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| **Tier 2 Vocabulary** |  |  |
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Alsop High School **Year 12 Film Studies - Term 1a** Knowledge Organiser – **Key Elements of Film Form**

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| **B: Subject Terminology – The Key Elements of Film Language** | |
| **4. Cinematography** | The art or technique of camera-work in a film. Camera shots, angles and movement, and the way in which the subject (the person or thing in the shot) is framed. |
| **5. Mise-en-Scene** | A French term borrowed from the theatre, which means ‘putting on stage’. It refers to all of the visual elements that can be **seen within the frame** of a shot, e.g. scenery, props, costume, etc. |
| **6. Performance** | This refers to the acting that is taking place, but specifically the visual aspects of performance that revolve around movement, as film is primarily a visual medium. |
| **7. Sound** | The only non-visual element, refers to everything you can hear in a film, including dialogue or vocals, sound effects and music. |
| **8. Editing** | The cutting and sequencing of the film; the element that gives **narrative shape** and **coherence** to all the other elements, and the process by which the film finally comes together. |

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| **A: Overview** | |
| **1. Unit Overview** | a) In this unit, you will be learning about how to critically analyse the **language** of film.  b) You will demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the micro-features of film language and how these **create meaning and response for the audience**. |
| **2. Film as a Language** | a) Film operates as a language because its aim is to communicate with an audience (usually visually), to create meaning and get them to react in some way to what they are seeing.  b) Just as written language is an organizational structure that uses symbols (letters), words, sentences etc. to convey meaning, film uses a number of other visual elements to create meaning and generate audience response.  c) As with a traditional language, often the connection between these symbols and their meanings can seem arbitrary and have to be learned over time. |
| **3. The 5 Key Elements** | a) When we analyse a film, it helps to look at 5 main areas (known as **key elements** or **micro features**) of film language, and how they create meaning.  b) The 5 key elements are **Cinematography, Mise-en-Scene, Performance, Sound** and **Editing**.  c) Each of these elements creates a huge spectrum of meaning, as every choice made in the way a film is presented to us (however small) can potentially create vastly different meanings for the audience. |

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| **C: Cinematography** | | |
| **9. The power of Cinematography** | a) The most important thing to bear in mind about cinematography is that the filmmaker has within his/her control the manipulation of the viewer’s physical point of view.  b) The camera determines what we see and how we see it, so can make us feel comfortable or uncomfortable, dominant or vulnerable, just by changes in the position or movement.  c) The camera may be positioned at any distance from the subject, and at any angle. It can move in any direction and at any speed, and can be as smooth or shaky as the filmmaker decides. Each of these options creates a huge spectrum of different meanings and feelings in the audience, about what is being filmed. | |
| **10. Camera Shots** | a) Establishing shot – Captures a location or setting. It is often used at the start of a sequence to set the scene so we know what to expect.  b) Close-up – Focuses usually on the face of a character, to reveal their emotion and help the audience understand how the character is feeling.  c) Medium shot – Emotionally neutral shot which shows a character from the waist up and focuses on action, i.e. what the character is doing.  d) Wide angle shot – Emotionally and intellectually alienating shot in which the subject is visible but the emphasis is more on placing him/her in his/her environment.  e) Extreme close-up – Frames a subject very closely, often so much so that the outer portions of the subject are cut off by the edges of the frame. Disorientating and/or emotionally intense.  f) Two-shot – Used to show a relationship between two characters, whether they are in battle or conflict or to show a romantic connection. Often connotes a power relationship by the relative positioning and framing of the two characters.  g) Low angle shot – When the camera is positioned low down and points upwards at a character. This is often used to make them seem powerful and heroic, or dominant and scary.  h) High angle shot – The camera is up high pointing down on a subject. Used to make a character look small or vulnerable. Often used in horror to hint who will be the next character to die.  i) Bird’s eye view – A shot looking directly down on the subject from above. Good for capturing action, and can be disorientating as it is rarely the way audiences themselves see the world.  j) Point of View (POV) shot – Shot from the subject's perspective. The viewer is placed physically in the subject’s position and sees the action through their eyes, creating a sense of voyeurism.  k) Canted angle (or Dutch tilt) – The camera is tilted to one side so the horizon line is not parallel with the bottom of the camera frame. Used to portray psychological uneasiness or tension. | |
| **11. Camera movement** | a) Pan – When the camera moves across something (left to right or vice versa).  b) Tilt – When the camera moves up or down to a higher or lower angle.  c) Zoom – When the camera stays still and the lens zooms in closer to an object or character, or out to a wider angle. Used to either lengthen or shorten the focal length. | d) Dolly Shot – When the camera is on wheels.  e) Crane Shot – Almost the same as a Dolly shot, but in the air (on a crane).  f) Tracking Shot – When the camera is literally on a track, and can move in a particular set sequence. |
| **12. Focus / Depth of Field** | a) Deep focus – The foreground, middle-ground, and background are all in focus. Often combined with deep staging, allowing the viewer to observe everything in a spacious and detailed scene.  b) Shallow focus – The opposite of deep focus, where one plane of the scene is in focus while the rest is out of focus. Typically used to emphasize one part of the image over another.  c) Focus pull – A technique in which the focus is changed during shot, so it begins with the foreground in focus and the background out of focus (or vice versa) and then the focus is adjusted during the shot so that the foreground goes out of focus and the background comes into focus (or vice versa). Used for directing the viewer’s attention during a shot. | |

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| **D: Mise-En-Scene** | |
| **13. ‘Putting on stage’** | a) To understand mise-ens-scene, consider the elements you see in the staging of a play that are used to create the impression of a ‘real world’ on stage.  b) A particular location will be suggested on stage, characters will be dressed in particular costumes, particular objects will be placed on stage or used prominently, etc. It is exactly the same in film, and this is what we call mise-en-scene. |
| **14. Setting** | a) The most obvious and all-encompassing element of mise-en-scene is the setting - the constructed space or environment in which the action of the film takes place.  b) Can be interior or exterior, historical or contemporary, fantasy or realistic, and contain a range of environmental conditions (weather, time of day, whether it is busy/crowded or isolated, etc.).  c) Setting often communicates **genre**, letting the viewer know exactly where they are in film terms, and exactly what to expect from the film experience. |
| **15. Lighting** | a) An aspect of setting, but significant enough to be considered in its own right.  b) Lighting, of course, does not just refer to what is lit and the way in which it is lit, but also the areas of darkness and shadow.  c) High Key Lighting is bright and full, and this is used by a director to imply an upbeat and hopeful mood. Often used in comedies and musicals.  d) Low Key Lighting is dark and full of shadow, and this is used by the director to imply mystery, fear and uncertainty. Commonly used in horror and thriller genres. |
| **16. Costume** | a) Acts as a type of uniform – linking a character to a particular group or type.  b) Can also ‘announce’ a character, giving an insight into what this person is supposed to be like.  c) Costume has always been important in helping to create meaning for the viewer, particularly, when a character has adjusted their persona in some way.  d) There are numerous examples in film of a character going through a personal transformation of some sort, which is then signalled by a distinctive change of costume. This can be done subtly, or not-so-subtly. |
| **17. Props** | a) Props work within the setting to give an authentic sense of place. They can also be used in more complex ways – to suggest important characteristics of particular characters, or even key themes for the whole film.  b) A character seen with or surrounded by books will be looked at completely differently to a character seen with or surrounded by weapons.  c) More subtly, the way characters use props, or the way in which props are placed in relation to them (orderly or tidily vs. clumsily or messily, for example), can imply countless differences in meaning.  d) Props or costume items can sometimes take on considerable significance – they can take on a role within the film that goes far beyond their mere presence as a material object, and become symbols for some key idea or concept. |

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| **E: Performance** | |
| **18. Every movement counts** | a) Every movement that can be seen in a shot, from the smallest, slowest movement of the eye to the largest, sudden movement of the whole body, can create limitless possible or potential meanings.  b) However spontaneous any movement may appear to be, it is likely to have been tightly **choreographed**, and carefully chosen to create a particular effect on the viewer. c) The phrase ‘hit the mark’ – used by actors to mean getting a performance right – literally comes from the marks on the floor of a set (usually a piece of tape) that the actors need to arrive at exactly at the right moment in the script!  d) There are a range of subtle ways in which actors can generate audience response. Ten ‘body codes’ have been identified. |
| **19. The Ten Body Codes** | a) Direct bodily contact  b) Proximity (or closeness) of one character to another (also known as proxemics)  c) Orientation (the extent to which they are turned inward or away from each other)  d) General appearance of individuals (short, tall, fat, thin etc.)  e) Head movements  f) Facial expressions  g) Gestures (or kinesics)  h) Body posture  i) Eye movement or contact  j) Aspects of speech (such as pitch, stress, tone, volume, accent, speech errors, etc.) |

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| **F: Sound** | |
| **20. The odd one out** | a) All the other key elements of film deal with the visual aspects of filmmaking, but there is of course a further dimension to film – that of sound.  b) Sound is also the newest element of film language, having only existed since 1927’s *The Jazz Singer*.  c) Sound in a film may be said to operate on three levels: Dialogue or vocals, Sound effects, and Musical accompaniment.  d) Each of these three aspects of sound can be recorded during the shooting of a film OR added afterwards in the editing process. |
| **21. Naturalistic vs. Abstract sound** | a) Dialogue, sound effects and music can all be put to use in different ways – from making the world of the film seem as realistic and naturalistic as possible, to more abstract uses of sound which suggest subtle aspects of character or theme.  b) A good example of abstract use of sound is in the horror genre, the most effective horror films often using sound very inventively. A creaking door or staircase, a roll of thunder, or even the most ordinary or everyday sounds, can be subtly but unnaturally heightened to convey a sense of tension or dread. |
| **22. Diegetic & Non-Diegetic sound** | a) The **Diegesis** refers to the imagined or constructed ‘real world’ of the film.  b) **Diegetic sound**, therefore, is any sound that is heard in the diegesis; the sound that the characters would be able to hear.  c) **Non-Diegetic Sound is a**ny sound that is outside the diegesis, and that the characters cannot hear. It usually includes overlays of soundtrack music and voiceover narration. |

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| **G: Editing** | |
| **23. The All-Encompassing Element** | a) What you will find when discussing the other elements (Cinematography and Sound in particular) is that it is almost impossible to talk about them on their own, without discussing editing.  b) Editing gives **narrative shape** and **coherence** to the array of shots and sounds which are recorded during the making of a film.  c) The editing process is vital as it is where a film finally comes together – as such it involves a great deal of hard and thorough work. d) Hours and hours of film which have been shot (including multiple takes of the same sequences) must be sifted through and cut down to an ‘appropriate’ length for a conventional film.  e) At all times, the potential meaning of a shot can be adjusted by the following shot, and by the transition between them. |
| **24. Shots, Scenes and Sequences** | a) A **Shot** is an uninterrupted number of frames in which no cutting takes place (usually short but can be long / continuous).  b) A **Scene** is a section of film (usually made up of a number of different shots) that gives the illusion of uninterrupted action taking place within one continuous space and moment in time.  c) A **Sequence** is a series of related scenes that clearly and logically fit together as a whole, and may be considered a well-defined ‘unit’ of the overall narrative (much like a chapter in a book). |
| **25. Transitions** | a) **Straight cut** – We are instantly transported from one shot to another. This is the most common transition and used within a scene to maintain uninterrupted action. b) **Fade** – The shot fades out to a blank screen, and fades into the next shot from a blank screen. Often used to give a sense of a closure to one shot, and a sense of  c) Dissolve – Where one shot is gradually superimposed over another and so one shot appears to dissolve into another. This is often (but not always) used effectively |
| **25. Long Take** | a) For some theorists, the **long take** (filming a lengthy sequence without cuts) has been seen to be the essence of filmmaking, as it allows the viewer to follow as a privileged ‘presence’.  b) This was taken to its logical extreme in a film called *Russian Ark* (Sokurov, 2002), which was one highly-choreographed long take without editing. Decades before, Alfred Hitchcock had pioneered the idea in *Rope* (Hitchcock, 1948), takes place in real time and is edited so as to appear as a single continuous shot through the use of long takes.  c) In actuality, there are 9 cuts in the film and no take is more than 10 minutes long (as that was the length of a film reel). The cuts are ‘**masked**’ by the camera panning or tracking into an object, so there is a brief blackout on screen for a fraction of a second and a cut can take place without breaking the illusion of a continuous camera movement. |
| **26. Montage** | a) For other theorists, cutting a variety of shots together in a montage that challenges the viewer to make meanings from connections between the shots has been seen as the key to filmmaking. At its extreme, under this approach each shot is fleeting and depends on the equally-fleeting shots before and after it for meaning.  b) For example: a shot of a man’s staring face tells us little, but when it is followed by a shot of a sandwich, we immediately make the inference that the man is hungry. This theory arises from the work of Lev Kuleshov, who established the **a+b=c** definition of montage: that an image followed by another image produces a thought. This phenomenon is called the **Kuleshov effect.**  d) Early Soviet filmmaking was heavily based on montage theory, to the point that Soviet national cinema is also known as the Soviet Montage style. Filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein pioneered and perfected montage cinema, with the ‘Odessa Steps’ sequence from *Battleship Potemkin* (Eistenstein, 1925) being one of the most celebrated and powerful uses of montage.  e) Outside of the Soviet Union, one filmmaker who made highly effective use of montage was (again) Alfred Hitchcock. The ‘shower scene’ in *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), probably one of the most famous scenes in cinema history, is made up of a montage of 77 different camera shots despite only lasting 3 minutes. Most of the shots are extreme close-ups and last for less than a second, which makes the whole sequence feel longer, more uncontrolled, and more graphically violent than if the images were presented alone or in a wider angle.  f) Hollywood later adopted the montage technique for a much more straightforward purpose: to condense narrative and show the passage of time, usually to music. This is known as the Hollywood montage, training montage or ‘Rocky’ montage because of its prevalence in the *Rocky* film franchise). |

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| **H: Hollywood Continuity Editing** | |
| **27. Continuity** | a) In film terms, continuity refers to the illusion of continuous, unbroken action being maintained by the editing. In Hollywood, continuity editing is seen as the key approach to film construction.  b) In other words, every effort should be made to make the editing as **unobtrusive** (or ‘low-profile’) as possible, so that the audience is unaware of the cuts.  c) This is why most people are largely unaware of the editing when watching mainstream films. |
| **28. 180-Degree Rule** | a) One trick of continuity editing is the 180-degree rule, which is widely and strictly adhered to in Hollywood films. The rule states that all shots show the subjects (usually characters) from one side.  b) For example, if you have two characters standing next to each other, there is an imaginary line running from one to the other then the camera can move anywhere within 180-degrees of this line.  c) If the camera at any point moves across this line, the effect will be that the two characters seem to suddenly jump from one side of the shot to another, so the 180-degree line is rarely crossed. |
| **29. Cutting on Action** | a) This involves making the cut at the point where a character is performing a certain action, and then filming the completion of the action from a different camera position.  b) For example: we see a shot of Character A as he punches Character B, then cut to a shot of Character B receiving the punch and reacting. The action that is taking place provides continuity for the viewer, who is absorbed in the action and so barely registers the edit. |
| **30. Eyeline Matches** | a) A character looks at something off-screen, and there is then a cut to show whoever or whatever he or she is looking at, from roughly that same character’s position (a POV shot).  b) The gaze of the character in the first shot has to line up with what they are looking at in the next shot. |

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| **I: Key Vocabulary (Frayer Models)** | |
| **WORD** | **DEFINITION** |
| **31. Aesthetic** | Concerning the visual style and ‘look’ of a film, particularly concerning what is visually attractive or appealing. |
| **32. Choreography** | The art designing sequences of movements of physical bodies. |
| **33. Connotation** | An idea or feeling which a symbol invokes, in addition to its literal or primary meaning. |
| **34. Continuity** | Unbroken and consistent existence, or continuous action. |
| **35. Denotation** | The literal or primary meaning, in contrast to the feelings or ideas suggested. |
| **36. Diegesis** | The internal world created by a story that the characters themselves experience and encounter. |
| **37. Genre** | A type or category of film, characterized by a specific form, content, and style. |
| **38. Montage** | A film editing technique in which a series of short shots are sequenced together. |
| **39. Narrative** | A story that is presented in a constructive format. |