. All of these contribute to meaning.
- ▶ Sound effects are of two types: 'atmosphere' (ie continuous sound) and 'spot effects' (ie short sounds).
- ▶ Sound – particularly music – can set the 'mood' of a text and establish its generic identity (eg comedy, thriller).
- ▶ Sound can often do more to 'pin down' the meaning of a sequence than visual images can.
- ▶ Sound can affect not only the way viewers interpret the images but also what they actually think they can see.
- ▶ Off-screen sounds can help to create the impression of three-dimensional space.
- ▶ Silence can also have a powerful effect on the interpretation of a sequence.

3 Spot the Shots

- ▶ After their first viewing of a short moving image sequence, pupils guess at the number of shots used.
- ▶ On second viewing, they mark each change in shot, scene location and sound (use pause button if necessary).
- ▶ On third viewing they look carefully at how the shot transitions are created (eg cuts, mixes, fades, wipes etc) and whether the sound transitions happen at the same places.
- ▶ They should also time each shot.

Possible follow-up:

- ▶ Create a script or storyboard to support their analysis of the sequence. Variations on the sequence can then be hypothesised: eg eliminating shots or changing the order of the sequence.
- ▶ If the software is available, pupils could digitise and re-edit the shots to try out different sequencing and timings.

- ▶ How long is this sequence? How much 'story time' does it represent?
- ▶ What new information or impression is each new shot giving us?
- ▶ What information or impression does each change in sound give us?
- ▶ Why is this kind of shot transition used? What difference would it make if another type of transition were used?
- ▶ Why are the shots of this length? Does the overall time-scheme of the shots build up a rhythm or a pattern? What is the effect of this?

Pupils should learn that:

- ▶ The number, sequence and duration of shots in a moving image sequence all contribute to its meaning and are created in the editing process.
- ▶ Screen time and 'story time' are usually different: the editing process 'manages' the story time for us.
- ▶ Each new shot should provide new information or impressions: shot changes are not merely 'to keep viewer interest'.
- ▶ The pace and rhythm of editing and the types of transition used also contribute to meaning.
- ▶ Sound transitions may not match shot transitions: in drama especially they may anticipate them and this can function to maintain or develop moods such as suspense.
- ▶ Certain kinds of shot sequence are highly conventional: eg shot/reverse shot in a conversation or interview; or a character looking off-screen is likely to be followed by a shot of what they are looking at.

BASIC TEACHING TECHNIQUE

4 Top and Tail

- ▶ Show the title sequence of any moving image text and use any of Basic Techniques 1 to 3 to help pupils identify its genre and intended audience, and to predict its content and 'message'.
- ▶ Show the production credits at the beginning and/or end of a moving image text and discuss the information they provide about the source and ownership of the text, how it was produced, and how it was distributed to audiences.

5 Attracting Audiences

- ▶ In pairs or groups, pupils collect information about how a text has been marketed and circulated to audiences: eg TV listings, educational resource catalogues, video catalogues, shop displays, websites, film posters, advertisements, trailers, TV ratings, cinema box office information, reviews, press releases, news items.
 - ▶ Groups or pairs present their findings (eg as live presentations, poster montages etc) to the rest of the class, identifying key issues affecting the success or failure of a text to find its audience and convey its message.

KEY QUESTIONS

- ▶ Is this a cinema film or a TV programme? ... AND
- ▶ Is it fact or fiction? HOW
- ▶ Who is it for? CAN
- ▶ What is it about? CAN
- ▶ Who made it? YOU
- ▶ Who owns it? YOU
- ▶ Why might it have been made? TELL?
- ▶ What roles were involved in making it? TELL?

- ▶ What methods were used to promote this text to audiences?
- ▶ Why were these methods used and not others?
- ▶ Who helped promote this text and why?
- ▶ Did audiences respond as the producers intended? If not, why not?
- ▶ Was media controversy deliberately fostered? Did it help or harm the text? How?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Pupils should learn that:

- ▶ Title sequences identify the text and 'sell' it to audiences; they may be very explicit about the text's genre, content, audience and purpose or they may disguise this to provoke curiosity.
- ▶ Information about who made a text, who financed it, and who owns it, can alert you to the interests it represents – and those it may not represent, or may misrepresent.
- ▶ Many roles may contribute to the production of a moving image text and can affect its content, style and meaning.
- ▶ A moving image text is likely to be produced by one company and distributed by another.
- ▶ Most moving image texts compete for audiences in a busy commercial market.
- ▶ Moving image texts can be promoted in many different media.
- ▶ Marketing and promotional strategies are central to most of the moving image industries.
- ▶ Most media producers and distributors are part of larger conglomerates and can call upon a range of different companies to help promote their products.
- ▶ Audience responses are measured and fed back into future production and promotion strategies.
- ▶ Most moving image production and distribution is expensive and risky.

6 Generic Translation

- ▶ Pupils 'translate' a moving image text – eg documentary, TV news item, TV or film commercial, scene from a feature film – into a print genre such as a newspaper item, a magazine feature, an extract from a novel, a short story or a poem.
- ▶ Pupils translate a print text into moving image form – first as script or storyboard, and then if possible as video (a brief extract or 'try-out' of one scene).

- ▶ What can you tell in print that you cannot tell or show in moving images?
- ▶ What can you tell or show in moving images that you cannot tell in print?
- ▶ Which medium do you think is best for the story/information/ideas you are conveying?
- ▶ Is a real 'translation' ever possible from one medium to another?

Pupils should learn that:

- ▶ Meaning can change when information is presented in different forms or transposed to another medium.
- ▶ Each medium has its own language, conventions and genres.
- ▶ Moving image is more appropriate for some kinds of content or structure, and print is more appropriate for others.

7 Cross-media Comparisons

Pupils can use Basic Techniques 1-6 to:

- ▶ Compare the treatment of an issue in two different media and/or for two different audiences.
- ▶ Compare a key moment from a fictional print text in two different moving image adaptations.
- ▶ Compare treatments of the same theme in factual and fictional forms.

- ▶ What elements stay the same and what changes (and how?) for the different audiences?
- ▶ How do print and moving image respectively manage 'literary' features such as time, character, setting, motivation etc?
- ▶ What is gained and what is lost in each form?

- ▶ Groups, issues, values or ideas will be represented in different ways according to the form, genre and intended audience.
- ▶ Print texts are open to a range of moving image adaptations.
- ▶ Both documentary and drama can present a theme effectively; the boundary between fact and fiction can be hard to draw.

8 Simulation

- ▶ Pairs or groups of pupils are placed in role as producers of an existing moving image text used in any subject curriculum and asked to produce plans for how they would
 - ▶ modify or reconstruct it for a different age-group;
 - ▶ 'sell' the text to a different audience;
 - ▶ challenge it critically from a particular point of view;
 - ▶ produce an alternative text.

The plans should be presented to the teacher or another group acting as Commissioning Editor or Executive Producer.

- ▶ Why have you chosen this age-group/audience?
- ▶ What in the existing text will not appeal to or be understood by its new audience?
- ▶ What aspects of the text can you use to sell it to its new audience?
- ▶ What methods would be most appropriate to reach that audience?
- ▶ From what point of view are you arguing against the text or for a different version?
- ▶ What evidence are you using to back up your argument?
- ▶ Who is the audience for the new version?

- ▶ Most moving image texts are produced within editorial and institutional constraints: time, budget, context, purpose etc.
- ▶ Content and form will vary according to audience and purpose.
- ▶ Addressing a different audience can add ethical or legal factors which will affect what can and cannot be said or shown.
- ▶ A critical challenge to an existing text must have good evidence to back it up which can come from both within the text itself and from other sources.
- ▶ Alternatives are possible.