

Attack the Block (dir. Joe Cornish, 2011)

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English Language,
Key Stages 4/5

A standalone language-focus lesson where students use the film *Attack the Block* to investigate the question: ‘Why does Joe Cornish use dialect in this film?’ Students will be looking at how writers’ manipulate dialect for specific purposes, and why they may do this. Students either watch the whole of *Attack the Block*, or the segments specified, and then close in on the language used, identifying elements of dialect used. Students are asked to investigate *why* a writer might choose to use a specific type of language – namely South London youth dialect – in their work. Students should have some knowledge of spoken language and dialect – this lesson should be taught in order to demonstrate the application of dialectic knowledge, either through the study of English Language at A Level or of Spoken Language at GCSE. *NB this lesson may be more suitable for higher-level students, as a way to stretch them and develop understanding of the ways writer s can manipulate language.*

Lesson Objectives

- To explore how dialect can be used in unexpected ways to add depth to genre.
- To understand the literary manipulation of language in light of various genres.

Curriculum Links

- GCSE English Language: Spoken Language in contexts.
- A Level English Language: Spoken Language, Language and Technology, Language Change over time – application of Language in Contexts.

You will need...

Copy of the *Attack the Block* (available on DVD/the BFI Player)

Paper to write ideas on – ideally A2 size so groups of students can write on the same piece of paper.

Activities

TRAILER: Introduction

Before you conduct this lesson, students should have a working knowledge of accent and dialect. Watch *Attack the Block* (if you do not have time to do this, skip straight to the segments). Conduct a class discussion of why Joe Cornish chose to set the film where he did – why does this make it interesting?

Then, re-watch the following sections:

3minutes – 7minutes

30minutes – 32minutes

59minutes – 1hr10minutes

While they are watching, get them to note down any examples of dialect they find. You may want to put each clip on twice or give students a couple of minutes before putting on the next one so that they can write down their ideas.

MAIN ATTRACTION: Investigating Language

Students' main task is to answer the question 'Why does Joe Cornish use dialect in *Attack the Block*', and this section should prepare them so that they are able to complete the task on their own.

Students should either work in pairs and in groups, and should have between two and five minutes to think about each of the following questions:

- What dialect is used?
- What are our expectations/prejudices when we hear this dialect?
- Does Joe Cornish subvert that in this film?
- How is this dialect different from that which we would normally expect to hear in a sci-fi film?

Following that, students should have a further ten minutes to analyse some of the language that they picked out when they were watching the clips. Use the following prompts for this analysis:

- What words would usually be used and how might this change the effect on audience?

- Does the language used serve to ignite sympathy or antipathy from the audience?

END CREDITS: Extended Writing

Students should now work on their own to answer the question:

- ‘Why does Joe Cornish use dialect in Attack the Block?’

They should use the group planning that they have just been doing and write in a sustained way, thinking about the examples that are used, and what the effect on the audience is. If you have time, this could then be peer assessed in pairs.

Extras

Other Ideas

Attack the Block would also be a good stimulus for a 'moral dilemma' question based on this film.

Based around the idea of 'who is to blame', this lesson could be taught as an 'extra' lesson alongside this one or as a standalone lesson.

Read

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (1900)

Selected Poetry by Tony Harrison, Robert Burns (1900)

Watch

Kes (Ken Loach, 1969)

Mary Poppins (Robert Stevenson, 1964)

My Fair Lady (George Cukor, 1964)