When her older sister dies trying to prevent the theft of one of her people’s great treasures, twelve-year-old Scirye and three companions set out to avenge her and recover the precious item. All have a grudge against the thieves who stole the treasure: the evil dragon Badik and the mysterious Mr. Roland. Scirye and her friends pursue the thieves to Houlani, a Hawaiian island created by magic. There, they befriend Pele, the volatile and mercurial goddess of volcanoes.

They soon learn that Mr. Roland is seeking the Five Lost Treasures of Emperor Yu, which will give him the power to alter the very fabric of the universe. Even with Pele on their side, Scirye and the others may not be able to stop him.

“Brilliant, exciting, and highly original, City of Fire is an absolutely magnificent fantasy adventure! Laurence Yep creates a truly believable alternate world that is loaded with great magic in a book that radiates great magic of its own”

—T. A. Barron

Stay tuned for the next books in the series:
City of Ice
City of the Dead
AASL's new learning standards: skills, dispositions in action, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies designed to shape the library curriculum and help school library media specialists mold student learning more broadly. Visit www.ala.org/aasl/standards and download a pdf or purchase bundles of the handsome full-color pamphlet ($13.50 for AASL members).

Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action

How are the new learning standards incorporated into the school library media program? This new publication from AASL takes an in-depth look at the strands of the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner and the indicators within those strands. Benchmarks are provided along with examples that show how to put the learning standards into action. This practical 120-page book is available to members for $35.10. Purchase it online at www.alastore.ala.org/aasl.

Empowering Learners

Empowering Learners advances school library media programs to meet the needs of the changing school library environment and is guided by the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner and Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action. It builds on a strong history of guidelines published to ensure that school library media program planners go beyond the basics to provide goals, priorities, criteria, and general principles for establishing effective library media programs. This essential resource for any school library media program is available to members for $35.10. Purchase online at www.alastore.ala.org/aasl.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on these publications and AASL’s plan on implementing the new standards and guidelines, please see: http://www.ala.org/aasl/learning4life.
"They didn’t realize they possessed strengths that could play positively in other’s lives. The students had been made aware only of their weaknesses."

A Common Chord in Our Beliefs — pg 62

FEATURES

10 Lights! Camera! Action!
A Grammar of Film for Media Literacy
Carolyn Fortuna

24 Set Decorating and the Art Department on a Feature Film or How I Tell a Story with Things
Kris Boxell

28 Developing a Mindful Practice around Moving Images in the K–12 Classroom
Ryan R. Goble

34 Flip Your Way to Easy Video Production
Julia Roberts and Robin Stiles

41 Genre Films as Cultural Pedagogy: The Enduring Myth of Star-Crossed Lovers
Bonnie L. MacDonald

48 Treading Softly: Ethics and Documentary Production
Jan Krawitz

52 Student-Created Videos: Teaching Copyright and Media Literacy through Student-Produced Documentaries
Sarah Levin
FEATURES cont.

56 Digital Storytelling:  
Never Has Storytelling Been So Easy or So Powerful  
Leslie Rule

59 A Room With a View  
Mary Jane Waite

COLUMNS & CAMEOS

62 AASL Community  
A Common Chord in Our Beliefs  
Sabrina Carnesi

66 CBC Column  
When Hollywood Calls: An Author’s Perspective  
Mary E. Pearson

"In many cases film is not viewed as an instructional main course but as dessert. Poorly developed practices that use film as a reward or reinforcement tool cultivates a suspicious attitude toward “fluffy” uses of moving images in the classroom"

Developing a Mindful Practice around Moving Images in the K–12 Classroom — pg 28

DEPARTMENTS

6 President’s Column  
Turning a Vision into a Reality  
Cassandra Barnett

72 Index to Advertisers
Early in my school library career, I had several wonderful opportunities to work with students as they created their own films. Since we worked outside of the school day in afterschool and summer classes, the students were completely free to choose their own medium and content. My primary task was to make sure that "no harm came to anyone in the making of the film." They had to figure out everything else on their own. It was a fascinating process to observe.

First of all, no one wanted to use the film to document or present information. They all wanted to tell a story. The only "teaching" that I did was to introduce the idea of a storyboard—not a highly structured approach—but I did insist that they show evidence of a beginning, middle, and end. Some of the students put a lot of effort into scripting a story, visualizing it through a storyboard, and planning every step they took to get to the finished product. Others took the "fly by the seat of the pants" approach. They had a basic idea of a story, but how they were going to complete it was a total unknown.

The most interesting aspect of this process to me was that students’ vision always far exceeded their ability to enact that vision. They envisioned Star Wars with all its magical special effects. But then reality would set in. Our equipment was simple, and the available budget and equipment limited what students could do. We worked in the library, which could never have been mistaken for a movie studio, and we had no props warehouse. Since most students preferred experimenting with animation, not live action, we used 8mm film because VHS cameras didn’t work very well for filming frame-by-frame. The trade-offs were the lack of sound and a three-minute limit.

Nevertheless, I was always amazed that those restrictions did not deter a single student. They all forged fearlessly ahead. In retrospect, the restrictions might even have been a good thing. The restrictions forced the filmmakers to be creative thinkers and problem solvers. A student might start with clay but decide that LEGO pieces made better props. If a spaceship had to explode, dynamite was out of the question. However, paper, paint, cloth, clay—whatever came closest to the creator’s vision—could solve the problem. Time limits kept students focused on the story. Whether these students realized it or not, they learned how to turn a vision into a reality. The end product might not have achieved their exact vision, but hard work, ingenuity, and persistence helped them attain a goal that could be a source of pride.

I see some parallels between my students’ filmmaking and the process that AASL has used to move its vision for the profession towards reality. The leadership of AASL has spent the last year revising its strategic plan. The vision that the leaders have for our profession is “To achieve universal recognition of school library media specialists as indispensable educational leaders” (AASL 2005).
Just as a good film requires a well-thought-out storyboard, our vision for the profession requires a good strategic plan. The most recent version of the AASL Strategic Plan can be found at: <www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aboutaasl/aaslgovernance/aaslstrategicplanning/spgoals.cfm>. For some, it may seem that this vision far exceeds our ability to achieve it. Certainly, there are restrictions that will require creative thinking and problem solving.

We have four goals designed to move us toward our vision of universal recognition.

- The education community will have a shared vision that AASL’s standards and guidelines are a model of excellence for student learning.
- AASL’s professional development opportunities are essential, valuable, and available to school librarians.
- All stakeholders understand and recognize that the school librarian and school library programs are essential to teaching and learning.
- AASL fosters vibrant, inclusive, accessible, and supportive communities for school librarians.

The objectives and strategies provide the directions needed to accomplish these goals and are based on the realities we live with as an organization. The biggest restriction that we face is that we can accomplish these goals only through the work of our members. We forge ahead (fearlessly, we hope) believing that our members will step up to implement these strategies through participation in our committees and task forces. Our collective brain power undoubtedly leads to the creative thinking and problem solving that we need to accomplish our vision.

What are we as an organization doing to move us toward realizing our vision? Our standards and guidelines are gaining recognition as we implement the Learning for Life (L4L) initiative through the efforts of our state coordinators. An assessment for school library programs is in the works and should soon be available for us to evaluate our individual programs and set goals for improvement. The AASL Best Websites for Teaching and Learning webpage <www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/bestlist/bestwebsites.cfm> offers information about recommended websites (and links to the sites), presentations, and a press kit, all designed to support 21st-century teaching and learning. To keep the webpage current, you are invited to nominate a website for consideration.

The success of our National Conference in Charlotte is one example of essential professional development that AASL provides. Other professional development opportunities offered by AASL are listed here: <www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/conferencesandevents/aaslconferences.cfm>. During School Library Month look for a set of webinars based on the four chapters of Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs. Don’t pass up the chance to participate in the Fall Forum (November 5–6, 2010) “In Focus: The Essentials for 21st-Century Learning” featuring Gail Dickinson, Leslie Kuhlthau Maniotes, and Ross Todd.

To help members tell their stories, we have a number of tools available on the AASL website. The Parent Outreach Toolkit, the School Library Media Program Health and Wellness Toolkit, and the @ your library Toolkit for School Library Media Programs are just a few of the resources designed to assist in advocacy. Winners of AASL awards and grants can be held up as models to show the impact of quality school library media programs. The AASL’s National Longitudinal Survey of School Library Media Programs provides data that we can use for comparison as we build our programs. The latest report can be found here: <www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey.cfm>.

To build community, AASL has taken advantage of ALA Connect and its capabilities. Members can be part of two kinds of groups: formal groups that carry out the work of the Association and informal groups built around topics of interest. I am particularly excited that a group of urban school librarians has formed an interest group. I believe this networking opportunity has the potential to not only offer a supportive environment for these librarians, but also provide them with a means to work together to solve problems that are unique to urban schools.

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I see some parallels between my students’ filmmaking and the process that AASL has used to move its vision for the profession towards reality. The leadership of AASL has spent the last year revising its strategic plan.
To bring others outside our profession to share our vision, we need to follow the example of my film students. They believed that the story was the thing. It didn’t matter if you had the special effects to rival Hollywood. It was the story that was most important; people connect to personal stories. To show how we are indispensable educational leaders, we must tell our personal stories that demonstrate how we daily fulfill that role.

For instance, in response to the Santa Rosa School Board removing school librarians from the media centers and returning them to only classroom teaching, Connie Williams (president of the California School Library Association) wrote about the impact of the librarian/classroom partnership in providing, designing, and implementing effective 21st-century learning experiences (2009).

When other districts in the nation are closing school libraries and laying off school librarians, Saugus School District in Massachusetts not only reopened its newly renovated Belmonte Middle School library (after its having been closed for ten years) but also hired Sharon Hamer to be the new librarian. In a grassroots effort lead by the school administrators, money was raised to improve the infrastructure and to purchase furniture and resources. With this support Hamer has been able to implement a program that promotes literacy, teaches 21st-century skills, and encourages lifelong learning (Shvorin 2009).

As an organization, we will do our best to make sure that these stories are told through implementation of our strategic plan. We have the vision, but it is our members who give us the ability to achieve it. Go to the AASL website and complete the volunteer form <www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aboutaasl/aaslcommunity/volunteroppsp/aaslvolunteeroopportunities.cfm>. In addition to being an active participant in AASL, offer to serve on ALA committees.

You can also:

- discuss issues on the AASL Blog
- become a part of the AASL Community in Second Life, Facebook, and ALA Connect
- be a leader in your school and district by offering professional development opportunities to teachers and administrators on collaboration and on integration of our standards into the curriculum
- participate on school and district committees, and present to your school board to ensure that the school library program is visible
- be active in your local and state teacher organizations, and take every opportunity to illustrate how the school library program can be a part of teaching and learning
- offer to visit pre-service education classes at your state universities and colleges to talk about the role of the school librarian and the school library program
- write articles for other educational publications promoting your school library program and highlight concerns

If we all find ways to tell our school library stories, together we can realize our vision of “universal recognition of school library media specialists as indispensable educational leaders” (AASL 2005).

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**Works Cited:**


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Cassandra Barnett is the president of AASL and librarian at Fayetteville (Arkansas) High School Library. She was co-chair of the AASL Learning Standards Rewrite Task Force and member of the AASL Learning Standards Indicators and Assessment Task Force. She was also on the writing committee for the AASL’s Standards for the 21st-Century Learner.
IN FOCUS
THE ESSENTIALS FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNING

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Presenters include: Gail Dickinson, Leslie Maniotes, and Ross Todd
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Lights! Camera! Action!

Carolyn Fortuna
c4tuna@aol.com
The Grammar of Film

Grammar is a system of logical and structural rules of language, and grammar provides readers of print texts with a foundation of knowledge that can be transferred to linguistics of all kinds—written, oral, auditory, visual, and body language exchanges. Through their knowledge of grammar, readers, speakers, viewers, and listeners can analyze how a communicator creates particular messages and specific subtexts.
In today’s saturated world of new media, a student’s ability to negotiate the grammar of visual literacy has taken on particular importance. Visual literacy—the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in images—requires students to “read” pictures in ways that previous generations have not needed to do. As a result, when students explore, identify, learn about, describe, and use grammar to make meaning of visual messages, they create reciprocity among linguistic literacies and visual literacies. A grammar of film creates a complementary and interlaced adjunct to a cohesive meaning-making process of literacy. Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen initiated educational discussions around the grammar of film, identifying “descriptions of major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of Western visual semiotics” (1996, 1). Because film texts embed different schemata than print for navigation, when we view films, we can use the interactive processes of analysis, interpretation, and synthesis. Visual grammar is a set of rules, and—just as writers do—filmmakers break those rules to catch our attention and call upon us to notice fresh visual language and sublime symbolic representations.

The classroom and library media center can become sites of interrogation of the literal and the connotative implications of film discourse. Active reading through visual interpretation is a process of decoding and evaluation. For students to be visually literate, they must learn to intelligently consider images from multiple sources and disciplines. Teachers and school librarians can reveal to students the ways that our increasingly visual culture requires people to discriminate among images, symbols, icons, and objects they encounter in the world. We can infuse explicit instruction in the grammar of film to enhance our students’ overall literacy learning.

When we invite students to accommodate a grammar of film, we can accentuate their linguistic and cultural competence. Students can gain familiarity with codes of the dominant culture of our contemporary society. Often called critical literacy, this type of instruction can unveil layers of possibilities about youth and society, youth journeys, and the relationship of texts to culture, learning, and an equitable social world. Visual texts of all kinds touch the lives of humans across age groups, genders, heritages, sexual orientations, races, and religions. Windows on the world open through visual texts and disclose numerous social, economic, political, and ideological ways of being.

A consequence of explicit instruction in a grammar of film can lead to what British cultural theorist Stuart Hall refers to as an “oppositional reading” and a “struggle in discourse” (1999, 517). Students can begin to interrogate and innovate in their own language use in the same way that filmmakers transform literary semiotics (the symbolic in literary texts) into a set of universal and culturally based conventions. Through a grammar of film, educators can refresh, reinvigorate, and validate literacy studies so that film texts of all kinds can become pathways for students to make relevant meanings of their visual worlds.

### Students’ Expectations around Authentic Literacies in the Classroom

It’s 1999. The classroom is set up as an amphitheater: seven rows of desks and chairs are arched toward a twenty-four-inch television screen that hangs from the ceiling. “Are we watching a movie?” several of my eighth graders ask as they enter.

I shut off the lights as a scene of gold desert fills the screen. The grand landscape opens behind Lieutenant T.E. Lawrence in a film that has been widely considered one of the most influential in cinema history, *Lawrence of Arabia*. The term “reading” means a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following (A) the skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print, (B) the ability to decode unfamiliar words, (C) the ability to read fluently, (D) sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension, (E) the development of active strategies to construct meaning from print, (F) the development and maintenance of motivation to read (NCLB 2002).
At about the fifteen-minute point, Sammie, a student who is failing the class, has fallen asleep. Alice, who professes to hate school, twirls her hair in front of her downcast eyes. Brent, who has attention difficulties, pokes Seth periodically or taps his pen against the desk.

“That was boring,” Trevor, one of the higher-achieving students, blurts out when the twenty-minute clip ends.

“Why?” I ask, smiling.

“No action,” his friend Malcolm pipes in. Malcolm is one of three students of color whom I teach this year in our upper-middle-class, suburban public school.

“You turned off the movie just when the action was starting,” Tommy offers. He is a six-foot-tall fourteen-year-old with a difficult home life.

“It was like a musical,” Joel yells from the back. He has heard me humming the theme music in a silly performance at the front of the room.

“Forget that,” I ask again. “ ’Cause of that?” I hum the same riff. He nods.

“The echoes were cheesy,” Drake offers. “They started immediately after he said the words.”

Steve adds it was “hard to follow what was going on with the characters.”

Alex decides, “We should watch that whole film sometime.” I suggest that he tell his mom and dad that he’d like to do so because they’d probably be pleased.

As long as a decade ago, my students had been acculturated to respond to films in very specific ways that spoke to their status in what Marc Prensky would later term “digital natives” (2006). They responded to Laurence of Arabia differently than did the 1962 audience that awarded it the Best Film Oscar. Student viewers in 1999 had greater expectations for frequent camera shot switches, an array of special effects, nuanced sound quality, layered plot, and action sequences. Youth at the door of the new millennium had counted on film producers to capture and keep an audience’s attention more keenly than had film audiences who preceded them.

Mandates for Accountability and Reading

Fast forward to 2010. Students walk into overpopulated, underfunded public school buildings while looking down at their cell phones and composing text messages. They post on each other’s social networking walls, write music lyrics, design photographic slideshows, collaborate in wiki spaces, and coauthor digital stories. They are able to multitask within a variety of media, moving among the various modes of print, image, movement, graphics, animation, sound, and music. Schools must be tapping into these authentic literacies of students to prepare them for their comprehensive adult lives as literate citizens in a global-connected society... Right?

Unfortunately, no. Structures mandated within the U.S. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation have reinforced print-based definitions of literacy (Bullen, Robb, and Kenway 2004; Dole, Duffy, Roehler, and Pearson 1991; Valencia and Wixson 1999; Wixson and Pearson 1998). Annual U.S. assessment requirements in reading for students in grades three through eight and high school examine students’ ability to read only from print.

Without doubt, public school administrators experience a constant and significant federal pressure to meet annual accountability mandates, which are derived through standardized test gains (Cuban 1992, Darling-Hammond and Sykes 2003, Fullan 2001, Honig 2006, McDermott 2004). The result is that public schools often consider literacy practices as a process of “mining of extracts of texts for fixed meanings and correct answers,” according to literacy researchers Mary Bousted and Alayne Ozturk (2004, 56). Students tend to respond at “a literal, often superficial level with little evidence of inferring, evaluating, or critical reading,” add reading researchers Maureen Walsh, Jennifer Asha, and Nicole Spairinger (2007, 51). Are we as educators to assume that students will transfer print-centric reading practices to the authentic texts—those heavily visual and digital texts—of their new millennial lives? Such an inference is complicated by students’ aversion to print, particularly the high Western canon.

Should twenty-first century students read print? Absolutely. Should public schools foster structures for successful print reading comprehension in all students? Absolutely. Should print be the exclusive domain of literacy instruction in U.S. public schools?

No. Because literacy is tied to personal, relational experiences formed through a variety of textual experiences, many educators transcend strictures within NCLB and infuse a wide array of texts and ideological textual interrogation into classroom
instruction. Various modalities and genres provide students with fuller and richer literacy learning experiences than does print alone. Film is a visual modality that has strong capacities to incorporate new definitions of “reading” into classrooms and media centers and to sidestep students’ negativity around print. When educators use film, they teach core structures of literacy while compelling students to achieve deeper levels of thinking. An explicit instruction of a grammar of film can help students gain insights into the ways that discourse relies on social, textual, and interpretive semiotic codes. An explicit instruction in a grammar of film can unite accountability requirements, as well as students’ desires to engage in their authentic literacy practices.

Reconciling Visual and Other Literacies

What does it mean to teach within pedagogy that approaches film as serious educational discourse? Is viewing merely a means to an end to inspire students? What is the long-term purpose of including film texts when students have not yet been exposed to so many other important texts? Don’t structures of print and visual texts differ?

In the way that baby boomers learned to accept commercials as a normal and plausible form of discourse (Postman 1985), today’s youth is savvy about the world of film and culture through the technology they access daily. The high Western canon still has a place in the public school, but, with the companion of students’ own literacies, John Knowles’ *A Separate Peace* can become more accessible. Embracing film as literacy can open pathways to rich academic discourse. Moreover, explicit instruction in a grammar of film can begin a process

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**Principles of Design and Composition: Black & White Photography**

*A photograph is a two-dimensional semiotic representation of reality.* Eliminating color variation in favor of shades of gray allows light to emerge. Black and white is much more than two opposites—the depth of midnight, the piercing ray of the sun, the muted hues of morning mist. To create particular effects, black and white photographs—and videography—seek out particular elements of design and composition such as texture, shape, line, contrast, and tone.

**Principles of Design** are the organization of works of art. They involve the ways in which the elements of art are arranged. These elements include balance, contrast, dominance, emphasis, movement, repetition, rhythm, subordination, variation, and unity.

**Composition** is the arrangement of the elements within the frame. They include the main subject, the foreground and background, and supporting subjects.

**Texture, lines, and shapes** lead our eyes through a black and white picture in ways they do not in a color picture. A meandering fence, rows of corn growing in a field, and layers of rock on a cliff wall all have strong lines, and when a producer removes the color from these scenes, the overall effect may be improved.

**High contrast** is an extreme range between bright and dark. High contrast scenes may confine a viewer’s attention to one element, while a low contrast, with its narrow brightness range, may alter the scene to convey serenity and peace.

**Tone** is the degree of lightness or darkness in any given area of a print. Tone is also sometimes referred to as value. Cold tones, such as blues, and warm tones, such as reds, refer to the color of the image in both black and white, and color photographs.

**Sepia** is a photograph with a reddish-brown color. Sepia finishings offer the feel of an early era photograph.
that stimulates conversations and thought in students about new texts for curriculum, about how education can be meaningful in its relation to literacy outside of school, and about the authentic literate lives of today’s youth.

One way that film as educational discourse can shift the way educators and students perceive literacy, according to Gunther Kress (2000), is when students move from being consumers to becoming producers. Thus, for an explicit instruction of a grammar of film to be most effective, educators must relinquish authority, step back, and free students to compose their own films. As educational philosopher John Dewey said, “education is a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience” (1966, 76). The synthesis, reflection, and evaluation necessary during film production are educational experiences that challenge students to new levels of meaning making. And, because film analysis, interpretation, and creation move learners from the lowest to the highest levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson et al. 2000), students who learn an explicit grammar of film and apply that grammar to their own compositions have rich resources to draw upon when taking standardized tests.

Study Contexts

Film, to me, is not an abstract means to enhance my students’ interests in prescribed curriculum. Incorporating film doesn’t just make my job as a teacher easier: I believe in bringing the authentic literacies of youth into the classroom. I also agree with teacher researchers Susan L. Lytle and Marilyn Cochran-Smith, who have noticed a “conspicuous absence” (1990, 83) in scholarly research of the voices of teachers—the questions and problems teachers pose, the tools we use to interpret and improve our practice, and the ways we define and understand our students’ academic and social lives. Participant-observer research can be a rich source of data for educational reform measures. So, because my gut instincts weren’t enough to merge the dissonant world of literacy and accountability in which I teach, I decided to conduct my own research to see if, in fact, students would become more literate overall if I were to incorporate film as serious educational discourse.

I designed and implemented a study according to institutional review board standards in 2009. My population resided in a suburban community approximately forty miles southwest of the capital of a state in the northeastern U.S. The community’s population of 29,500 was, on the whole, white, European-American, and upper-middle-class. At the graduation ceremony, the principal reported that over 90 percent of Taylor’s students would attend college.

Taylor High School (THS) had a population of about 1,550 students. This study comprised five rosters of English class teenagers, with an average age of seventeen, during their junior year of high school. These were “college preparatory” students who were designated to the less rigorous of two English class offerings, and three of the five rosters were inclusion classes*. The participants’ classroom was situated on the first floor of one wing of a brick-and-cement 1970s school. As a teacher-researcher I told, read, watched, and listened to texts about youth culture and culture’s influences on youth’s worldviews. While some students did identify elements such as “special effects,” “budget,” “sounds,” or “actors,” a large majority of students responded with items that reflected traditional narrative structure, such as “plot,” “setting,” “hero,” “protagonist,” “climax,” or “good ending.” Educated for their entire lives under the umbrella of NCLB, my new-millennium students had been inculcated into a hidden curriculum of public schooling. Although I had asked my students to describe elements of film, it was, after all, an English subject-area classroom, and, according to Kay Sambell and Liz MacDowell, a distinction exists between “what is meant to happen” and what teachers and learners actually do and experience in assessments to achieve satisfactory performance grades (1998). In their careers as English-class students, “analysis,” to my students, meant identification of narrative structures.

How could I get these new-millennium students to step back and challenge the dominant norms of society and film in the way that my students a decade earlier had?

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1 * According to confidentiality stipulations for subjects in research, school/town/state names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

2 "Inclusion" means that students with Individualized Educational Plans were in the class.
To prod these students to think beyond traditional literacy structures, we pulled out the laptops and surveyed a wide variety of movie posters available at websites like [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Movie_posters](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Movie_posters) or [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awpnp6/posters.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awpnp6/posters.html). We saw Harry Potter in silhouette against a full moon. Keanu Reeves, draped in leather and black, leaned toward us with lightning bolts piercing the night behind him. A confusing collage of hand-drawn faces and umbrellas splashed across a cityscape to depict a world of chaos in *Blade Runner*; Indiana Jones, framed in a burnt-orange glow, grasped a sword in one hand and a whip in another. Bela Lugosi stared menacingly at a pale female neck.

Soon, I asked the students, “After viewing the film posters, what other elements of film do you know?”

In this second attempt to identify the elements of film, the students offered a wealth of responses: “lighting,” “script,” “transitions,” “camera angles,” “ratings,” “explosions,” “stunt doubles,” “choreography,” “animation,” “location,” “sets,” “producers,” “cinematography,” and many others. Here was some initial success: Students were beginning to describe their authentic worlds of visual literacy within a public school educational experience. But I was only mildly optimistic about my students’ independent abilities to transfer these first successes to analysis of the film version of *Inherit the Wind*, starring Spencer Tracy and Frederic March. Due to lack of familiarity with the depth and dimension of black and white visuals, many people today—youth and adults alike—find black and white visuals to be dull, one-dimensional, and uninspiring.

As a result, I created a lesson plan in which students could separate themselves from a quick response to a black and white visual and, instead, slow down, breathe, and break the whole into parts. The lesson plan called for me to teach an explicit grammar of black and white visual analysis and for me to model my own analytical responses. I created a PowerPoint presentation with photographs such as those available at [www.archives.gov/research/ansel-adams](http://www.archives.gov/research/ansel-adams). My students and I viewed, analyzed, wrote, and discussed the elements of light, texture, and balance through the principles of design and composition of black and white photography.

Knowing that young people require adults to guide them to new levels of thinking and learning (Vygotsky 1978), I modeled my own writing and observations for the students. I narrated my “think aloud” as follows:

CF: A single deer drinks from an icy lake pool while bathed in the first rays of sunrise. Above the deer is a series of three horizontal cuts across the landscape. The first cut emphasizes the frost-coated trees. The second cut is of a long mountain range, covered in shadow, dark and foreboding. The final cut is up to the Sierra Nevada mountain range, which is a swatch of white light speckled with shadows. Even above the range, the sky is leaden with horizontal puffy clouds.

After my modeling and sharing two or so more slides of breathtaking mountains, winding vistas, and deeply shadowed valleys, the students began to write with a depth of feeling.

Sandy: Mount McKinley truly is a great mountain. Sun cuts the jagged line into the mountain, creating bright and dark offsets. This balance creates a muscular look. The sheer shapes of the mountain are strewn across the lake, showing how truly impressive it is. The patterns show a presence that is grand in both size and texture.
Josh: The distant light illuminates the mountain. The close terrain is encased in the shadow of what could be a hill or another mountain. The light meets the dark on the horizon at the center of the photo.

Sandy was a popular student who reached beyond the inherent social discourse of the classroom to engage voluntarily in sharing his observations. Josh was a generally reluctant reader and writer whose family situation required him to be self-sufficient. Each of these students was able to find voice in the analysis of black and white photography through explicit instruction in its grammar. High achiever or outsider, college bound or work-oriented, expressive or logical—it made no difference what kind of student was before me. After an explicit instruction of the grammar of black and white photography, followed by my modeling, every student could be successful.

I didn’t end the learning event there, however. I remembered how Gunther Kress had revealed that students who become text makers and transform resources according to their own visions locate “agency of a real kind” (2000, 340). Thus, I assigned the students a task that required them to become composers. Each had to locate a black and white photograph that was personally compelling, brainstorm numerous elements of black and white photography, transform the list into a well-written and descriptive paragraph that analyzed the photograph’s elements within a metalanguage of black and white, and lay out text and photograph in a visually appealing way. Upon completion of the assignment, students reflected on their depth of analysis, and I sat down and assessed the project individually with each student. The conference gave me an additional chance to discuss possibilities within a grammar of visual analysis.

And now the time had come for the students and me to open up the print version of *Inherit the Wind*. Concurrent with that reading, we drew the stage, tossed key lines, answered guiding questions, shared insights into characterizations, and analyzed overarching themes. We experienced the print text personally by beginning with characterization and identifying narrative structure, but we transcended mere literary analysis by viewing some clips of the Spencer Tracy film version. To guide the students toward comprehension of media messages within the black and white film, I unveiled “The Grammar of Film” (see sidebar in pages 18–21) to which I constantly referred. Students who were not typically outspoken in literary discussions took lead roles in calling out the elements of film that they identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of assessment criteria</th>
<th>Student self-assessment</th>
<th>Teacher final assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student has a brainstormed list of criteria that looks back to numerous elements of art and principles of design. (6 points possible)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student has drawn from the brainstormed list to write a richly descriptive, cohesive, and analytical paragraph. (12 points possible)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The photograph and typed paragraph are combined into a layout that is creative and colorful. (3 points possible)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total possible score: 21 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The students had multiple opportunities to divest themselves of the passive consumption of entertainment glitz and glamour, and to recognize the underlying messages about society, culture, and dominant ideologies within the film text of *Inherit the Wind*. We had read the book; we had seen the film; and we had deconstructed both.

Ultimately, it was time for me to relinquish my authority as teacher and to invite my students to become experts. I designed an assessment called “Film Trailers as Assessment” and posted the project description on our class blog: <http://societyissuesidentity.blogspot.com/2009/04/film-trailer-as-composition.html>. Over a series of five days, with significant co-teaching from our school librarian, M.J. Waite, students created and shared their film trailers. Some are posted on the class blog at <http://societyissuesidentity.blogspot.com/2009/04/film-trailers-for-inherit-wind-student.html>. I’ve included others in a professional development blog I created: <www.mediasupermarket.blogspot.com>.

The results of the students’ efforts were impressive. For example, Laurel combined keen observation of metaphors into her film trailer: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1NNw4pL9rs>. Brad studied the genre of film trailers and mastered it: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpNh1Cuf6ws>. Within the classroom Nelly May reconciled her personal views of religion in a way that further grounded her beliefs: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=O04hsAfkEU>. Maude called upon the drama and quick camera angles of films she had seen to create her own film: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXv4Np6YDe8>.

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**A GRAMMAR OF FILM**

**CAMERA TECHNIQUES**

**Shot** is a single “run” of the camera. This is the basic unit from which a film is constructed. The length (or duration) of a shot depends upon:

- purpose: to help the viewer to recognize setting or place, to show action, to show reaction
- pace (or tempo) of the sequence in which it occurs

**Sequence** is a group of shots that depict one action, or that seem to belong with or depend upon each other. Sequences can range from a few to many shots.

**Scene** is a group of sequences or (for short scenes) a group of shots that:

- depict an event in the story
- occur in one place

A scene is generally a larger unit than a sequence.

**TYPES OF SHOTS**

**Long Shot** is a distance shot in which a setting, and not a character, is the emphasis. This is generally used to establish the place in which action will occur, hence the term “establishing shot.” A long shot is often used at the beginning of a scene or sequence, and may be combined with a panning movement of the camera to show a wider area.

**Midshot** is a middle-distance shot that focuses our attention on a particular subject. With a midshot, the camera is close enough to pick up detail though still far enough away to be able to follow as the subject moves. The midshot is commonly used to show action, such as a fight scene, a walk down a dark alley, or a glimpse of a villain coming into view.

**Close-Up** is a close shot of an object or person. A close-up focuses the viewer’s attention on particular details. Close-ups of objects may serve as the introductions to new scenes, may offer a new fact, or may shift location in the story. Close-ups of a person have a number of different functions:

- The close-up can imply that the person on whom we are focusing is a main character.
- The first close-up of a character (in a sequence of shots) establishes point of view, so we know who is watching an event.
- A close-up is most commonly used to show the reaction of a character.

**CAMERA MOVEMENTS**

**Pan** is a movement from a stationary position to side-to-side.

**Tilt** is a movement up or down from a stationary position.

**Tracking** occurs when the camera moves to follow a moving object or person. The camera is mounted on a moving device, such as a rail platform, a dolly, or a vehicle.
**Zoom Out** is movement outwards away from a subject. The speed of a camera movement (which can range from very fast to very slow) can dramatically alter its effect.

**MOVING FROM ONE SHOT TO ANOTHER**

**Cut** is the ending of a shot. If the cut is a jerky movement that seems a little inconsistent with the next shot, it is called a jump cut.

**Fade In or Out** offers an image that appears or disappears gradually. It brightens to full-strength over a full second, or darkens to fade out. The fade is often used as a division between scenes.

**Dissolve** occurs when one image fades in while another fades out so that for a few seconds the two are superimposed.

**Inpoint** is an image that starts the scene. Sometimes this inpoint is used to smooth the transition between scenes and make a visual link (a related object or shape) with the **outpoint** of the previous shot.

**CAMERA ANGLES**

In filming a shot, a decision is made about the angle at which the camera is to be directed at a subject; this influences the viewer’s impression of a particular character.

A character filmed from a **low angle** will seem strong, powerful, tall, proud, etc.; in contrast, if a **high angle** is used the subject will appear weak, insignificant, vulnerable, or small. The viewer’s impression of a structure or object can be manipulated in a similar way.

**A distorted angle** may be used to make a scene more frightening, or to make the viewer feel anxious or seasick.

**A crane angle**, where the camera moves up and away, is often used to end films.

**Editing** is the process of assembling and splicing together the various shots that comprise a film. Underlying the editing process is a technique that can be called **pairing**, in which a story is built up by alternating one set of shots with another.

- To depict a conversation or confrontation between two characters the shots alternate from one to the other; angles may be used to suggest inferiority or superiority.
- Shots of a character alternate with shots of what the character sees. The first shot of the character is the point of view.
- In cross-cutting, a sequence of shots alternates between two different locations (for example, the townspeople yelling in dismay while the defense attorney approaches town on the train). The sequence builds to a climax and ends with the two things coming together.

**Editing Speed** (or tempo) of a particular sequence can involve fast editing, also known as fast cutting, in which the shots are one to two seconds long. Fast editing generates excitement and anticipation as, for example, in an emotional courtroom scene. In slow editing, shots are three to ten seconds long. These lingering shots have the opposite effect of the fast edit, and calm and relax the viewer. An example of the slow edit is when the star-crossed lovers pause and reveal their true feelings.

**CAMERA TERMS**

**Soft focus** is a slightly blurred shot to make the subject seem more attractive, romantic, nostalgic, or dreamlike.

When a **handheld camera** is chosen, the tripod and dolly are deliberately abandoned. The director wants to create a sense of anxiety or confusion, recreating the chaos of real human life. A typical held shot follows a character who is approached from behind, and the shot implies danger.

**Montage** is editing together of a large number of shots with no intention to create a continuous reality. A montage is often used to compress time because numerous events are chronicled in fast succession. Sound or narration can enhance montages’ cohesion to setting and characterization.
**SOUND TECHNIQUES**

Sound effects are added after filming. They need to be added because the original set did not allow clear and audible recognition of necessary audio elements. Sounds that are added later are numerous: lighthouse sirens, car tires skidding, horses’ hooves on a cobbled street, a child crying in the background, or a cell phone ringing.

Dialogue is a conversation between characters.

Commentary or narration, also called voice-over, layers additional commentary and insight into characterization and conflicts. Often a voice-over is the inner voice of the protagonist as she or he debates over life choices. The narrator is invisible in this case. Viewers react differently to commentary depending on several factors.

- **Pace,** or the speed of delivery, can imply a circumstance. For example, faster talk may mean the protagonist is in jeopardy.
- **Tone** of dialogue reveals the emotion of the characters. Characters might be rude, shy, aggressive, threatening, passive, eager, quizzical, or sarcastic.
- **Clarity** (enunciation) can create a particular effect. Words that are inaudible suggest confusion; words that are explicit in sound can suggest power and authority.

- **Dialect** creates a direct effect on the way that audiences react. Non-mainstream dialects challenge the way viewers might otherwise readily accept a character. Dialectical nuances open up to audiences new interpretations of people and their experiences.

**Background noise** makes a scene seem more realistically close to viewers’ authentic experiences. When we hear horns blaring, birds singing, children crying, or trains clattering, we associate these sounds with our own lives, thus allowing us to believe in the plot.

**Laugh tracks** are added to reinforce comedic action.

**Music** is used most often to add emotion to scenes. Usually the audience instinctively understands the feelings the filmmaker wants to evoke with a certain style of music. Some of the most common uses of music are:

- **building suspense:** scary music or climactic music
- **suggesting romance:** easy-listening music
- **establishing the location or setting:** many types of music are associated with certain parts of the world
- **adding humor:** music can add a comic element to a production if the music is funny or doesn’t fit the action
- **setting a pace:** music can set the pace for action, such as in a cartoon or rock video

**LIGHTING TECHNIQUES**

Because films are no more than recorded light, directors give special attention to lighting techniques.

For **high key** lighting, the scene is flooded with bright illumination, giving it a cheerful feel and a happy atmosphere.

For **low key**, illumination is low and soaked with shadows, creating an ominous or melancholy mood.

**Spotlights** cast intense beams on the subject.

A strong light from behind, called **backlighting,** separates the subject from the background. It can also create a silhouette effect when the subject is not illuminated from the front.

**Sidelight** adds solidity and depth, accentuating features and sometimes hiding facial marks.

**THE ESSENCE OF ACTING**

The actor’s primary goal is to perform **determined actions** that inspire an audience to willfully suspend disbelief. We want to identify with the actors as real humans with conscious desires like our own. Emotions, the human equivalent of animals’ instincts, arise from the ego, or our subconscious desires to become fulfilled. An actor locates motives for the character’s actions as a means to achieve the connection with the ego. Desires, action, and performance are intermingled as one in the actor’s world.
Actors see themselves as experiencing real events. The characters’ past, ego, and discourse with real people and real things manifest in moments. Actors reconcile their real and artificial selves by constantly questioning their behaviors, reasoning, and conditions as if they were now the characters.

Improvisation is the act of making something up as you go along. Some famous actors are remembered for their spontaneous additions to scripts during filming.

The director’s influence is key; nearly every decision made by the actor is reinforced or scripted by the director. Some directors like to control actors’ decisions as much as any other element of the film.

COLOR
In the U.S. filmmakers embed Western social codes of color to create character and mood.

Red: excitement, energy, passion, desire, speed, strength, power, heat, love, aggression, danger, fire, blood, war, violence, aggression, all things intense and passionate

Yellow: joy, happiness, optimism, idealism, imagination, hope, sunshine, summer, gold, philosophy, dishonesty, cowardice, betrayal, jealousy, covetousness, deceit, illness, hazard

Blue: peace, tranquility, calm, stability, harmony, unity, trust, truth, confidence, conservatism, security, cleanliness, order, loyalty, sky, water, cold, technology, depression, appetite suppressant

Orange: energy, balance, warmth, enthusiasm, vibrant, expansive, flamboyant, demanding of attention

Green: nature, environment, healthy, good luck, renewal, youth, vigor, spring, generosity, fertility, jealousy, inexperience, envy, misfortune

Purple: royalty, spirituality, nobility, spirituality, ceremony, mysterious, transformation, wisdom, enlightenment, cruelty, arrogance, mourning

Gray: security, reliability, intelligence, staid, modesty, dignity, maturity, solid, conservative, practical, old age, sadness, boring

Brown: earth, hearth, home, outdoors, reliability, comfort, endurance, stability, simplicity, comfort

White: reverence, purity, simplicity, cleanliness, peace, humility, precision, innocence, youth, birth, winter, snow, good, sterility, marriage (Western cultures), death (Eastern cultures), cold, clinical, sterile

Black: power, sexuality, sophistication, formality, elegance, wealth, mystery, fear, evil, anonymity, unhappiness, depth, style, evil, sadness, remorse, anger, underground, good technical color, mourning, death (Western cultures).

Source: [www.wired4success.com/colorsymbolism.htm]

SPECIAL EFFECTS
Computer Animation:
To “animate” is literally “to give life to.” “Animating” is moving something that can’t move itself.

Animation adds to graphics the dimension of time, vastly increasing the amount of information that can be transmitted.

An artistic piece of animation will probably require different tools than an animation intended to simulate reality. Computer-assisted animation usually refers to two- and two-and-a-half-dimensional systems that computerize the traditional hand-drawn animation process.
instruction in the grammar of film, this critical literacy classroom embraced multi-modal, multi-literate, and trans-cultural cores and offered possibilities for emancipatory literacy learning.

Final Thoughts

As I began this study, students seemed to have difficulty relating film analysis to the classroom, due to traditional definitions of literacy in public school practices and the necessities inherent in an era of accountability. By the end of this study, however, many of the juniors rose up with voices that attested to new levels of interpretation and creation through accommodation of an explicit grammar of film. Through student artifacts, this study unveiled a rich vocabulary that students were able to draw upon to describe images and to create critical interpretations about film texts. A grammar of film became a conduit through which youth could connect academic to public literacies and the texts they encountered in wider social and cultural contexts.

Students can reconcile their real lives with public school literacy practices and become hope-filled when they are able to read and recontextualize their worlds in meaningful ways through explicit instruction in the grammar of film and through a broad array of film analysis learning experiences. With recent and increasing shifts in thinking around the way education is delivered in the U.S., a grammar of film might be a subtle way into new thinking about new literacies as serious educational discourse.

Through composition, students demonstrated their abilities to transcend identification of narrative elements and, instead, used the technologies available to them through the Internet to design and signifiy relevant literacy messages. Through original literacy messages, or messages that demonstrate clear communicative meanings across modalities, students become producers of texts similar to those in the media that inform, persuade, and entertain them daily. In each of these examples, students moved reciprocally through in-school and out-of-school literacy practices to gain meaningful learning structures. Thus, youth need spaces both inside and outside school where they can absorb and practice 21st-century literacy structures. As Eleanor Duckworth notes, “Wondrous ideas do not spring out of nothing. They build on a foundation of other ideas” (1996, 265). Through an explicit works cited:


Costanzo, William V. 2004. *Great Films and How to Teach Them.* Urbana, IL: NCTE.


Carolyn Fortuna, whose PhD (ABD) is in education, teaches English at "Taylor" High School in New England. She made a presentation "A Supermarket of Ideas: Strategies for Media Literacy in a Changing Information Age" at the 2009 NCTE Annual Convention.

Films that Help to Infuse a Working Knowledge of the Grammar of Film

- **Casablanca** (1942, introduction for students to black and white cinematography)

- **Lawrence of Arabia** (1962 Best Picture Oscar, with grand landscapes)

- **Grease** (1978, Sandy: “I’m going back to Australia. I might never see you again.” Danny: “Don’t talk that way, Sandy.” Sandy: “But it’s true. I just had the best summer of my life, and now I have to go. It isn’t fair.”)

- **Empire of the Sun** (1987, a Spielberg film based on J. G. Ballard’s moving account of an English child in Shanghai separated from his parents during WWII)

- **Run, Lola, Run** (1998, a postmodern, highly stylized interplay of drama, intrigue, and philosophy told in three alternate plot versions. Educators can eliminate mature language by playing it in German without subtitles)

- **Bend It Like Beckham** (2002, a contemporary view of intergenerational cultural clash through youth, sports, and romance in London).

For additional titles, see William Costanza’s *Great Films and How to Teach Them.* (2004).


During preproduction the production designer, locations department, art director, construction department, scenic artists, property master, and the set decorator all work together to design the environment in which the characters will interact. The costume designer is also part of the mix, since the style and color of wardrobe must be appropriate for the actors, as well for the look of the set.

During filming, the on-set dresser works closely with the camera operator, script supervisor (who follows continuity), and the property department to make sure the compositions look good and the objects are in place and straight.

The lighting department, beginning with the director of photography (cinematographer), includes the gaffer and key grip, and their crews. They figure out the lenses, camera angles, lighting, and shadows of the shots.
How It Comes Together

Once the look and the feel of the film are discussed, the groundwork begins. The set decorator, often with the help of a shopper, starts looking for possible set dressing. Set dressing includes everything you see from floor to ceiling, inside four walls, and outside, too. Our goal is to give the viewing audience a feeling for who lives in the environment, so I have to be careful not to let the dressing reflect my personal interests, but rather reveal the interests and personalities of the characters. I also have to be careful to avoid clichés and stereotypes; I don’t want my sets to inadvertently make fun of a character.

I run through a kind of mental checklist when creating a set. Sets should contain an accumulation of things—some old, some new—because in real life, not everything in a setting was bought on the same day. I look for objects that reflect activities of daily life, including personal items like schoolbooks, newspapers, mail, reading glasses, schedules on the refrigerator, snacks, and recycling. A film viewer should see evidence of hobbies, collectibles, objects that show the characters’ interests, travel souvenirs, sporting goods, and memorabilia. When I dress a family home, I like to include kids’ art, ceramics, crafts, and toys. Beach glass, shells, pine cones, and dried herbs are interesting accents for windowsills and shelves. Coats, boots and umbrellas show seasonal and daily activities of life.

To develop the sense of a family or a local community or a group of affiliated people, I use photographs. If there is enough lead time, I like to contact the actors to borrow their own personal photos, which I duplicate (never using their originals), resize, and frame. When possible, we schedule an informal photo shoot to capture images of the actors who will be portrayed as family and friends. I’ll also choose photos from travels, events or non-specific individuals that “fit” the time and place. Calendars, flyers, museum brochures, theater tickets, newspapers, postcards, mugs, and tote bags can also convey a local flavor.

Any time photographs, artwork, identifiable logos, or brands are seen in a shot, clearances are necessary. We have an extensive procedure for clearing the rights on objects. No images can be used without permission. If something has not been cleared, we may use generic or nondescript items, or create our own brand, or we “greek” out a logo, usually by covering up the identifiable image.

On the other hand, some branded objects are deliberately visible. Such “product placement” has become very common; it keeps down costs on purchases and rentals since objects that get placement are loaned or given to the production in exchange for being seen. When watching a film, keep your eye out for placements—typically computers, sunglasses, TVs, MP3 players, cell phones, kitchen appliances, utensils, cars, scooters, and sneakers.

Logistics and Budget

Once I have a good idea of the characters, I put together a wish list and begin an initial search by going to retail stores, checking the Web (Craigslist, eBay, Google), and visiting prop rental businesses that work with the film community. During research I may identify an interesting item that would be appropriate for the project. The item may or may not exist, it may or may not be available, and it may or may not be affordable. It may have to be built or manufactured, in which case a set designer would draw up the plan, the construction department would build the item, and then the scenic artists would paint and age it.

Sometimes I need duplicates for multiple takes, so if I’m buying an item, I purchase extra ones; if we’re building the items, all will have to match exactly. An item or prop may need to be modified or “dummied” for the safety of the actors and crew. For example, multiples of a knife for a particular action will include the original or “hero” knife, as well as a rubber one and a dulled one. When the action calls for a character to be struck by a vase, fall onto a table, or be thrown through a window, the substitute is used in place of the real thing.

Stunt coordinators will ask the decorator to supply special set dressing for specific action sequences. For example, if there is a chase through streets and alleys, piles of garbage bags, cardboard boxes, and similar debris may be used as the actors run along, fight, or hide. I’m in charge of finding clean, safe, and soft garbage for the set.

If there is a food scene, the set dressing crew coordinates with the props crew, and often we will bring in a food stylist. First we select the dishware, flatware, table linens, serving dishes, and utensils. In addition to preparing plates of food that may show a meal “in progress,” we talk with the actors about their food issues and decide how much of what food needs replenishing for each “take.” For a restaurant or café set, we’ll need to consider menus, drinks, partially eaten meals, salads, dessert, and even patrons paying their checks.
Greens are also part of my responsibilities as the set decorator. This includes cut flowers, growing plants, shrubs, trees, branches, and fallen leaves. Sometimes, if the story takes place out of season, I’ll have to arrange to attach autumn leaves or spring blossoms to bare branches. In reverse, when the plants are flourishing, the greens crew may need to trim or prune plants to accommodate the composition of a shot or to help the lighting crew add shadow effects.

The producer gives me a budget for rentals, purchases, and manufacturing everything we’ll use. Early on I break down the budget, allocating amounts for each set or location. As I get more information, I adjust the budget allocations. It’s important to stay on or under budget, and if anything looks as if it’s going over budget, I have to notify the producer immediately.

Not only do I budget money, but I also budget time. Working with my key assistant, called the “lead person,” we put together an action calendar. The lead determines the size of the crew and figures out the logistics of moving the set dressing—pickups, storage, dressing and striking sets, returns, and inventory. Members of the set-dressing team are set dressers and the swing gang—they need to carry furniture properly, pay close attention to details, know how to pack items and protect locations, since they’re handling expensive objects.

As set decorator, I’m always conscious of timelines, since not everything is available immediately. Sofas or wallpaper may have to be ordered and must arrive long before the set is scheduled to be shot. Tracking is critical because if a promised delivery date is not met, I need to come up with an alternative solution. While fabrics for drapery, throw pillows, or upholstery are readily available, when these need to be sewn or manufactured, that timeline has to be tracked.

Next time you see a movie, think about the environment created by the set decorator—was he or she successful in adding to your understanding of the characters and the story?

How might you tell the story differently?

Kris Boxell is a set decorator who has worked on movies such as Bull Durham, James and the Giant Peach, and The Bee Season. She loves to read books and teaches water exercise classes in her spare time. “Believe it or not, even though I work on movies, I see very few new films.”
The Problem with Film

Presently, I’m teaching a college course called Literacy across the Curriculum. This course is designed to help pre-service teachers to become comfortable with reading and writing strategies in their subject areas. Because of my background in media, technology, and popular culture, I define “literacy” and “text” broadly and subscribe to Paulo Freire’s sentiment that we must learn to “read the world and the word” (Freire and Macedo 1987).

When we think about literacy as listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing it is possible to differentiate our literacy practices around a wide range of multi-modal texts like music, architecture, wikis, blogs, and even facial expressions (see John Cleese’s extremely teachable BBC documentary FACE). While every text has a vocabulary indigenous to its medium, I have found that educators who develop a mindful practice around moving images easily springboard into teaching with a wide range of high-interest non-print texts.

During this course I asked undergrads to interview practicing secondary teachers about their multi-modal literacy practices; the undergrads were specifically instructed to ask teachers about their use of film. While students visited a wide range of schools, there was a stunning similarity to some of the anecdotes they collected.

Students reported that high school and middle school teachers often use the “read the book, watch the movie” method of teaching film. If social studies, math, and science teachers used films, they were usually visual lectures or dramatizations of historical events. When students asked follow-up questions about how instructors scaffolded instruction around a film, they found little beyond a few discussion questions hovering at the knowledge and understanding rungs of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

A majority of the middle school teachers interviewed by students talked about what might be dubbed “Disney Week.” Middle school teachers of every discipline told the pre-service teachers that they usually screen Disney movies like The Little Mermaid or Aladdin.
before winter break. They did this because students are antsy, and film screenings are perceived as a pre-break reward. This would not be a loss of instructional time if teachers developed rich curricula around the films; however, that does not appear to be the case.

Unfortunately, this anecdotal data has been corroborated by my work as a high school teacher, mentor of new teachers, and instructor of pre–service and practicing educators at the collegiate level. In many cases film is not viewed as an instructional main course but as dessert. Poorly developed practices that use film as a reward or reinforcement tool cultivates a suspicious attitude toward “fluffy” uses of moving images in the classroom—an attitude shared by many teachers and administrators.

As the most commonly used non-print medium in K–12 classrooms, film should support well-developed questions and teaching objectives. The fact that many teachers lack a robust pedagogy around moving images is generally not the fault of teachers; rare is the college of education, library and information science program, staff development program, or building-level initiative that supports the theory and practices of non-print media education.

In Mary Christel and Ellen Krueger’s book Seeing Is Believing: How to Teach Media Literacy In the English Classroom (2001), Christel wrote a chapter called “Film in the Literature Class: Not Just Dessert Anymore.” In that chapter she acknowledges the possibilities of teaching with the moving image:

“Film can be so much more than just a reward or a time to relax for patient and reluctant readers of a text. It can provide meaningful enrichment, even for the eager reader, who can access visual texts with very sophisticated insights cultivated by the careful reading and understanding of a literary text (2001, 68).”

I believe Christel’s observation applies to the use of film texts in every discipline. Despite the incredible proliferation of visual media and culture in the last thirty years, a large portion of students and adults allow images to wash over them. Carefully viewing moving images while cultivating deeper understandings of the purposes, constructions, and meanings of those images is something that develops through thoughtful and creative practice over the course of a career.
Another reason that learning about non-print media like film can be daunting is because it is a complicated art form. A well-crafted moving image embraces art and design (set and costumes), lighting, photography, cinematography, acting, writing, directing, music, editing, choreography, and a considerable range of emerging technologies like CGI (computer-generated imagery), as well as the viewers’ imaginations. In addition to these variables, the complicated economics of producing films can also come into play. On the flip side, print media use writing, sometimes illustrations, and the readers’ imaginations.

Developing deeper understandings and mindful practices becomes the job of school librarians and other educators dedicated to “reading a world” overflowing with moving images.

The Possibilities of Film

Media generally, and film specifically, are essential elements for engaging curriculum and instruction. However, as with print texts, “attention must be paid” to the films you select, the reasons you select them, and the learning experiences developed around them.

When deciding what film you want to use with your curriculum it is important to select a unique and high-interest film. Alan Teasley and Ann Wilder’s book *Reel Conversations: Reading Films with Young Adults* (1997) lays out useful “Principles for Selection of Films.”

Their third principle is to choose films that students are not likely to have seen multiple times; they recommend selection of high-interest foreign films, classics, and “critically acclaimed films that didn’t reach a wide audience” (1997, 9). They reason that students will already have made judgments about a popular film and, in sharing these judgments, will ruin the film for others. “Ultimately, we feel it is a waste of time to spend the days it takes to watch and discuss

Figure 1. "Ways of Teaching Popular & Common Cultures" framework.
a whole film that most students have already seen” (1997, 9). They remind us that it is “more fun to introduce students to films [they have not seen] and we know they are going to love.”

On the other hand, when we use clips to teach film terminology to students, it often works to use chunks of very familiar films. Here students see portions of movies they know well. They know what to expect; they often can lip-synch the dialogue. But what happens is that they see these familiar films in new ways, out of context of the whole. Students come to recognize the “art” that has been invisible before. They know that the opening scene of E.T., for example, shows the spaceship leaving the little creature behind. What they didn’t realize before is that the camera movement, editing, and sound all work together to create the tension and then despair felt by E.T. (Teasely and Wilder 1997, 9–10).

Teasely and Wilder’s suggestions are helpful for language arts and, to some extent, other disciplines building on their work. My wife Nicole Trackman and I have developed the “Ways of Teaching Popular & Common Cultures” framework (see figure 1) based on our coaching of educators in all disciplines toward a more mindful practice.

As we see it there are three major ways you can use a film (or any pop/common/contemporary text) in the classroom.

Using this framework we suggest the following questions as guides to enhance your use of popular texts in the classroom.

**Big Guiding Questions**

1. What curricular content do you want to explore with this text?
2. What are the themes and main ideas of the text that interest you?
3. What teaching objectives do you want to use this text to explore?
4. What approach (stand-alone, direct link, or Rorschach) seems like the strongest starting point for your teaching of the text?
5. How can you differentiate instruction around this text?
6. How can you make an engaging and fun student-centered lesson coupling this text with differentiated activities?

**Other Points of Consideration**

7. Are there any special or interesting circumstances surrounding the production, popularity, or uses of the text?

   For example, might you want to know about the text’s creator, some of the reasons it was easy or hard for this film to be produced, and the public response to the film.

8. What are the interesting or unique cinematic features/characteristics of the text?

   For example, might we look at lighting, music, editing, costume and set design, camera angles, shot composition, and other techniques and effects that merit further analysis.

9. What other texts (music, comics, radio, books, websites, or stories) can this text connect with?

10. What text-specific terms or vocabulary may need to be defined?

   For example, a movie like Kit Kittredge: An American Girl Movie is set during the Great Depression. If you are teaching this film in a middle school social studies class you need to have structures so students can decode words like “hobo,” “boarders,” “apron,” and “phonograph,” or slang like “hoppin’,” and to clarify geographical concepts like the distance between Cincinnati and Chicago.

11. What understandings (prior knowledge) or misunderstandings might students bring to the text?

12. How can you activate the students’ prior knowledge to make your lesson/unit more meaningful?

   For example, if a math teacher was screening Stand and Deliver—a film about inner city high school students struggling to pass the AP Calculus test—simple pre-viewing questions would allow students to make personal connections to the film. Questions might include:

   - When have you had a conflict with a teacher? How did you deal with it?
   - When you are stuck on a math problem, how do you find a solution?
   - How do you imagine a school in East Los Angeles would be different from your school?

13. Does this text reflect on or comment on societal norms and values? If so, how?

   The exploration of even four of these questions can be helpful to an educator who wants to do more than “pop in and play” a film during a unit.

**Developing Mindful Practice**

The guiding framework makes teaching a feature film as rich as teaching an entire chapter of a novel. For that reason I recommend What About Bob? style “baby steps” by developing a few lessons in which short films and clips scaffold your initial lessons.

Short films or clips lend themselves to multiple viewings during which students can peel layers off the film. Use of short films or clips also builds students’ familiarity with close viewing and repeated viewing; these skills transfer to (and from) print texts if you model and explore their similarity to rereading and close reading. Of course, students will need to get accustomed to clips and learn to stop asking, “Can’t we watch the whole film?”
Instead of asking students, "What do you think happened to Johnny Phoenix?" we developed a learning experience organizer that asked them to hypothesize what happened to Johnny using data from the film (see figure 2). With multiple viewings of the clip, looking for cues beyond mere plot points, students are usually able to predict that Johnny must have been cloned!

Embracing Literacies

For at least fifty years, contemporary culture has been asking K–12 educators and librarians to view film as a main course. Our students have spent so much time engaging with film that they are generally willing to interact with

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Some of the layers you might explore include:

a. literary: character, plot, setting, dialogue

b. cinematic: shot composition
c. theme: essential question, big idea, or scientific/ethical quandary.
d. production: who produced it, how, and why. (These are traditional media-literacy and cultural-studies issues addressed in the stand-alone method.)
e. connections and synthesis: between any or all of the elements above

When doing this kind of analysis, I also recommend aligning your inquiry to the academic vocabulary of the discipline in which you’re using this film. For example, in the South Bronx, I developed a genetics unit with a biology teacher Napoleon Knight to frame all the essential questions and objectives around the Arnold Schwarzenegger action film The 6th Day, which is about cloning.

In an early clip of the film students see a football player Johnny Phoenix smash his spinal cord during a game. Shortly thereafter Johnny dies in an ambulance. In the next scene a news reporter explains that Johnny Phoenix’s injury "wasn’t as bad as predicted" and he is expected to play football next week.

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Figure 2. Aligning inquiry to discipline-specific vocabulary.
Most of us can easily find teachable clips on YouTube® and a myriad of moving images are available online and on DVD. People can usually find interesting feature films, and TV shows, but many folks struggle to find high-quality short films. There are some obvious DVDs to start with like the Pixar short film collection or the DVD anthologies of Academy-Award-nominated shorts. Many of these films are also available for purchase as individual shorts through iTunes. For those working in the social sciences and the humanities the Media That Matters Film Festival is a great online place to browse shorts by topic.

To assist media specialists in finding texts I’ve created an extensive wiki page (see first link below) with short film resources. Additionally, I have two blog posts in the Making Curriculum Pop Ning that elaborate on the use of short film. The links below will take you to hyperlinked resources.

Please note that the Making Curriculum Pop Ning is free but password-protected. If you’re not already a member of Ning you need to create a Ning ID to sign in.
How do you recognize the snowball effect of a technology? At Staples High School the eleventh-grade health curriculum includes learning about safe teen behavior. One way the library media center has collaborated with the school health department is in creating lessons during which students create visuals that advertise how teens can make good decisions. In the past we have tied the health curriculum with the information and technology curriculum in a variety of visual products. This year we used Flip cameras to make public service announcements (PSAs).

How did we know they were going to have a lasting effect? Soon after finishing the health PSAs, a world language teacher offered class groups a chance to make a news presentation using French vocabulary. The students asked if they could please create Flip videos. The teacher was intrigued by their request and headed toward the library media center to investigate and plan a new unit. We overheard students saying that the health class’s PSAs made them think about their own decisions. That’s power and possible lifelong change in the making. The ease of using the Flip cameras not only improved the quality of the videos and shortened the time it took to make them but, due to the quality and intensity of the arguments presented in the PSAs, student decision making may have changed for the better.

It is customary in Westport for our information and technology literacy integration coordinator, AKA troubadour of technology Bill Derry, to spend a day orienting new teachers to the technology services and resources of the district. Unbeknownst to us, the school librarians at Staples High School in Westport, Connecticut, the district had just acquired more Flip video cameras.
cameras (see specifications sidebar), and Bill Derry used the orientation to demonstrate them. Flip video cameras and the FlipShare software that comes with the cameras are very easy to use. The name Flip comes from the USB arm that flips out of the camera and allows immediate uploading of video to a computer. At about $150 each, these cameras are much less expensive than standard, more sophisticated video cameras; facilitate easy filming and deleting of clips, and speedy uploading; have improved MP4 video clip quality; and provide the ability to use either the MP4 clips in iMovie or the Flip MOV files in Windows Movie Maker. In short, they are the quickest, simplest, and least expensive way to make brief videos.

By the time new-teacher orientation was over, two new health teachers

<table>
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<th>Score</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STORYBOARD</strong></td>
<td>Storyboard is complete with sketches for each scene, detailed notes on titles, transitions, special effects, sound, etc. Storyboard reflects outstanding planning and organization for the visuals in the video.</td>
<td>Storyboard is relatively complete with sketches for most scenes, and notes on titles, transitions, special effects, sound, etc. Storyboard reflects effective planning and organization for the visuals in the video.</td>
<td>Storyboard has glaring omissions in scene planning. There are some sketches, and notes on titles, transitions, special effects, sound, etc. Storyboard reflects attempts at planning and organization for the visuals in the video.</td>
<td>Storyboard is not done or is so incomplete that it could not be used even as a general guide. Storyboard reflects very little planning of the visuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SCRIPT</strong></td>
<td>Script is complete and it is clear what each actor will say and do. Entries and exits are scripted, as are important movements. Script is quite professional.</td>
<td>Script is mostly complete. It is clear what each actor will say and do. Script is shows planning.</td>
<td>Script has a few major flaws. It is not always clear what the actors are to say and do. Script shows an attempt at planning, but seems incomplete.</td>
<td>There is no script. Actors are expected to invent what they say and do as they go along.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESEARCH</strong></td>
<td>Notes indicate that the group members developed questions about the assigned topic, consulted at least three reference sources, developed a position based on their sources, and correctly cited their sources.</td>
<td>Notes indicate that the group members consulted at least three reference sources, developed a position based on their sources, and correctly cited their sources.</td>
<td>Notes indicate that the group members consulted at least two reference sources, developed a position based on their sources, and correctly cited their sources.</td>
<td>There are fewer than two note cards or sources are incorrectly cited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEAMWORK</strong></td>
<td>Students meet and discuss regularly. All students contribute to the discussion and all are listened to respectfully. All team members contribute a fair share of the work.</td>
<td>Students meet and discuss regularly. Most students contribute to the discussion and are listened to respectfully. All team members contribute a fair share of the work.</td>
<td>A couple of team meetings are held. Most students contribute to the discussion and are listened to respectfully. All team members contribute a fair share of the work.</td>
<td>Meetings are not held AND/OR some team members do not contribute a fair share of the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCEPT</strong></td>
<td>Team has a clear picture of what they are trying to achieve. Each member can describe what he/she is trying to do and generally how his/her work will contribute to the final product.</td>
<td>Team has a fairly clear picture of what they are trying to achieve. Each member can describe what he/she is trying to do overall but has trouble describing how his/her work will contribute to the final product.</td>
<td>Team has brainstormed their concept, but no clear focus has emerged for the team. Team members may describe the goals/final product differently.</td>
<td>Team has spent little effort on brainstorming and refining a concept. Team members are unclear on the goals and how their contributions will help them reach the goal.</td>
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Figure 1. Health PSA rubric.
Kelly Garrity and Nicole Ross had begun to develop an idea about using the cameras to make PSAs on curriculum-related health topics to promote positive health behaviors for teens. After several in-class lessons about the issues (including hearing guest speakers from the community and viewing public service announcements from a Dove Soap program: www.campaignforrealbeauty.com), students had developed an appreciation of the need for effective, well-designed PSAs and were impressed with the idea that healthy behavior messages could have a lasting effect on their peers.

Previously, we had developed rubrics for critical thinking and how-to procedures for PhotoStory 3, so we were ready to try something newer. These two enthusiastic teachers presented us with a challenge, and we were up for it.

You may wonder how much experience we had using Flip cameras. During our 2009–2010 library media back-to-school professional development we had a half hour with Bill Derry to quickly learn the features of this simple-to-use camera, create a brief video in teams, and mount it to a shared folder. We were so busy with early school year routines that we had not even had time to practice!

Due to various curricular constraints, we determined that we could partner with each class on only four days. Students had approximately three and a half hours of class time during one week in the library media center to plan and carry out the project. This may seem rushed, but we have found that deadlines that extend beyond a week generally lead to procrastination. Therefore, as we began planning, the scheduling became important.

Outline of the creation of the PSA videos:
- One to one and a half class periods were spent on research and storyboarding.
- Approximately half a class period was allotted to refine and fine-tune the storyboard and get it approved by the health teacher.
- One or one and a half class periods were devoted to filming and downloading.
- A half or full class period was reserved to edit and save at school.
- Some groups used more time at home or during free periods at school to edit video in iMovie or Windows Movie Maker.

As we collaboratively planned the health PSA project, we kept our school goal in mind. It encompasses many of the student outcomes required by our department’s curriculum, as well as many AASL Standards (2007). We would be providing a vehicle for students to use contemporary literacy skills in a real-world application. Knowing that the health curriculum timeframe allotted for only four days of work in the library media center, we thought the Flip cameras would help the students make effective, impactful videos efficiently in a short time frame.

Next, a rubric for the PSAs (see figure 1) was created relating to the health content of the project, the positive behavior promoted, how well groups could work together to plan and carry out the project, and the creation of the storyboards. Suggested topics included high school pressures, drinking and driving, drug abuse, suicide and depression, stereotyping, and decision making, but students were free to choose additional topics with the health teacher’s approval.

Staples High School students have many opportunities to conduct critical thinking research in the library media center where they are guided in searching techniques, paraphrasing, and using the NoodleTools suite to create citations and note cards. Students know to use a variety of resources and often work in groups, so for this project they tended to get right to work. We pointed them to Health & Wellness Resource Center and Health Source-Consumer Edition databases, as well as leading health organization websites, such as CDC, MADD, SADD, Suicide Hotline, and NIH, to research facts and statistics related to the health issues they were studying. We often reminded them of the previously learned good research strategies.

Once we were ready to introduce the students to the cameras, we decided to follow a lesson model similar
to the one we experienced during our own professional development training. We showed the classes how to use the camera and the FlipShare software that comes loaded on each camera. The FlipShare software is a free download with free updates. It lets the users create and organize clips and share to networks. Our students are used to having choices available both in technology and final products, based on the objective of addressing student talents and abilities. Most of the health student groups chose to import their MP4 or MOV files into iMovie or Windows Movie Maker for more versatile editing. Some students brought in their own laptops, including laptops with Sony Vegas editing software, a program that was totally unfamiliar to us. The health teachers allowed students to use a choice of editing routes with the caveat that their finished PSA product needed to be compatible with the school’s PC desktops in the health classrooms and saved to our network’s shared folder so that the PSAs could easily be viewed in class. The health teachers and we provided support for the variety of avenues the students took, reiterating often the importance of the information the audience would get from the PSAs.

A challenge for us as teacher-librarians has been copyright. It is natural for students to be drawn toward familiar music as they create storyboards. While we encouraged them to use copyright-free music or create their own, many chose to import songs from their own music libraries. Since citations were required and the PSAs were for class use only, during the project we allowed use of copyright music. However, we have done our own professional research and quite a bit of soul-searching during this process. We believe that our students are producing transformative, evocative mashups for educational purposes, which falls under fair use guidelines according to the Center for Social Media (n.d.). As we revise our rubric for next quarter, we will be reviewing our policy and rubric based on what we have learned from this project.

Students made decisions together about how to convey original messages from the research they had done. Observing students plan, develop creative ideas, and effectively use costumes and props to convey the information was almost more important than the finished product. The film was to be between one and three minutes in length and most wound up around one and a half minutes. Students were subjects in some PSAs; some PSAs were totally filmed with use of sticky note messages; childhood action figures were used as models in another; but the upshot was that no two were alike. By giving the students choice about how to put together their PSAs, we allowed the learners to synthesize the information to be presented and find a unique way of telling their “story.” In a traditional health paper or presentation, primarily a list of facts and information is presented, with less emphasis on creativity, synthesis, and ownership. These Flip PSAs contained more originality and investment to find solutions and a conduit to address teen behavior.

Several hurdles had to be cleared during the project. The students wanted to do more editing with a larger variety of software than originally expected. We helped students maneuver through the crazy path of default saving to the hard drives of our laptops, and then moving files and saving to students’ local drives so as not to lose video files. We also had the time constraint of filming and importing clips within a class period so that teams’ clips could be deleted from the cameras that had to be made ready for the next class to film. Perhaps one group per class experienced greater frustration, lost some footage, or procrastinated in the storyboard stage. We plan efforts to minimize this frustration with our next group of classes by discussing early how to avoid these pitfalls.
It was an intense two-week period with great rewards. Kelly Garrity’s five classes, most with thirty-five students, and Nicole Ross’s two classes of twenty-five to thirty totaled over two hundred students producing about eight to ten PSAs per class. It was a stimulating learning endeavor for all involved. See one of the PSAs “SHS FLIP Health PSA on Teen Depression” on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6U8tpKAsPw>.

Student comments and written reflections on their ideas, their filming techniques, and their creative videos told us they were moved by the statistics they learned, and they reported their awareness of the influence their PSAs might have on themselves and their peers. Excitement built during the process. Students suggested to us that we would need tissues while viewing the finished productions. Their pride was evident on their faces, in their comments, and in their reflective writing. Students had succeeded in using contemporary literacy skills of both research and production; they had worked toward a solution of a real-life problem; and they had effectively persuaded others to think about their own behaviors.

The coolest part is that our health classes run for only one marking period, and so we get to practice and improve the collaborative methods of introduction, research, storyboard planning and checking, filming, editing, saving, and presenting three more quarters this year! This was truly a village effort of district administrators, school librarians, health teachers, and teens with inspiring ideas to produce insightful and moving public service announcements on positive health behaviors for our teens.

Works Cited:


Genre Films as Cultural Pedagogy:

Knowledge Quest | Film in Education
In my Introduction to Film class, I ask students about their favorite films. For several years running, the women agreed upon *The Notebook* (2004), while the men agreed upon *Goodfellas* (1990). Eventually, someone mentions that *The Notebook* is a chick flick. I ask how they would describe *Goodfellas*. Students respond “true crime,” “thriller,” “mob,” and “gangster film.” Thus begins my discussion of genre films and how they operate in the culture.

We understand film genres when we choose a movie for a night out or a night in watching television or DVDs. Genre is a way to categorize films by similarities in plot, theme, and character types. Hollywood has been marketing genre films since the silent picture era. Today, a film could be classified as gangster, western, horror, comedy, science fiction, historic, action, romance, adventure, or a combination of genres. Genre films are created as popular entertainment and geared to mass audiences. Barry Keith Grant, a genre film scholar, suggests, “genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations.” (1995, xv)

Viewers recognize the plot as a formula and bring all of their previous film-viewing experiences to bear as they interpret a new film. This is both the magic and the power of genre films. We find pleasure in watching a film that re-presents in a new way a story we already know. We enjoy figuring out the twists and turns of the plot using the formulas and conventions of the genre. And we find comfort when the end of the film brings us narrative closure, when everything is back to normal, and we can leave the theater feeling satisfied with our daily lives. Most Hollywood genre films provide the proverbial romantic ending, the mystery solved, the bad guy dead or in jail, the family reunited, and the alien attack averted as the world spins peacefully on its axis. We expect this optimistic outcome. This is how genre films operate. Genre films are the lifeblood of the Hollywood economy.

**Genre Films as Cultural Pedagogy:**

*The Enduring Myth of Star-Crossed Lovers*

**Bonnie L. MacDonald**

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Developing Genre Film "Literacy"

But, there is more going on with genre films than Hollywood producers telling us the stories we want to hear and turning a profit. A specialized form of visual literacy develops as a child watches a narrative genre film. The child learns to read and interpret the generic formulas, codes, and conventions. That literacy becomes more sophisticated throughout a lifetime. Genre film scholar Thomas Schatz describes the concept of film genre as similar to the literary concept of grammar. "If we extend these ideas into genre study, we might think of the film genre as a specific grammar or system of rules of expression and construction and the individual genre film as a manifestation of these rules" (1999, 644).

I like to describe the process of watching a genre film as formulating a series of linked hypotheses. It goes something like this: In the opening scene we meet a young male and female who are obviously from different socioeconomic backgrounds as they board an ocean liner. Their costumes are coded to tell us that they are not of the same class. His coat is soiled and patched, and her dress is obviously high-fashion and expensive. He is lower-class, and she is upper-class. We have learned how to read these costume codes. Our mismatched couple has not met at this point in the film, but we have already begun to wonder if they will meet (hypothesis #1), and if they are going to fall in love (hypothesis #2). In the next scene they cross paths but do not meet, and we learn that they will be on different decks of the ocean liner. We learn that the female is engaged to be married. Hypothesis #1 is closed but hypothesis #2 is still open. We now consider the possibility that fate will force them to meet by accident (hypothesis #3), and maybe then they will fall in love. Note that hypothesis #2, that our couple will fall in love, is the one that we keep open because we know how the romantic film genre works.

As the plot unfolds the individual viewer engages in an internal dialog about what will happen to the protagonists and considers multiple hypotheses as the story proceeds through the narrative stages. The film’s storyline reveals an answer, closes one question, and opens another question. We are pulled through the narrative by this “reading” process. We learn to pick up clues about how the story will unfold. We feel as if we are insiders, in collusion with the filmmaker, and we know what will happen in the end. A specific film invokes an association with the genre for the viewer and sets up the structure for the hypothesis formation process. Typically, as we watch more genre films we get better at the process of understanding genre films. In our example, a film that begins with a man and woman from two different socioeconomic classes suggests the familiar plot of star-crossed lovers.

But, there is more going on with genre films than Hollywood building a grammar system and audiences passively receiving a message and interpreting its meaning. While grammar in a language system is static, grammar in the case of genre films is both static and dynamic (Schatz 1999, 642). An individual film has the potential to change its genre system of rules. For example, the release of Rebel without a Cause in 1955 signaled a change in the grammar of the drama film genre. It was the first family drama told from the point of view of the adolescent son. Hollywood discovered a new audience—teenagers—and a new subgenre the teenpic was developed. According to Schatz, based upon box-office results, the studios and audience are in a conversation that gradually modifies the grammar. “Genres evolve and they tend to evolve quite rapidly due to the demands of the commercial popular media” (2004, 692–93).

Mirroring and Influencing Culture

I like to describe the relationship between the Hollywood studios and the mainstream audience’s box-office response as a cultural feedback loop. The films mirror the culture, and the audience learns about the culture from the films. In fact, reiterations and modifications in genre films can indicate how the mainstream culture has changed or perhaps not changed. Rebel without a Cause was based upon a headline-making social problem in the mid-1950s—juvenile delinquency. Nicholas Ray, the film’s director, based the lead character on an actual case study of a delinquent imprisoned teenaged sociopath, published in a book by the same title. In the film we meet Jim Stark (James Dean), a teenager who has a difficult time fitting in with his peer group. He represents the quintessential alienated (white, middle-class, suburban) rebel. On his first day at his new high school he meets Judy (Natalie Wood), who rebels against her father by hanging out with hoodlums, and we meet Plato (Sal Mineo), a misfit who is neglected by his divorced parents. Jim is confronted and challenged by the gang of hoodlums. Over the course of one day he tries his best to become a man. Ray stated in an interview for Rolling Stone, "Romeo and Juliet has always struck me as the best play ever written about ‘juvenile delinquency’, …I wanted a Romeo and Juliet feeling about Jim and Judy—and their families. Out of this
came a conviction about the shape of the story. Try to follow the classic form of tragedy” (Dalton, 1974). We learn that the root of Jim’s problem is that his father is henpecked at home by his wife and unable to teach Jim how to become a man. In other words, Jim’s troubles arise from a “broken” nuclear family. At the end of the film Mr. Stark realizes that he has failed his son and assumes his position as head of the family. The film provided insights into the world of juvenile delinquents, placed blame on the weak father / strong mother dynamic and thus, reflected the fears and idealized solutions for the 1955 audience. In American culture in 1955 and, to some extent, today there is a shared belief that every family should have a mother and father and that the father be the breadwinner and authority figure. While the genre, based upon a mythic tale, has changed because the story is told from Jim’s point of view, the ideology of the patriarchal nuclear family has been reaffirmed.

The teenpic genre has branched out and evolved in multiple directions since 1955. Many changes in American culture have occurred in the past five decades. Among the most striking changes have been the rise in the divorce rate and the increase in single-parent homes. By the 1980s the intact nuclear family seldom appears in teen films, and the family is less significant to the narrative. The adolescent peer group replaces the nuclear family. Teen protagonists have absent, disinterested, or single parents who work all the time, providing a plausible situation for the plot. For example, in Breakfast Club (1985) a group of misfit teens who meet in Saturday morning detention attempt to parent each other. Embedded in this film is the familiar star-crossed lovers mini-plot. Claire Standish (Molly Ringwald) is an upper-middle-class, popular, prom-queen princess. John Bender (Judd Nelson) is a working-class loser from an abusive home. Claire and John are hostile toward each other throughout most of the film, but the audience can detect the sexual attraction. Eventually, Claire kisses John, but he reminds her that she will not talk to him when they return to school on Monday. We know he is correct.

While the plot of Breakfast Club may provide a reflection of the contemporary teen culture in the mid–1980s, it has another interesting, deeper level of interpretation. Once again, a film in which teens get into trouble because they do not have the benefit of the traditional family with a strong father and a mother at home making cookies reinforces the ideology of the patriarchal nuclear family. A question arises. Has the genre changed on the surface level, for appearance’s sake, but maintained its familiar, patriarchal, value system? Yes. Here we find the cultural significance of genre film. There is critical way to watch a genre film, seeking the underlying cultural pedagogy, asking our students, “What is this film teaching?”

Decoding Genre Film and Cultural Myths

I take a cultural pedagogy approach to film studies because I believe the popular culture is a very powerful influence on our youth. It is much more than innocent entertainment. David Trend in Cultural Pedagogy calls on cultural workers to examine popular culture, “If culture is the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, it is useful to realize that such stories are never neutral, but are always constructed, delivered, and received in specific historical encounters. For this reason they are political by definition. A pedagogy of culture entails analyzing these stories, tellers, and their times—and encouraging this analytic spirit in others” (1992, 4).

As an educator, it is not possible to be apolitical. Indeed, it is my responsibility to give my students the ability to critically interpret the popular culture, detect the embedded ideologies, and understand how to become socially responsible citizens of a democratic society. One way to do this is to have them question the deeper meaning of these genre films.

The concept of cultural myths is important to this process. A cultural myth is a belief that is culturally determined. It is assumed to be true, normal, and natural. However, a cultural myth is, in fact, artificial and arbitrary. It is an ideological construct. Some of the most dangerous myths are about romantic love. Here are just a few: love at first sight, each person has one true love, love conquers all, love will find a way, my love will change him/her, love is blind, and absence makes the heart grow fonder. All of these myths support the ideology of romantic love. Dig deeper, and we find that romantic love supports the ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism.

As the plot unfolds the individual viewer engages in an internal dialog about what will happen to the protagonists and considers multiple hypotheses as the story proceeds through the narrative stages.
I ask my students to investigate the ideology of genre films and question who is telling the story and why. What benefits are gained by the six major media conglomerates producing films today (Time Warner, Viacom, Sony, News Corporation, General Electric/Vivendi SA, and the Walt Disney Company) by retelling these cultural myths? How do these myths help these media giants maintain their cultural and political power? Ultimately, I ask my students to question who is the intended audience for the film. We talk about how viewer differences in age, gender, race, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity could affect the interpretation of a film. I suggest that the meaning is not fixed, not neutral, but contextual and loaded with ideology, and that films contain multiple layers of meaning.

My students frequently ask me if I ever enjoy going to the movies anymore. I tell them I do. When I watch a film for the first time, I always expect to be swept away. I want to enter the world of the film, to forget that I am sitting in a theater or my living room, and to be there with the characters and feel what they are feeling. That is, for me, the initial pleasure of narrative film. It is in the second and third viewing of the film that I find a different pleasure in critically interpreting the meaning. I want to discover how the director constructed the story. I seek the subtexts of the narrative. I look for generic patterns, conventions, codes, and variations in the grammar. I recognize a film’s relationship to the other films in its genre. I imagine that I am decoding a cultural text for its ideological meaning. It is that method of decoding that I want my students to learn and take from my classroom.

Many film scholars maintain that genre films serve the same function that myths did in earlier civilizations. In contemporary American culture, these cultural myths are reinforced and transferred from one generation to the next via genre films. Myths about individual characters operate as if they are collective dreams that reveal universal truths. For example, we believe in the young hero who must go on a quest, defeat the villain, and return home to marry the princess. Our ancestors are talking to us, transferring codes of behavior, rules of kinship, and establishing role models for our children.

For example, in the mythic world we find good/evil, male/female, hero/villain, and sacred/profane. Thomas Schatz expands on Levi-Strauss, stating that genre films perform a mythic function, ritualizing collective ideals, and temporarily resolving disturbing social and cultural conflicts behind the guise of entertainment (1995, 97). The previous examples of teenpics separated by thirty years, Rebel without a Cause (1955) and Breakfast Club (1985), present teenagers in trouble, blame their families, and reaffirm the collective ideal of the American nuclear family. And these films reinforce the myth of star-crossed lovers.

One of the ancient functions of myth has been to preserve the rules of kinship—basically, who can marry whom. The myth of the star-crossed lovers teaches us not to marry or fall in love outside our “tribe.” Simply stated, the opposition in this myth is adherence to the rules of the tribe versus defiance of the rules of the tribe. In fact, the message is that mating outside our race, religion, ethnicity, age group, or class is ill-fated, perhaps fatal. And yet, this tragedy resonates from generation to generation and, even when we know how it will end, we return to the story over and over again. There must be some deep-seated reason for this phenomenon. I think we want to believe in the myth of true love.

A quick synopsis of the basic myth begins when a man and woman (boy and girl) from different “tribes” meet and fall in love. For some reason they cannot be together, that is, they cannot marry. Fate intervenes, one dies, and then the

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**The films mirror the culture, and the audience learns about the culture from the films. In fact, reiterations and modifications in genre films can indicate how the mainstream culture has changed or perhaps not changed.**

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**Recognizing the Power of Myths**

Anthropologists study the function of myth in a society, define and redefine it, and analyze its structure and component parts. One well-known anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, developed a linguistic method of analyzing myths. He found that myths are very similar across cultures, are made up of the same structural elements, grow as they are repeated, and function in a culture to overcome contradictions. “[M]ythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution…” (1963, 224). Oppositions are binary, either one thing or its opposite.
other dies. This story has multiple plot twists. For example, the woman may fake her death, as does Juliet, and then the man may take his own life, as does Romeo. Or the woman leaves, and the man grieves for her the rest of his life, or vice versa. Or they fail to meet again at the appointed time and place. Or one of them is killed in an accident or has cancer. The reader or viewer is left with a belief that, despite the fact that their families or society will not legitimate the couple, their true love is so powerful and fateful that it transcends death. This tragic myth teaches a lesson about the wisdom of choosing a mate within one’s own race, religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic level. This myth works to maintain the hierarchical social structure across the centuries.

Let's take a quick look at the history of the myth. The Greeks had Hero and Leander. Their story is referred to several times in Shakespeare’s plays. The Romans had Pyramus and Thisbe, to whom Shakespeare also alluded in a play. The legend of Tristan and Isolde predates the Arthurian romance of Lancelot and Guinevere. Catherine and Heathcliff of Wuthering Heights taught us about true love that cannot cross class boundaries, but their spirits can find each other again roaming the moors. This myth about ill-fated heterosexual love that cannot be socially recognized and legitimated is retold in literature, plays, music, dance, and opera. Its lesson is multi-cultural, spanning China, Arabia, India, and Mexico. Hollywood has remade Great Expectations, Wuthering Heights, and Romeo and Juliet multiple times and has proven that each generation responds to this myth. West Side Story (1961) and Titanic (1997) are based upon Romeo and Juliet. These narratives are more than entertainment. They teach each generation what is “normal and natural” in the prevailing culture.

**Reading the Cultural Meaning of Films**

By drawing on previous experiences with genre film and recognition of the cultural myth, the film viewer interprets and engages with the grammar of the film. Similarly, the viewer has learned to read the cultural coding of the characters. In a genre film about star-crossed lovers the filmmaker has to establish the kinship opposition very quickly in the film. Within seconds, a viewer figures out the age, gender, race, class, sexuality, attractiveness, nationality, and education level of a character. These attributes are codes conveyed by skin color, eye color, hair color, hairstyle, costume, makeup, posture, gait (way of walking), accent, dialect, and setting. One of the long-standing practices of Hollywood directors has been to rely on stereotypes to establish a character’s identity. Thus, in the case of a film about star-crossed lovers, a heterosexual couple from different backgrounds is “coded” as oppositional. The opposition could be race (black/white), ethnicity (Italian/Irish), class (upper/lower), religion (Catholic/Jewish), or family rivalry (Capulets/Montagues).

It is important to note that these aspects of identity are not truly in opposition. The codification of identity via stereotypes produces shallow characters with simple motives that are attempting to deal with the issues of a complex social context. And still, when we watch a film and we see a boy and girl from different backgrounds, we recognize that the potential for sexual attraction and social tension exists. We know the genre formula. As we read the codes, the star-crossed lover plot becomes plausible. This plausibility relies upon and at the same time reinforces the ideology of racism and classism.

**Herein lies the cultural pedagogy of the film. This is where and why we want to question the film’s meaning with our students.**

We have seen how genre films are similar to a grammar and how the grammar can be modified over time via a feedback loop between the film studios and the mass audience. And we discovered that genre films fulfill the function of myths and that the myths do not change significantly from one generation to the next. These myths serve a function: to resolve social and cultural conflicts.

But, there is more going on in a genre film than resolving cultural conflicts. Film scholar Judith Hess Wright wrote an important essay about genre films, first published in *Jump Cut* in 1974, in which she claimed, “These films came into being and were financially successful because they temporarily relieved the fears aroused by a recognition of social and political conflicts” (1995, 41). This concept is consistent with the our understanding of the purpose of myths. One of my favorite examples is a now-classic film that appeared to deal with social and political turmoil in the late 1960s. *The Graduate* (1967) was marketed with the tagline: “Meet Benjamin. He is as little worried about his future” (IMDb.com n.d.). Many viewers at the time (as well as today) thought the film captured the era and the rebellious angst of a generation. Benjamin’s rebellion is an affair with Mrs. Robinson, the wife of his father’s law partner. We find a new twist on the myth of star-crossed lovers as the film represents a taboo love affair with Oedipal allusions. The affair overshadows the political issues of the 1960s. Several scenes in the film are set at the University of California at Berkeley, which was a hotbed...
of anti-war protests that began in 1965. But, in The Graduate, there are no protests about the Vietnam War, no hippies, and no drug use, just some illicit sex. Benjamin has absolutely no political awareness. The film has no political awareness. The film does satisfy and comfort the audience, as it delivers romantic closure when Benjamin heroically runs away with an age- and class-appropriate woman. We can assume his life will model that of his parents. Heterosexual mores, marriage, and the ideal nuclear family are back to normal. The audience leaves the theater believing the kids were a bit confused but they are alright now.

Wright takes her argument a bit further, saying that these films “serve the interests of the ruling class by assisting in the maintenance of the status quo” (1995, 41). This means the people who are in power stay in positions of power. In the United States it means that our capitalist economy relies on a stratified class system. That is one irony of genre films. To get to the screen they need capitalism, including the Hollywood machine, as a means of production. And they need populism to appeal to the masses. At times, I think the film industry and the film audience have a symbiotic relationship by virtue of this feedback loop. But most of the time it is a parasitic relationship. We feed the big machine. It is important to recognize that the power relationship has not changed in the past one hundred years. A very few people are at the top of the mass media pyramid controlling the mainstream culture. They are not about to give up their positions of power, money, and influence.

Encouraging the “Analytic Spirit” in our Students

In my opinion, it is important that our students understand this power relationship, recognize their position as mass media consumers, and consider how it influences their lives, how they think, what they believe, and what they will do in the future. The Hollywood studios are selling ideology that does not upset the social order. That does not mean we have to buy it. First, we have to understand how it works.

Wright identifies three characteristics of genre films that make it possible to resolve a complex social or political problem in a simple and reactionary way. Genre films camouflage present-day social and political problems by dealing with them indirectly, as if the problems are merely a backdrop or context for the primary story. The problems are recontextualized in a simplified society and frequently take place in another time. Typically, the films focus on a few characters that resolve a central problem and reach narrative closure. The audience has vicariously faced and resolved a societal issue by doing nothing. In the end the status quo is maintained (Wright 1995, 41).

And while we, the film-viewing audience, do have the conversation with the studios at the box office, and we can alter the grammar of the genre, it is difficult to imagine major changes in the cultural pedagogy of the films. We are immersed in the ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism. In most of our daily lives we do not examine the contradictions that exist between the ideologies of democracy and capitalism. We believe in equality but live in
a hierarchical class system. We believe in individual freedom, but racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia are still tolerated in the business world and social communities. Consider for a moment the ongoing debates about same-sex marriage, affirmative action, and racial profiling. While a genre film may represent these issues, the film will not represent them as systemic; the issue will affect only a few individuals who will find a solution. The status quo is maintained, and the ruling class remains at the top of the pyramid.

So, how are we to approach these wonderful films? First, just as you read a book, I would say enjoy them for their entertainment value and the stories they tell. Then go back for a second and third viewing. If we can teach our students to learn the grammar of the films and recognize them as cultural myths, then we can ask students to seek and interpret the implicit ideologies. It is important that students understand how genre films (as well as all mainstream mass media) operate to maintain the status quo. The myth of the star-crossed lovers is accessible and relevant to their daily lives. In fact, I suggest that students reconsider how they choose a partner. Are their choices influenced by an ancient myth? Is that okay? I hope that our students will engage the culture as critical consumers, and eventually when they take their roles as cultural creators, they will begin to tell some new stories. That is why I teach genre film as cultural pedagogy.

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Each year I teach the required introductory production course for MFA graduate students in documentary film at Stanford University. In the first class I lay the groundwork for what will become an ongoing dialogue about the ethical responsibilities inherent in the production of nonfiction work.
Before the student puts a camera to her eye, she is sensitized to the ethical ramifications of working with real people in unscripted situations. Students are taught to act professionally when using the equipment necessary for film production. So, too, should they be trained to act responsibly in their relationships with their documentary subjects and their audiences.

From the outset, a student should be encouraged to understand her motivation for making a particular film. At the script treatment and proposal stage, I ask my students to address the following questions.

- What is the potential impact of this project, most specifically on the lives of those portrayed?
- Who is the intended audience, and what message do you hope to convey?
- Who might benefit from the film?
- Who could be hurt by the film?

If the student confronts these questions with honesty and keeps them in the foreground during the production process, she can undertake the project from an ethically informed position. Inevitably, because human nature is involved, the relationship between the filmmaker and her “characters” is a dynamic that will evolve and change along with the story being told. The student must remain attuned to these shifting nuances and respond to concerns that may arise during the production and postproduction stages.

A substantive discussion of ethics should be an integral part of any documentary production curriculum. The perils of working in documentary film have become more complex since the days of documentary-film pioneer Robert Flaherty (best known for Nanook of the North) or the advent of portable technology in the 1960s. Today, issues of representation (who has the right to film whom), arguments about objectivity and “truth,” and a consideration of audience are in the forefront of the ongoing debate around documentary ethics.

Forty years ago, it was the occasional film—one thinks of Titicut Follies (1967) or Grey Gardens (1976)—that catalyzed a flurry of press about perceived ethical transgressions. Today’s students have been jaded by four decades of personal films, advocacy films, and mock documentaries, and by the ensuing controversies centered on filmmaking tactics. These controversies grew more vocal when Michael Moore, a filmmaker who embraces the role of “fly in the ointment” (rather than “fly on the wall”), catalyzed confrontations with subjects for entertainment value. The viral reach of reality TV has caused documentary subjects and the television audience to be increasingly savvy about the potential for manipulation, distortion, and misrepresentation in the finished product.

Although students may be aware of the ethical quandaries that impact the genre, they do not necessarily have the required sensitivity or maturity to navigate these minefields.
Although students may be aware of the ethical quandaries that impact the genre, they do not necessarily have the required sensitivity or maturity to navigate these minefields. As they begin their research and preproduction process, novice filmmakers may be confronted with healthy skepticism or outright hostility from potential subjects. At that early stage it is prudent to gain access to a subject from a position of candor, thereby creating the basis for a foundation of trust between the producer and her subjects. A student may sometimes believe that duplicity is an expedient strategy for securing access to a character or event, but this deceit ultimately backfires. (This tactic, used by Sacha Baron Cohen in his recent film *Borat*, resulted in myriad lawsuits upon the film’s release.) Although a filmmaker cannot reliably anticipate the possible positive or negative consequences of participation in the project, she should be as forthright as possible in interactions with her subjects. A student may sometimes believe that duplicity is an expedient strategy for securing access to a character or event, but this deceit ultimately backfires.

I have navigated challenging ethical terrain with many of my own films, most notably in *Little People* (1982), a film that explored issues facing dwarfs in an average-sized world. Gaining permission to film *Little People* was a significant challenge for my co-director Thomas Ott and me. When we first approached the board of directors of the Little People of America national organization with our proposal, they were cautious because of a negative experience with a still photographer who, they felt, had misrepresented his intentions for his project. My co-director and I were asked to show several of our previous films to the board and talk about our concept for the proposed documentary. Ultimately, we received their cooperation despite the fact that we would not concede on the issue of editorial control. They accepted our reasons for rejecting this request, and the project was given a green light.

Although a filmmaker cannot reliably anticipate the possible positive or negative consequences of participation in the project, she should be as forthright as possible.
and aspirations expressed in the earlier film. Karla, an optimistic sixteen-year old dwarf in Little People, had transformed into a dispirited thirty-six-year old woman who had confronted many hardships in the interim twenty years. Her expressed negativity in the film was in marked contrast to the other characters’ attitudes. Although I felt that the portrayal was accurate, I was concerned about how she might react to the finished film. Contrary to my expectations, she had only one minor objection to the film. She was sorry that she described her parents as tacitly disapproving of her marriage to an average-sized man. In fact, at the time of the release of Big Enough (three years after the filming), she felt that her parents were now quite supportive of the marriage. The source of my concern went unmentioned by Karla.

Working as a documentary filmmaker affords a passport to people, places, and experiences that would otherwise remain out of bounds. Ideally, we will leave those whose lives we have touched none the worse for wear, and perhaps, even a bit better. By behaving in an ethically responsible way with our subjects and our audiences, we leave the door open for those filmmakers who come after us.

If the student confronts these questions with honesty and keeps them in the foreground during the production process, she can undertake the project from an ethically informed position.

Jan Krawitz is a professor and director of the MFA Program in Documentary Film and Video at Stanford University, Department of Art and Art History. For information about her documentary films, go to <www.stanford.edu/~krawitz>.

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STUDENT CREATED VIDEOS
My students have a vast toolbox filled with their personal sources and software, our library materials, and the seemingly infinite supply of raw materials, open sources, and free software on the Web. Film and moving images are ubiquitous. Some students watch and create video blogs (vlogs). Most are watching YouTube videos and using video-centric social networks like Vimeo and Hulu to find music videos, humorous sketches, TV shows, news, and information for school projects and personal gratification. Students’ broad exposure prepares them to become sophisticated media creators and consumers; they recognize various styles that are used in film and can apply a Ken Burns or Comedy Central style to their iMovie projects. Their multimedia class projects offer opportunities for me to develop new information literacy skills since their media literacy goes hand in hand with the library’s information literacy curriculum. Students need to learn to apply critical thinking skills to marketing videos.
advertisements, live performance and music videos, documentaries and documentaries, and narrative films of all types.

At the Urban School of San Francisco, an independent high school where I am the librarian, each student has a laptop equipped with software including iMovie and iStopmotion. Some teachers encourage or even require the use of these tools to create projects. I have found that these video-based projects are a great place to teach students about image, video, and audio copyright issues.

A major class project in Antony Reyes’s Spanish 3B class composed of sophomores and juniors involves creating a video. Students are asked to research the life of Che Guevara and create a seven- to ten-minute documentary in the style of Ken Burns. They meet in groups that look at various segments of Guevara’s life—his motorcycle journey through Latin America, his involvement in Guatemala reforms, the overthrow of Cuba’s dictatorship, and the conflict in the Congo. Students come to the library for a brief research-skills session, since they’ve already had basic library skills orientations as freshmen. We go over the print resources they’ll need to gather facts about Guevara’s life, and then we dive into multimedia sources. The students can easily find information on the Web, though they do require assistance in learning how to evaluate the websites they find. We go over website evaluation. Who runs the site? Is it an expert? When was it last updated? Are advertisements on the site? When looking for raw materials especially, how can you trust that the information found is authentic? Then I direct them to various trustworthy sites, including government sites like the National Security Archive and media sites like PBS, CNN, BBC, and NPR that may have video or audio footage that will be worthwhile for their documentaries. We talk about the gray area of fair use and the importance of citing images. Students must create a script in Spanish, based on the information they’ve found in print resources. Then they plan a storyboard and produce the video using the images, video, and audio they have found online (see <www.urbanschool.org/courseguides>).
The project is time-consuming. Each year Antony and I tailor it to be more streamlined. I created a pathfinder <www.urbanschool.org/uploaded/Herbst_Library/che.doc> full of research tips specific to this project: what Dewey area to search for a book, which databases would have the most pertinent information, how to choose keywords, and what websites offer a good starting point to find reliable information on Guevara’s life. A pathfinder for students is invaluable in helping them gather information quickly. Assistance from our tech department also helps in keeping the project rolling smoothly. A video-based project shouldn’t take too much time away from class time. Video projects for the sake of simply making a video will not add to the value of the course. Values that video projects can bring to a class include engaging students by having them work creatively with the material, developing critical thinking skills through the creation of a script and storyboard, and gaining a deeper understanding of the course material when the students share their documentaries with the class. In planning these projects it is important to articulate the goals of both the teacher and librarian for student learning outcomes.

Another class centered on video production at the Urban School creates oral history interviews. The library generally offers resources for background information while the students compose interview questions. In the spring of 2009, however, students created a promotional micro-documentary that covered an oral history class <http://www.tellingstories.org/mcom/pl thuisontvangstumentary/index.html>. It was the result of a collaboration between our oral history class "Telling Their Stories" and McComb High School’s "Local Cultures" class. Students in Mississippi conducted oral history interviews with assistance from Howard Levin, Urban School’s Director of Technology and teacher of the "Telling Their Stories" class. Urban School students sought images from the Civil Rights Movement in McComb. I helped students find some amazing images from the Mississippi Digital Library. However, we weren’t clear about whether our use would be “fair” since, unlike the Spanish 3B project, our video was intended for a wider audience. To make sure that the video didn’t violate copyright, I helped students look for the copyright statement on the Mississippi Digital Library website. It encouraged use for educational purposes, but since the documentary was both a school project and intended for a wider, non-scholarly audience, we decided to e-mail the digital library to request permission to use the images. The students gained permission to use the images and learned how to determine fair use and seek copyright permission.

Video creation can address many skills outlined in the AASL Standards for the 21st-Century Learner. I have found that the projects address standard 1.3.1: “Respect copyright/intellectual property rights of creators and producers” (2007, 3). Finding sources in both the library and on the free Web, the students also “seek divergent perspectives during information gathering and assessment” (standard 1.3.2, 2007, 4). Video creation also uses “technology and other information tools to organize and display knowledge and understanding in ways that others can view, use, and assess” (standard 3.1.4, 2007, 6).

Students enjoy creating videos of their own. While the process of researching information for a video has much in common with doing research for a paper, the product is often more difficult to plan and produce. Yet students persevere, in part because they welcome the autonomy that they have when developing a film.

I am excited to see where student video creation will go next. Many of the library’s instructional goals can be met in a fresh way. Students learn to do research, search effectively, perform Web evaluations, and cite sources. They deal with questions of fair use and copyright. Teachers’ goals can be met as well; students work with disciplinary content in a hands-on manner and exhibit critical thinking.

Sarah Levin is the librarian at the Urban School of San Francisco. She is currently working on creating a digital repository for student and faculty work.

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Librarians know, even though many teachers have forgotten, that all the lessons of life can be found in story and taught through storytelling. As libraries have become media centers, so storytelling has become digital storytelling. How do you take story and add the layer of digital to it? The medium has changed, and as Marshall McLuhan said, “It is the framework which changes with each new technology and not just the picture within the frame” (1997, 273).

So has the framework changed? My definition of digital storytelling penned in 2001 is still being used today: Digital storytelling is the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. Digital stories derive their power by weaving images, music, narrative and voice together, thereby giving deep dimension and vivid color to characters, situations, experiences, and insights.

Librarians are storytellers. But the creation and delivery of the story has changed. Stories are now multimedia, meaning many mediums. At their most basic, digital stories are made up of what you hear and what you see, and how those two elements are juxtaposed to create yet a third medium. These stories can include voice-overs, sound effects, and music for your ears (what you hear), and video and still images for your eyes (what you see)—but the creative power comes from the ways that the two are woven together. Deep dimension and vivid color are added to characters, situations, and experiences by the creative choices made around what images are placed next to each other, what transitions are chosen to lead from one to the other and for how long, and what audio tracks overlap one another causing sounds to mix and blend.

“Digital stories” have differentiated themselves from “movies” in important ways. Digital stories
traditionally are first-person narratives, so the "I" voice is used. This means that the person telling the story and the person creating the story are the same. No third-person voice is overlaid, and, consequently, there is no distance between the teller of the story and the story itself—no editorial overlay. It is exactly this lack of distance that confirms the authenticity of the piece.

For educators, digital stories offer ways to activate multiple intelligences and integrate media literacy into the digital storytelling process. This type of hands-on project-based learning serves to engage at-risk students who otherwise find little connection between life and school.

Through our hands-on, project-based trainings at KQED’s Center for Digital Media, San Francisco’s public media station, hundreds of teachers have been trained and have implemented digital storytelling into their practice. Digital storytelling is a very powerful tool for “giving voice.” The stories that the students tell are often ones that are deeply personal, yet so representative of their lives; these stories are literally the stories of their lives. In these cases, often the digital story takes the form: I was this person, then experience "A" happened to me, and because of that experience I have become a different person, seeing the world in a different way. It is a transformation story, often with a lesson learned. I can recall one young woman recounting how she came to California from Mexico; she closed her piece by noting “the world is not the same for everyone.” Strong and important life lessons not often realized—much less articulated—find their way into and out of these digital stories. Using the same theme, a young man told the story of his cousin’s journey to California. The storyteller focused on the myth of the American Dream and came to realize that his cousin’s troubles sprang from the fact that he did not realize “the American Dream is a dream that takes generation after generation of hard work before you can actually wake up and see it and live it for yourself.”

Over the last five years, as technology has evolved, many digital storytelling tools have become ubiquitous and free. Most computers ship with video editing programs that can create simple but elegant digital stories. Movie Maker or Photostory for a PC and iMovie for a Mac have the longest track records, but new digital storytelling tools are launched frequently. Often, they are easier to use and have a wider ranging toolset than that of proprietary software. A new favorite is VoiceThread; it allows multiple storytellers to add to the story. In addition, with the advent of geo-applications like Google Maps and Google Earth, place-based digital storytelling is a fascinating new form generating a lot of interest because of its integration with mobile devices and in-the-field mediamaking. These tools have enabled backpack journalism (tools necessary for multimedia reporting fit into a backpack) and students as citizen scientists.

At KQED’s Center for Digital Media we have been providing hands-on, project-based digital storytelling training to educators and community providers for over seven years. We also provide train-the-trainers workshops to enable educators to implement a digital storytelling program in their own schools or organizations. To that end, we have created online tools, including a manual The Art, Skill, Craft, and Magic of Digital Storytelling: A How-Come, How-To Guide, downloadable at our website <http://dsi.kqed.org/index.php/workshops/about/C66/>, and step-by-step video tutorials with accompanying PDF files available at <www.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/digital-storytelling/#tier3>. Often a good place to start is by viewing or showing digital stories. Our site has many examples, spanning a wide range of topics, made by those new to multimedia creation and by those very experienced.

As we are fond of saying, everyone has a story that should be told—most people have a story that needs to be told. With the tools being so prevalent and so easy to use, there is little reason not to try. With a script of 100 to 150 words, 10 to 15 images, a very few snippets of video, and an evocative instrumental soundtrack, you have all the pieces. Find an experience to talk about, articulate what you want to say (a thesis statement), determine to whom you want to say it (your audience), and then go. The only way to learn to do it is to do it. Once done—learned. Then you can train the teachers. Don’t forget to get support from students!

Leslie Rule is producing supervisor at the Center for Digital Media, KQED, Public Media, San Francisco, California.

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I remember the first day I walked into the old high school library as the new school librarian for the 2008–2009 school year. The dry stale air was oppressive. Dark corners. Closed doors. Shelves overflowed with unappealing old books, and a dozen or so twenty-seven-inch-screen televisions on tall black carts obstructed the front window of the library. The unintended message this gave to the school community bothered me each day as I entered the library until I moved those TVs to the back room. That was the beginning of a number of changes that I would set in motion to shift towards an inviting, contemporary facility.

The space, although disjointed and awkward, was not the only obstacle I faced. Marilyn Lombardi and Thomas Wall assert that the traditional concept of library is of “gatekeeper with its interior spaces devoted primarily to processing, preservation and security of the collection” (2006). The students and faculty were comfortable with this traditional view of the library—a script that positioned me as the gatekeeper of resources. To borrow a term from Lombardi and Wall, I envisioned the library as a “gateway,” not a gatekeeper, but to accomplish that goal I needed to make changes. However, I knew it was wise to make these changes slowly and to wait to see where I might make the most impact. So, in those first few months as I settled into the position, I observed how people interacted with the library. Students gravitated to the computers to socialize, print schoolwork, play games, listen to music and access their private lives. They rarely sought books or help for academic research. Teachers arrived with a single, consistent request: "Could I get into the DVD room to see if there is a movie on ...?" I held the key for this treasure trove of films.

Access to the book collection, which had an average copyright date of 1978, was not a problem. Thousands of dusty and dirty books sat untouched on the shelves, many with the original book jackets from when my students’ parents were in high school. If I was going to inspire kids to browse the shelves and encourage reading, I would have to discard books like *Kids Sure Rite Funny! A Child’s Garden of Misinformation* by Art Linkletter and replace them with books with contemporary themes for teens.

Thus began the weeding project. It was easy to identify and remove outdated and inaccurate books from the collection, as well as those books...
that did not meet students' needs or support the curricula. It was more difficult to decide what to purchase. Should outdated books be replaced with updated books? Given the freedom to choose resources for assignments, students used the Web exclusively, unless a print source was required by the assignment. Since the library was valued as a social space and for its access to the digital world via our computers and students’ mobile devices, I made the decision to spend the majority of my budget on databases, eBooks, and films. I did add print resources to support specific subjects, contemporary fiction to encourage pleasure reading, and audio books for core required reading selections.

Teachers rarely sought print resources, but the library owned an impressive film collection. When the teacher requested a DVD, I walked the entire length of the library, unlocked the DVD room, unlocked various drawers, walked back to the circulation desk with the disk for checkout, and finally handed it over to the teacher. I didn’t have to perform this tedious routine many times before realizing that it represented yet another barrier to my vision. I wanted teachers and students to have open access to browse these films, and to see me as an asset and partner in the education process.

Just as I had moved the televisions to the back area to remove the visual barrier, I transferred hundreds of films to the open shelves in the front of the library to provide unfettered access. Word circulated that there were hundreds of films available in the library, and as teachers drifted in to browse the titles, they were stunned at the size of the film collection on topics relevant to their curriculum, not just the one or two films they knew to ask for each year. Film circulation skyrocketed. Some teachers used films to build students’ background knowledge, others to illustrate or enhance instruction on a topic that was difficult to grasp. For example, films used to enhance instruction were about American government, grammar usage, verb tenses in foreign languages, atrocities of the Holocaust, life under Jim Crow laws, how to conduct yourself in an interview, marketing strategies, examples of physics in real life, and how to search databases and search engines.

I took to heart Sharon A. Hollander, Barbara R. Herbert, and Karen Stieglitz DePalma’s argument that “Librarians and faculty have many mutual goals and concerns. Both want students to develop a greater understanding of and respect for books, journals, and other intellectual property. Both want to enhance student literacy, particularly information literacy, and help students become writers, problem solvers, critical thinkers, and self-directed, lifelong learners” (2004).

I wanted my faculty to understand that we share commonalities, while recognizing that I could provide the knowledge and skills to bridge their teaching with more interactive models, including Web technologies. I began describing this collaborative model one conversation and one teacher at a time.

I had a healthy budget to use for purchases to support teachers and students, so I purchased LCD projectors, Flip camcorders, a sound system, and headphones with microphones, as well as videos. During any face-to-face meeting with teachers, I would suggest videos and invite my colleagues to browse the collection. I subscribed to streaming media, placed catalogs in mailboxes, encouraged new requests, and sent Web links for relevant subject content on YouTube, Google Video, and video-on-demand sites. I also turned to the local public library for films, although I had to drop by the public library to pick up the films myself after school.

Now that demand for film and video to support curricula was strong, I began to design a viewing space. I used an eight-by-twelve-foot white wall for a projection screen, bought a hundred-dollar amplifier with good sound quality, hooked the amplifier and the DVD/VHS player into the LCD projector, and projected video. No longer did students have to watch movies on twenty-seven-inch screens from thirty feet across the classroom or
on a five-by-five-foot pull-down screen. Enhanced by amplified sound, films could be projected on a wide screen that filled the entire wall. When an English teacher brought students in to analyze _Shakespeare in Love_, the official theater area was born. Popcorn was the only missing ingredient.

**Speaking of a missing ingredient...**

At the start of the 2009–2010 school year, students, and faculty opened the doors to our reinvented library. They found the new books, the computers, the films—but they didn’t find me. The professional librarian who had driven the rebirth and collaborated with the faculty was gone. Due to budget constraints, the position of librarian had been eliminated by the school district.

Is there a cost to the community when the high school library is no longer staffed by a librarian?

The library is more than a place. Under the direction and guidance of a professional librarian, it is a program with an ongoing mission. This mission is best seen in the manifestation of the initiatives, attitudes, choices, and relationships that the professional librarian creates within the school. When the library is staffed by a “gatekeeper,” then the activities that happen within the walls of the library are limited. A capable aide can perform clerical functions such as the tracking of books and resources for library users, ordering supplies, troubleshooting printing problems, and answering general questions about how to locate a specific book or resource. But students and teachers require far more than cursory services; they need a professional librarian whose collaborative work with faculty facilitates student learning using the resources and facilities provided by the library and the expertise of the librarian.

The professional librarian, not the clerk, teaches the foundational research skills and dispositions that enable students to move beyond superficial regurgitation of data to systematically investigate a subject to come to a conclusion or determine a course of action. The professional librarian, not the gatekeeper, evaluates and selects young adult literature and media resources that match the state standards for supporting disciplinary inquiry and motivating teens to read, thus advancing school-wide literacy goals. The professional librarian, not the aide, instructs students about the ethical use of resources, teaches students

**Movie Reviews:**

**Guide to reviews of contemporary films**

<www.kids-in-mind.com>

<www.allmovie.com>

**Movie Descriptions and Dialogue:** Detailed descriptions of movies, downloadable movie scripts, and phrase search

<www.imsdb.com>

<www.filmsite.org>

<www.subzin.com>

<www.script-o-rama.com/oldindex.shtml>

<www.thevideobeat.com/store/mod-movies>

<www.jinni.com>

<www.simplyscripts.com/movie.html>

**Documentaries:** Extensive collection of online documentaries

<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com>


<www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?display=home>

<www.snagfilms.com>

<www.docuseek.com/ressites.php>


<www.bodocus.com>

<www.bbc.co.uk/filmmaker/films>

<www.docuseek.com/ressites.php>

**Video Search Portals:**
to deconstruct media messages, and supports faculty and student learning of Web technologies.

If a school’s mission is to prepare and educate its students to achieve to their potential, then everyone in the school must be able to articulate how the professional librarian contributes to that goal. Without institutional support for professional expertise, the school misses much more than popcorn.

Mary Jane Waite is the writing, research, and media literacy instructor at Franklin High School. Her website is <http://thinkingtracks.weebly.com>. Twitter: maryjanewaite

Gateway for online films and film clips
- <www.open-video.org>
- <www.watchknow.org>
- <www.youtube.com/edu>
- <www.learner.org/resources/browse.html>
- <www.neok12.com>
- <www.clipta.com>
- <www.watchmojo.com>
- <http://dsc.discovery.com/videos>
- <www.icue.com/portal/site/iCue/welcomepage>
- <http://anyclip.com>

Where to Purchase Videos: Places to search for those hard-to-find films
- <www.moviesunlimited.com/musite/default.asp?>
- <www.insight-media.com/IMHome.asp>
- <http://ffh.films.com>
- <www.insvideo.com>
- <www.lvn.org>
- <www.ambrosevideo.com>
- <www.learner.org/catalog/catalog.html>
- <www.aplusvideorentals.com>
- <www.filmmwest.com>
- <www.videolibrarian.com>
- <www.mpihomevideo.com>
- <www.pyramidmedia.com/items.php3>
- <www.bullfrogfilms.com>

Subscription Streaming Video Resources: On-demand video broadcasting for a price
- <http://streaming.discoveryeducation.com>
- <www.safarimontage.com>
- <www.learn360.com>
- <www.cccvod.com>

Works Cited:

As a school librarian who has embraced the 2007 AASL Standards for the 21st-Century Learner, I often see their connections to other areas of learning and to life. I especially note how the nine Common Beliefs resonate with our fellow educators and, when studied, are familiar to people in much the same way as the pentatonic scale. The what? Pentatonic scale? At one of the most dynamic sessions of the 2009 World Science Festival, singer Bobby McFerrin included an audience participation exercise using this well-known and very old scale common to Native American flute music, African American spirituals, Appalachian folksongs, and traditional American blues, as well as traditional Middle Eastern, Eastern Europe, and Western and Southeast Asian music (Wikimedia 2010). With little repetition, the audience was able to determine the tonal pattern laid out by the artist without use of instruments; the sequence was familiar, as if members of the audience were pulling from prior memory. The title of the session referred to a search for the common chord. According to McFerrin, “Regardless of where I am, anywhere, every audience gets that” (Science Festival Foundation 2009).

Our Common Beliefs, like the chord that “everybody gets,” thread through the formal and lifelong learning of our audiences, whether they are classroom teachers, parents, school librarians, or administrators. Articulating these beliefs can help our audiences hear the common need to plan together for student accomplishment and achievement, to become a common chorus. There are numerous examples where this common chord is applied. One example is classroom teachers and school librarians planning collaborative lessons. The common chord starts to ring through when the classroom teacher and the librarian tweak the methodology to guide the students through the process for gathering and organizing the information needed for completing the assignment—and then again when the students are able to access the information quickly, confidently knowing what resource to use and where to look within that resource for the information needed. The common chord rings even louder when the students connect with the skills they’ve gained from that lesson and can apply those same skills to another learning situation both in and outside of school. This kind of knowledge transfer is a life
skill—a skill that has been formally taught, but can technically be transferred to lifelong learning.

My personal contribution to helping my audiences discover and utilize this common strand is implemented through a knitting circle that I started this fall. I wanted to use the group as a catalyst to help change the culture of my school, a school in which many students showed no understanding of giving back to their community. Students seemed to always expect everything to be given to them, and it seemed as if they felt their teachers’ pockets were bottomless financial pits that were supposed to supply students with everything from lunch money to daily school supplies.

I soon came to understand that many students didn’t realize they had something they could give back. They didn’t realize they possessed strengths that could play positively in other’s lives. The students had been made aware only of their weaknesses. They didn’t realize that their own level of abilities could allow them to contribute harmoniously to their community through efforts such as:

• visiting and running errands for the senior citizens in their communities
• rounding up all the children in their neighborhood and having clean-up-the-yard competitions, or green-up-the-neighborhood-competitions, and in my case,
• learning how to knit—not only for yourself, but for those less fortunate than you

I used Learning4Life (L4L), which had been created by AASL to promote and market the new standards, as my inspiration and called my student knitting circle “Knitting4Life” (K4L).

Several Common Beliefs connect to our circle and to the rest of the students’ lives.

The rule for being a part of the circle is that each member must knit four items of whatever it is we’re knitting. The first well-made item goes to the less fortunate, the second item goes to a friend, the third well-made item goes to a family member, and the final item goes to oneself. If the student does not have a friend or family member who can use the first three items, they are contributed to needy groups. To date, we have contributed fifteen scarves for distribution to our town’s homeless as part of holiday presents.

Currently we are working on a winter-hat-making project for the local women’s shelter. The girls want to make three sets of hats: a set for infants, a set for toddlers, and a set for adults. When the students’ knitting skills are advanced enough, they must hone their reading to understand the patterns, a new “window to the world” (AASL 2007, 2).

I am amazed at how quickly circle members produce items, how fast they soak up skills, and how proud they are of their work. Their interest motivates them to learn more and become better learners. The process they are using can be applied to any activity or subject. In perfecting their skills at knitting, they use the wise old approach that my grandmother used to constantly chant, “Knit and rip!” When they see their stitches becoming uneven, or they knit the wrong stitch in a pattern for forming ribbings for their hats, they backtrack by unraveling to the point where they made the mistake and build back up with the correct pattern of stitches.

This kind of problem-solving approach to their mistakes through revision and attention to detail is a connection to the common belief that “inquiry provides a framework for learning” (AASL 2007, 2). And, as another Common Belief states, “the continuing expansion of information demands that all individuals acquire the thinking skills that will enable them to learn on their own” (AASL 2007, 3).

The K4L group has grown to the point where members have gained control of a life skill that has not only helped to develop their higher-order thinking, but has also empowered them to help others.
The AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force, also known as Learning4Life or L4L, is charged with leading the promotion and marketing component of the new Standards for the 21st-Century Learner. The main task of the L4L initiative is to promote the standards not only as a tool for formal learning of academic skills, but also as a tool for the learning of life skills. In an ALA press release from May 2007, AASL Past-President Ann M. Martin said, “Our students must be learners for life in order to adapt and master change in the 21st century” (Robinson 2007).

As part of L4L, many state coordinators prepared presentations for their state conferences; these presentations focused on how to implement L4L in their regional and district school libraries. The Virginia Educational Media Association’s (VEMA) 2009 annual conference was held November 19–21 in Roanoke, VA. An L4L session called “Getting Off the Ground Floor with the Standards: Moving Up!” featured a PowerPoint presentation adapted from the summer’s L4L training session in Chicago. The session promoted the use of the “elevator speech” as an promotion and marketing tool for your school library media program. As previously covered in a May/June 2009 Knowledge Quest article by Kristin Fontichiaro and Marcia Mardis, elevator speeches are two-minute product pitches used by the business community on websites, at trade shows, and as advertisement links. The vocabulary for these speeches is rooted in the language of the standards’ nine foundational Common Beliefs statements, which are:

- “Reading is a window to the world.
- Inquiry provides a framework for learning.
- Ethical behavior in the use of information must be taught.
- Technology skills are crucial for future employment needs.
- Equitable access is a key component for education.
- The definition of information literacy has become more complex as resources and technologies have changed.
- The continuing expansion of information demands that all individuals acquire the thinking skills that will enable them to learn on their own.
- Learning has a social context.
- School libraries are essential to the development of learning skills (AASL 2007, 2–3).”

The session’s warm-up included a read-around sampling of elevator speeches developed from each of the four standards; these samples were geared towards addressing one of the four stakeholders identified for the speeches. Stakeholders are people with a vested interest in a product. In this case, the holders with vested interest in a school library program are the parents, classroom teachers, administrators, and other school librarians. Included in the session’s handouts were a printout of the Common Beliefs for our new standards, a worksheet for summiting final copies, and directions for developing custom elevator speeches for participants’ own jobs.

Attendees said the session not only provided them with the opportunity to talk over problems and issues with their fellow professionals, but also gave them a strong tool to use immediately for promotion and marketing. Don’t miss the opportunity to acquire the tools for Learning for Life (L4L) at your state and regional conferences.

Works Cited:


One mother told me, "I am not going to buy another store-bought hat or scarf. I will patiently wait for my daughter to knit them!" When I heard those words, I experienced what Bobby McFerrin does when he improvises with his audiences using the pentatonic scale. Her statement not only validates the direction toward which I have geared my knitters, it also confirms that we have struck a common chord with the broader community.

For these knitters “learning has a social context” (AASL 2007, 3) not only because they are working and learning together to accomplish these projects, but because, through their efforts, they are able to make someone else’s life better.

Sabrina Carnesi, a school librarian at Crittenden Middle School in Newport News (VA), is regional director for the Virginia Educational Media Association (VEMA), state coordinator for AASL’s L4L, and AASL representative for AAUP and AASL/ALSC/TYALSA Joint Committee on School/Public Library Cooperation. Raised by loving grandparents in northeast Arkansas, Sabrina learned to knit, crochet, sew, can food, make preserves, sing parlor songs, look for poke salad in the woods, and, as her grandfather would jokingly say, learn anything else that a person would need to survive in nineteenth-century America—traditions she lovingly passes on to her students.

Works Cited:


When my literary agent, Rosemary Stimola, told me she sent my manuscript to a film agent, I was happy she was so enthusiastic about the story, but I really didn’t expect anything to come of it. The Adoration of Jenna Fox was my fourth novel, and by then I knew such things were long shots. Still, I entertained some brief “what if” thoughts, crossed my fingers, and then promptly forgot about it. I had a new book I was working on, and I was still waiting for my editorial letter from my editor on The Adoration of Jenna Fox. My “book” wasn’t even remotely a real book yet, so dreaming about a movie seemed far too premature.

Shortly after my agent sent the manuscript to this mysterious film agent, we received a response. He loved it and wanted to send it out to some interested parties. I have to admit, I was thrilled but at the same time cautious. Hollywood was as foreign to me as the moon. I trusted Rosemary, but this guy was an unknown entity. Very soon I understood Rosemary’s confidence in Jason Dravis, a partner in the well-established Monteiro Rose Dravis Agency. Jason had a very calm and practical demeanor that instilled confidence in me, as well.

According to Jason, several producers were interested in the manuscript, and he wanted me to interview them in a series of conference calls. I was frank and told Jason I had no clue what to say or ask (remember, foreign as the moon?) but he said he would be in on each call with me and guide me through. As it turned out, I had very little talking to do. All the producers we spoke with were well-prepared and told me what they liked about the manuscript, and then shared their vision for a possible film. I admit I was gobstruck with each one—totally blown away that they had even contemplated so many possibilities at this early stage. I tried to take notes as they spoke, but after we ended each call and I debriefed with Jason, I found myself saying the same thing over and over: “I really like them!”

But there were differences in their visions for the film, and that is what made producer Julia Pistor stand out for me. She focused on the relationships of the characters. Yes, she mentioned the suspense and thriller possibilities for a film, but she wanted to make sure the complex family relationships were captured. I knew then that she was the right producer—if a film was ever actually made. But, like Jason Dravis, she had a lot of impressive credits to her name, and I thought if anyone could make it happen, she could.

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**Experts create that all-important person-to-person connection between author and reader. An expert’s quotes help bring writing alive by adding humor, anecdotes, and opinion to nonfiction work. They deepen the voice and authority of the author, no matter what the subject.**
Soon, Julia brought on director Brad Silberling, who had some impressive credits of his own, and she invited me to come to her house in Beverly Hills to meet him. Jason and Julia wanted to have a whole team together before the manuscript was taken to the studios. I was nervous but was immediately put at ease by Julia and Brad. They were down-to-earth and easy to talk to. I was starting to feel like I was on terra firma and not walking on the moon. Over lunch Brad shared his ideas for the film and asked me for insights into the characters. They even threw out possible names of actors and actresses! I pinched myself on the long drive home to San Diego, thinking this might actually happen.

They still wanted to have a screenwriter on board before they went to the studios, but then, just as they were talking to possible writers, a wrench was thrown into the plans: The Writers Guild of America went on strike. Negotiations of any kind came to a halt. So I tried to put it all out of my mind and focused on writing my new book. Then, a few months later, when it seemed that the strike was finally going to end, it was decided that Julia and Brad would go ahead and pitch the book to the studios. (If the publishing business doesn’t prepare you for a rollercoaster ride packed with lots of patience, then nothing will.) Finally, at this stage I knew things might actually start happening, and I could barely concentrate on buttering my toast, much less working on my current book. I received daily updates from Jason on which studio the manuscript was going to next, whom we were waiting on, who was out of town but wanted to see it, and all the impossible complications that you could ever imagine as the manuscript was taken to various studios. Several were interested, and I was suddenly nervous it was all going to unravel. This was clearly not my world. I was grateful Jason was handling it—and so calmly, too. Negotiations finally came down to two studios, and the process lasted over what felt like the longest week in history. By this point I was often getting hourly updates from Jason—and Rosemary as well! When an offer from Fox 2000 was finally accepted I felt like I had run a marathon. And the book wasn’t even published yet—I still had that marathon to run!

In the coming months, contracts were signed, and a writer was hired. Dana Stevens, a talented writer in the industry, e-mailed me with questions as she prepared to dig into writing the script. Even though it was fictional, she still wanted to know the science behind the novel so she could understand my thought processes. Soon we met for lunch to discuss more aspects of the book. She asked about my inspirations for various scenes and what I thought was the heartbeat of the story. She told me that writing a script is a delicate process as she tries to maintain the original vision of the book, while adapting it so it will work on the big screen. I knew there would have to be changes. A film is a completely different animal from a book and requires different treatment.

One of those changes will be expanding the roles of the adults in the story so that the film has wider appeal across ages. Another change is that Jenna will now be eighteen, and Ethan will be twenty-one. Instead of being in high school, they will be in a GED program. This change was made so that the pool of high-profile actors to play Ethan’s part would be increased, and also to intensify the romance between Ethan and Jenna. Many of the changes like this are practical in nature and don’t really affect the bones of the story. I understand that the setting will also change slightly, moving from Southern to Northern California for filming purposes. I’m excited to see these changes, but of course I do hope the essence remains intact—or the heartbeat, as Dana called it. The first draft of the script is finished, and the final is set to be done next month. By the time this article appears, I’m hoping the film will be in production.

And now as I wait for this next milestone, I will, of course, be working on my next book—and maybe indulging in a bit of daydreaming about possible actors.

**Links**

Monteiro Rose Dravis Agency: <www.monteiro-rose.com>

The Adoration of Jenna Fox: <www.whoisjennafox.com>

Mary E. Pearson: <www.marypearson.com>
Students from Spain Park High School of Hoover, Alabama, created the cover art, as well as other artwork through the current issue of Knowledge Quest under the direction of their art teacher, Erik Myers. The talented group of juniors and seniors were given the issue’s theme of film and videos within education and librarianship, and from that topic, created many wonderful pieces of original artwork. Mr. Myers is the current chair of the art department for Spain Park High School, and has worked with Knowledge Quest several times in the past to produce original student artwork. To learn more about the art program at Spain Park High School, please visit www.hoover.k12.al.us/sphs/VisualArts/EMyers/index.html. To see more of Mr. Myer’s student’s work, please visit www.sphsdigital2.blogspot.com.
Filmmakers and Their Impact

**American Masters: Alfred Hitchcock and David O. Selznick**

**Resource type:** Lesson Plan
**Grade range:** 6–8

Compare and contrast the Hollywood film industry of the 1930s and 1940s with Hollywood today.

**American Masters: Billy Wilder: Film Noir Inventor and Genius**

**Resource type:** Lesson Plan
**Grade range:** 7–12

Through research and writing, explore the impact of Billy Wilder and historical perceptions that have shaped popular culture in the twentieth century.

**Great Performances: Kurosawa**
[www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/education/plan_kurosawa_overview.html](www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/education/plan_kurosawa_overview.html)

**Resource type:** Lesson Plan
**Grade range:** 9–12

Identify elements of Kurosawa’s films, explore Kurosawa’s life and work, and discuss how Kurosawa influenced the American film industry.

**Masterpiece Theatre: Langston Hughes: Cora Unashamed**
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/cora/tguide.html](www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/cora/tguide.html)

**Resource type:** Lesson Plan
**Grade range:** 9–12

Explore Langston Hughes’ work and the film through its major themes: race and class. Compare and contrast literature and film using examples from Cora Unashamed and other film adaptations.

**NOW: Capturing the Stories of Ordinary People: Albert Maysles and Direct Cinema**
[www.pbs.org/now/classroom/maysles.html](www.pbs.org/now/classroom/maysles.html)

**Resource type:** Lesson Plan
**Grade range:** 9–12

Learn about Albert Maysles and his documentary filmmaking style, “direct cinema.” Compare and contrast this style to other forms of media, create a short film, and evaluate others’ films.

**Reading Rockets: Mo Willems**
[www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/willems](www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/willems)

**Resource type:** Video
**Grade range:** K–5

Watch while this Caldecott winner talks about creating his own cartoons when he was young, making animations for Sesame Street, and what it was like moving from television to writing children’s books.
The War: Power of Story
<www.pbs.org/thewar/edu_power_of_story.htm>
RESOURCE TYPE: Video
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Watch Ken Burns, the creator of the PBS series The War, talk about the power of stories. Learn why he believes that history, as told through the stories of the men and women who witnessed it, is much more dramatic than anything Hollywood can dream up.

Critical Film Viewing
American High: Legal and Ethical Aspects of Reality TV
<www.pbs.org/americanhigh/teachers/lesson4.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Understand the basic legal and ethical responsibilities involved in making “reality” videos.

American Masters: Kazan, Miller, and the McCarthy Era
<www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/lessons/kazan-miller-and-the-mccarthy-era/lesson-overview/120>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 9–12

American Masters: Lucille Ball: What’s So Funny
<www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/lessons/lucille-ball-whats-so-funny/lesson-overview/1285>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 5–6
Study images of women in movies and television, contrasting the ideal of physical beauty with the risks an actress takes to be funny. Learn about physical comedy, discuss what makes clowning funny, and perform a short comedy routine.

Big Apple History: Click!
<http://pbskids.org/bigapplehistory/parentsteachers/arts_lesson5.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 5–8
Analyze early filmmaking efforts by New York’s cinematic pioneers and explore changes in movies over time. Examine the impact of films, as well as the inventions of other forms of media, on our world.
Frontline: When Kids Get Life
<www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/whenkidsgetlife/lesson.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
In “Understanding the Power of Media: Planning a Documentary Segment About Peter, a Juvenile Sentenced to Life Without Parole” examine the nature of documentary films and understand the power of film to shape opinion.

<www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/art/academy_awards.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Explore how film can be used as a political tool and as a vehicle for informing the public and promoting political agendas. Research critically acclaimed political films throughout history and create a two-page spread for a book about political films.

The War: Dissemination of Information
<www.pbs.org/thewar/edu_snapshot.htm>
RESOURCE TYPE: Offline Activity
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Examine the role government newsreels played in transmitting information to the American public during World War II. Explore how the newsreels were used as propaganda, and compare and contrast the roles of modern media and WWII newsreels.

The War: Music and Movies
<www.pbs.org/thewar/edu_snapshot.htm>
RESOURCE TYPE: Offline Activity
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Listen to songs produced during World War II, analyze the lyrics and melodies, and explain their effect on audiences. Review movies produced at this time to look for messages about the war effort depicted in the movies’ plots, dialogue, and sets.

Adaptations to Film

In Search of Shakespeare: Comparing Film Adaptations
<www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/film/lessonplan.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 6–8
Analyze various film adaptations of Hamlet by comparing visual styles and chosen elements set by the director. Develop an understanding and interpretation of how different directors set subtle tones and moods and develop themes within movie scenes.

In Search of Shakespeare: Shakespearean Comedy on Film
<www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/film/lessonplan2.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 6–8
Understand the impact of humor in scenes from video adaptations of Hamlet and As You Like It. Compare visual styles and chosen elements set by the director and how these convey humor on screen.
Masterpiece Theatre: The Merchant of Venice and Othello
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/merchant/tguide.html]
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Explore Shakespeare's literary techniques and examine the timelessness of Shakespeare's themes. Discuss the pros and cons of adapting Shakespeare's plays to film, and investigate the techniques and choices used in making the films.

Masterpiece Theatre: The Song of the Lark
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/lark/tg_teaching.html]
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 6–12
Explore the sense of place Cather evokes in The Song of the Lark and discuss the story's themes of immigration, westward expansion, small town life, and the American dream of remaking oneself. Compare a portion of the book with the film's script.

Reading Rockets: Chris Van Allsburg
[www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/vanallsburg]
RESOURCE TYPE: Video
GRADE RANGE: K–5
Watch and listen as Chris Van Allsburg talks about his big breakthrough with The Polar Express and about how his books have been transformed into movies.

Film Technique

Arthur: Buster's Movie Maker
[http://pbskids.org/arthur/games/moviemaker/moviemaker.html]
RESOURCE TYPE: Interactive
GRADE RANGE: K–2
Learn how visual and sound effects help moviemakers set a mood with this interactive. Edit the sights, sounds, and background music in Buster's movie to help make it funnier.

The National Parks: Mixing Audio in Windows Movie Maker
[www.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/digital-storytelling]
RESOURCE TYPE: Video
GRADE RANGE: 6–12
Watch a video that demonstrates how to mix audio tracks for a National Parks digital storytelling project using Windows Movie Maker.

From the Top: Pictures in Sound
RESOURCE TYPE: Offline Activity
GRADE RANGE: 6–12
Explore two different pieces of classical music that were written to convey a specific mood, image, or sensation. Identify mood, image, or sensation within familiar music, including movie soundtracks.

Zoom: Phenakistascope
[http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/sci/phenakistascope.html]
RESOURCE TYPE: Offline Activity
GRADE RANGE: K–5
Build a spinning motion picture show from a paper plate to explore how the eye and brain interpret a series of pictures as motion.
Putting It All Together

American Masters: Lon Chaney: Three Faces of Lon Chaney
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Write a script based on books on which Lon Chaney’s films were based, and compare students’ work to Chaney’s.

History Detectives: Mayme Clayton’s Collection
<www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/educators/unit4.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Video
GRADE RANGE: 6–12
Examine items from the largest collection of books, documents, films, music, photographs, and memorabilia on African American history and culture. Watch Mayme Clayton’s son describe how she came to gather this academically significant collection.

NOVA: Car of the Future: Open Content—Suggested Activities
<www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/car/open/teac-02.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Offline Activity
GRADE RANGE: 6–12
Consider four suggested ways to use open-content video clips from the Car of the Future website. Create presentations, documentaries, commercials, or scientist profiles.

P.O.V.: Why Vote?: Creating Video Public Service Announcements
<www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/election/educators/psa.html>
RESOURCE TYPE: Lesson Plan
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Explore issues surrounding voter turnout among eighteen-year-olds in the local community. Write, shoot, and edit a 10- to 30-second public service announcement on the importance of voting.

The War: Search & Explore
<www.pbs.org/thewar/edu_search_explore.htm>
RESOURCE TYPE: Interactive
GRADE RANGE: 9–12
Explore this comprehensive database of World War II information, including hundreds of photographs, primary source documents, clips of historical footage, interviews, home movies, and newsreels.
AASL can help.

Since 2006, the American Association of School Librarians, with funding from the Dollar General Foundation, has given more than $800,000 in grants to over 90* school libraries across the country. We've also created a website with tools to help with other areas of the recovery process. To learn more about the Dollar General school library relief fund visit www.ala.org/aasl/disasterrelief

*Beyond Words School Library Relief Fund Recipients

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