

A Grand Day Out (dir. Nick Park, 1989)

Lesson by Kitty Chapman, English teacher,
Greenwich Free School

English,
Key Stage 3

This lesson compares the use of absurdity and fantasy in the early Wallace and Gromit film *A Grand Day Out* with Georges Méliès' *A Trip To The Moon*. Méliès' film is highly theatrical, parodic and fantastical in style, while Park's film juxtaposes the absurdity of Wallace's building of a rocket on a Bank Holiday (to travel to the Moon in search of cheese) with typically British domestic foibles to create fantasy, and for comedic effect.

Students may then create a storyboard or film script (developed using drama), or write a descriptive story, involving fantasy, juxtaposition or absurdity. Media Literacy links include silent film, mise-en-scene, set design, visual influence, parody, surrealism, non-verbal narrative and stop-motion.

Lesson Objective:

- To understand and analyse the use of absurdity in *A Grand Day Out*

Curriculum Links

- Develop and sustain interpretations of writers' ideas and perspectives
- Explain how texts have been influential and significant to self and other readers in different contexts at different times

You will need...

A Grand Day Out DVD
A Trip To The Moon DVD
A film script template
(depending on chosen main activity)
Images of absurd or fantastical objects or situations (see below)
Motifs of a traditional working class British home (see below)

Activities

TRAILER: Fantastical voyages

Give half of the class a sheet of images of absurd, impossible or melodramatic objects or ideas (or display them), for example:

- An old photograph of a melodramatic actor making a wild gesture
- An outlandish costume
- The moon anthropomorphised as a person (the image from *A Trip to the Moon* of the moon with the rocket in his eye could be used)
- An Escher impossible staircase
- Surreal details from the illustrations of Anthony Browne
- Details from Salvador Dali's art
- Flying carpet
- Undersea kingdom
- Unicorns and other mythical creatures

Give other half a sheet of images of idealised British working class life, emphasising stability. For example:

- Teapot
- Chintzy armchair
- Flat cap
- Crossword book
- Gas fireplace
- Fringed lampshade
- Cook's matches
- Workbench
- Garden shed

In smaller groups, students should come up with everything they think their set of images has in common. More able should add or draw other things onto the sheet that they think belong in that collection (and justify their choices).

Share as a class, then students can pair with someone from the other team and see if they can think of a reason, or scenario, in which these two things might meet or belong in the same place. Introduce term **juxtaposition**.

- Question: what is the effect?

Elicit/introduce terms **absurd** and **mundane**.

MAIN ATTRACTION: Spot the absurd!

View both films (if they have not already). While viewing, students should identify as many absurd and mundane situations, actions or images as they can, and list them in pairs or groups.

Before viewing *...Day Out*, students should be posed the question of what generates the humour in the film. They should also be asked to look for similarities and differences between the two films.

After viewing, questioning should be used to check for understanding: it is crucial that all students recognise that while the 1902 film is consciously outlandish and absurd, the Wallace and Gromit animation is using juxtaposition to locate its comedy in the contrast between the normality of being at home, at a loose end, on a Bank Holiday, and building a rocket to travel to a Moon made of cheese!

Pupils then have a choice of activities depending upon time available:

- They could write a PEA-style (Point, Evidence, Analysis) treatment of several scenes from one of the films
- They may write a comparative analysis of both films
- They could write on ways in which the visuals, plot and action of *A Trip...* might have influenced *...Day Out*, and ways in which Park has adapted the original material
- They may also create a dramatic or artistic piece of work, a storyboard, short written story, or their own film, in which they use juxtaposition of the mundane and the absurd to create a comedic or surreal narrative

END CREDITS: Voting time

The results can be shared as a class and students may vote for the best use of: juxtaposition; absurdity/surrealism; depiction of the mundane, and comedic effect, justifying their choices.

Extras

Other Ideas

Different choices for main activity are detailed above. Parody may also be analysed for higher ability groups, or where cultural reference points are strong or can be supported: *A Grand Day Out* parodies older science-fiction exploration films as well as British foibles (gently), whilst *A Trip to the Moon* can be seen to parody colonialism, foreign policy, gullibility etc.

Read

Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès by John Frazer

Wallace and Gromit Storyboard Collections by Nick Park

Cracking Animation: The Aardman Book of 3D Animation by Peter Lord and Brian Sibley

Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction by Keith M. Johnston

A Sense-of-Wonderful Century: Explorations of Science Fiction and Fantasy Films by Gary Westfahl

Watch

2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick, 1968)

Dark Star (John Carpenter, 1974)

The Black Hole (Gary Nelson, 1979)

Flash Gordon (Mike Hodges, 1980)