

A practical guide to teaching with film

Whether it's watching and reviewing or making and directing, film offers endless educational benefits to pupils of any age and ability. As Into Film's annual celebration of film and education draws to a close, **Jane Fletcher** considers how this rich and diverse teaching tool can be harnessed in different areas of the curriculum.

The ability of film to tell compelling stories of enormous historic, literary, geographic, linguistic, cultural and social value, and speak to people across age, class, gender and background, makes it an invaluable tool for educators.

This is a medium that is accessible to all, regardless of ability, with the power to bring to life aspects of the curriculum that some students may consider dull, portray subjects from science to Shakespeare in a different light, boost young people's literacy, creativity and critical skills, and inspire disengaged pupils.

Despite its many advantages, however, unlike art, drama or music, film has never to date featured prominently in education. Now, Into Film – an education charity created by FILMCLUB and First Light – is providing a UK-wide programme for learning through and about

film, with a raft of opportunities for teachers to use the watching, making and understanding of films to support the educational, cultural, creative and personal development of all five to 19-year-olds.

Its film clubs, free to all state-funded schools, colleges, youth groups and libraries, offer access to over 4000 films for young people to watch, discuss and review, as well as training and online resources to make their own. In the next few years, Into Film will be developing increasing numbers of resources and possibilities to use film in the classroom, while also gathering existing ideas about best practice and disseminating these across the UK.

Film is the richest of educational resources, with the capacity to broaden young people's horizons and enrich their learning experiences. But how can educators begin making use of the

opportunities now, and how can they harness film's wide appeal to support learning across different areas of the curriculum?

Using film to develop English language skills

Reviewing films watched in class or a school film club is a good way to develop students' writing skills and powers of expression, increase confidence in their writing ability and engage reluctant writers. Boys, in particular, often engage more effectively with visual learning and seem more receptive to writing about what they have seen rather than what they have heard or read.

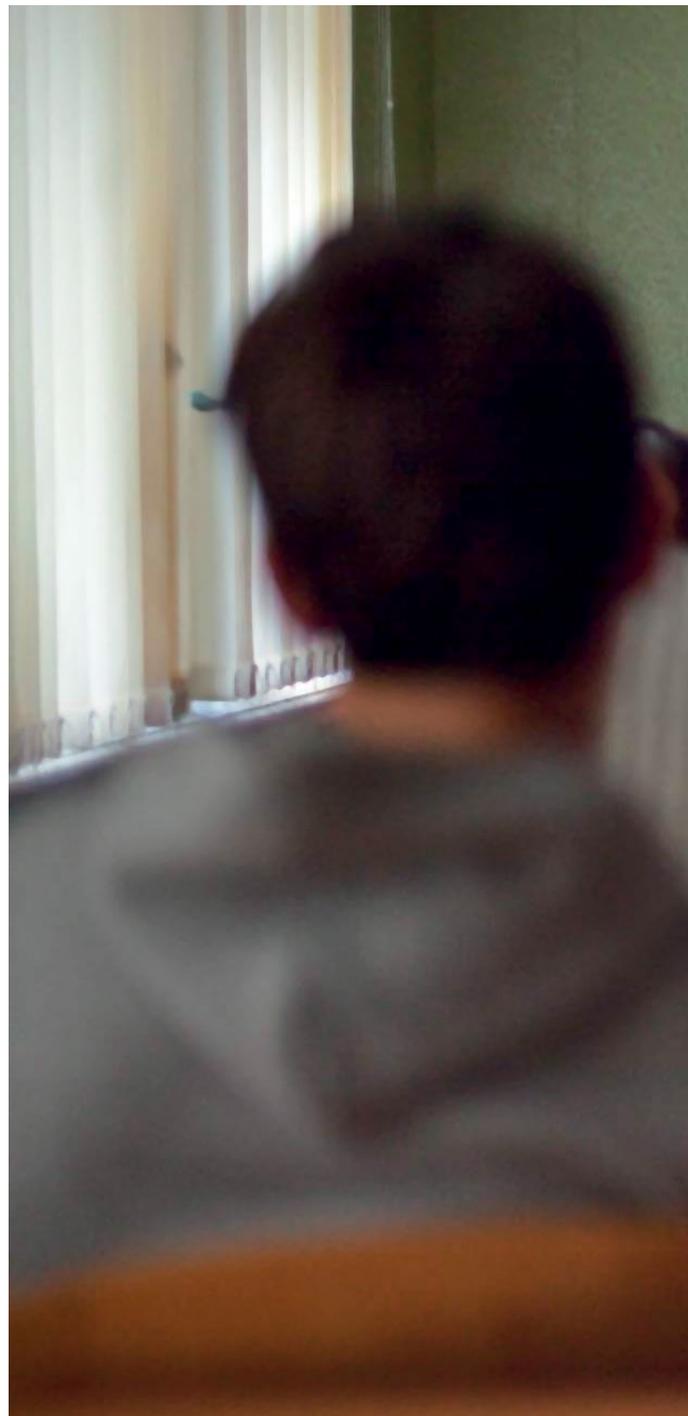
The comprehensive review writing guides for primary and secondary, **available to download** from Into Film's website, highlight the essential elements of a review – inform, describe, entertain and evaluate – and offer practical tips on how to write one effectively. Set word counts, for example 100 words to explain the plot and 150 words for their opinion, to help pupils separate the two and give the review structure. To increase the challenge, teachers may choose to ban certain overused words such as 'good', 'bad', 'interesting' or 'boring'.

Film can also be used to help students hone the descriptive, informative and persuasive skills required later on at GCSE. One way to do this is, for younger students, to take examples of shots and ask pupils to rewrite them as a sentence – for example, an extreme long shot as a sentence describing the setting, a long shot as a sentence introducing people and a close up shot as a sentence describing what people are feeling. For secondary students, select a part of the film where the camera zooms out and pause it at appropriate points so that students can write to describe a close-up, medium and long shot – like the opening minute of Polanski's *Macbeth* (15) – before turning it into a cohesive description.

Teachers may also ask pupils to write a first person story where one character from a film describes a scene from their point of view, a letter from one character to another, or a voiceover for a scene that has no dialogue. Many films contain sequences that include several shots to show the atmosphere of a place or setting, which may be used as a basis for writing poetry or thinking about metaphor and personification. For practice in persuasive writing, students can be asked to write a formal letter to the British Board of Film Classification arguing, persuading or advising them to alter the certificate for certain adaptations, prior

to which they can check the classification guidelines on the BBFC website.

Activities involved in filmmaking such as writing summaries of the film story, treatments in which pupils explain how they're going to film it, shot lists and shooting schedules, and notes and descriptions on storyboards are all useful writing exercises. Pupils could be asked to write a script or a screenplay, in which the emphasis should be on showing rather than telling using appearance and actions to depict characters' feelings.



Bringing literature to life

Analysing films and writing apt reviews will help young people – particularly reluctant readers and writers – to develop the critical skills required when studying texts at GCSE English literature and beyond. Teachers can ask students to consider the difference between objective and subjective reasons for liking and disliking a film, challenge learners to say more than that a film is good, and encourage them to analyse the component elements and the aspects they most enjoyed.

Film adaptations of books and plays are powerful tools to support the study of literature and inspire young people who find certain texts challenging. While using them in class isn't new, the possibilities are many and varied, and can be applied to a wide variety of popular texts including *Great Expectations*, *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Touching The Void*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. Modern adaptations such as *10 Things I Hate About You (12)* (based on *Taming of the Shrew*), *Lion King (U)* (from *Hamlet*) or *Easy*



A (15) (based on *Scarlett Letter*) offer a new perspective on classic works.

Teachers' notes, discussion questions and recommended activities such as those found in Into Film's **Shakespeare on Film** and **GCSE English Enrichment** resources, and the new curriculum-linked **guide to Dickens on film**, can be used to promote an array of post-screening discussions, including the suitability of actors to portray the novel's characters, comparisons between the book and film, and the interpretation of an author's work by a director.

Furthermore, analysing the soundtrack, lighting and camera shots can help students understand and draw conclusions about the mood of a text. Students may also be asked to look at foreshadowing in the film adaptation of a book and consider why directors have altered the structure of the original text. They may be encouraged further to make a short film adaptation of a key scene in a novel, for which they will need to show what the characters are feeling based on knowledge gained from the original text.

Adaptations of comic books – such as *The Dark Knight (12A)* – can be used to get students thinking about how many of the great comic characters are based on a cultural starting point, have survived decades of retelling and are now proving hugely popular with young audiences.

Foreign films and language learning

Film is a perfect way to learn a foreign language in context and be exposed to foreign cultures, real-life conversation and new day-to-day phrases and vocabulary, increasing students' ability to cope with different accents and helping them prepare for public exams. In *La Haine (15)*, for example, a film about three friends from the ghettos of the Paris suburbs, much of the French we hear is 'banlieue' French, spoken in the slums in the Paris outskirts. As well as introducing students to this style of French, the film can also be used to spark a discussion about what we can learn about people from their accents.

For language practice, you can ask students to identify phrases and figures of speech used in a foreign film, or choose ten words in the film and find synonyms. You could also ask them to write a review in the language they're studying. Making a simple film about an everyday activity such as shopping, using appropriate vocabulary, will help students develop written and oral skills. Alternatively, ask them to write

and record a script about themselves and what they like doing, and illustrate it with stills and video clips.

Film adaptations can also be used to support the study of foreign literature – for example, *Cyrano de Bergerac (U)* (based on a French play), *The Motorcycle Diaries (15)* (based on Che Guevara's diary) or *Sarah's Key (12)* (from a book about a young girl caught up in WWII). You could use the book as supplementary work for reading afterwards, or as background research into the film. A film can be watched in its entirety or individual scenes lifted and discussed in detail.

Enlivening history lessons

Films, supported by imaginative teaching resources, can bring to life different periods and events in history, engage pupils in topics ranging from the causes of the French Revolution to the American Civil War, and introduce a complex subject such as genocide.

A screening of *Paper Clips (U)* or *The Diary of Anne Frank (PG)* for example, preceded by a talk about who Hitler was and followed by a discussion about the impact of the Holocaust and the need to prevent it from happening again, is an effective and age-appropriate way



to raise the subject with pupils in years 5 and 6. For older pupils, films like *Sophie's Choice* (15), *Life is Beautiful* (PG) or *Everything is Illuminated* (15) – all featured in FILMCLUB's **resource for Holocaust Memorial Day 2014** – can be used to spark discussion. Watching, discussing and reviewing films such as *Gallipoli* (PG) or the World War I drama, *Private Peaceful* (12), adapted from Michael Morpurgo's popular novel, are engaging ways to bring the First World War into focus.

After watching the film, consider asking pupils to act out a key scene or create a soundtrack of the types of sounds a selected character would have heard, for example an evacuation scene after watching *Carrie's War* (U). This will help students to better understand the feelings and experiences of people living through different historical events.

Evaluating films critically can be useful when discussing sources. Within the context of the 'Hollywoodisation' of history, for example, it can be pertinent to screen a film like *U-571* (12) and discuss the historical inaccuracies. *Downfall* (15), a controversial study of the final days of Hitler from his perspective, is a useful starting point for a debate about whether, and how, history's monsters should

be remembered. *The Lives of Others* (15) is a useful tool to support teaching about the cold war from an East German perspective and spark a discussion about the level of surveillance in our own society.

Filmmaking too can play a valuable role in history lessons. Pupils could be asked to make fictional or documentary films about historical events or local history, using archive footage, or create a film using techniques from propaganda films.

A new take on geography teaching

Film can be used to support topics relating both to physical geography (the environment, climate change and natural phenomena) and human geography (migration, immigration and globalisation).

Documentaries like *An Inconvenient Truth* (U) and *Encounters at the End of the World* (U), will encourage students to think about their own use of resources and how mankind treats the planet. *Waste Land* (PG) is an excellent documentary for exploring environmental issues, waste and the power of human creativity, while the campaigning drama, *Promised Land* (12), gives an insight into the dangers of fracking, the process used in digging for gas. Another good choice is *Fast Food Nation* (15), in which an all-star cast examines the risks to health, the environment and society caused by the globalisation of the fast food industry.

As well as complementing the curriculum, these films, and the questions they raise, can help students to develop their thinking and problem solving skills. Making short films about the local area or a place they're visited on a field trip provides further opportunities for pupils to explore geographical themes, evaluate information and present it in a clear and engaging manner.

Exploring social issues

Film can be a great resource to start a discussion about difficult topics such as bullying, sex, drugs, alcohol and Internet safety in PSHE. *Mean Girls* (12), for example, is a well written examination of social groups and hierarchies within the school system, and a useful platform from which to consider these issues, along with the theme of retaliation and retribution. *About A Boy* (12) also deals with the issue of bullying, and for older students, the film *Gran Torino* (15) looks at challenging the assumptions people make about others. Asking



pupils to make a film around the subject of bullying and related themes, such as friendship, peer pressure and standing up for what is right, will encourage them to think about these themes from different perspectives and share their experiences.

The documentary *Catfish* (12), examining the idea of identity and representation online, *The Social Network* (12), an explanation of how Facebook has changed our lives, *InRealLife* (15) which explores the impact the internet is having on young people and *Trust* (15), a drama about the hidden dangers of the internet, are all powerful platforms for discussion about how to be safe and responsible citizens in an increasingly digital world.

Michael Moore's acclaimed documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (15) can promote discussion not only about gun law but also, more generally, about the effects of violence in society. Other films that can be used to support topics covered in PSHE include *Juno* (12) (teenage pregnancy), *Kidulthood* (15) (teenage life in modern London), and *Maria Full of Grace* (15) (drugs).

Getting arty

Watching and discussing films like *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (12), *Frida* (15) or *Annie Leibovitz: Life Through a Lens* (12) is an accessible and engaging way to introduce young people to the lives and works of great artists they might not otherwise encounter.

For a more practical approach, simple filmmaking skills can be used by students to collect examples of pattern, shape and colour, or describe artworks and express what they think about them. Students can be encouraged to look at the use of art in the world of film both in terms of research activities and as part of a practical career focus. Film can also be used as a fantastic way of displaying student artwork for the school community, parents and further afield.

In both art and D&T (design and technology), film is a useful way to record and explain

making techniques and processes. A new series of curriculum-linked filmmaking resources – **Creating Movie Magic** – offers a new approach to D&T teaching. Students can learn to create their own basic visual effects by exploring stop motion, false perspective and other creative skills. The resource also encourages understanding of the importance of Intellectual Property (IP) – an integral part of D&T currently receiving little recognition – by giving students the chance to become IP owners themselves.



Looking behind the scenes of the film industry at the many skilled roles that make special effects possible, the resource also highlights the range of careers that D&T skills can lead to – ranging from researchers and art department to technicians and directors.

Jane Fletcher is Director of Education at Into Film.

For further information about Into Film, visit: www.intofilm.org. To start a free film club, visit www.filmclub.org, email info@intofilm.org or call 0207 288 4520.

Supporting wellbeing through film – Into Film Festival 2015

Surveys show that problems such as anxiety, depression and self-harm among young people are on the increase. With wellbeing and mental health high on the national agenda, film – accessible and inclusive for all – is a highly effective tool to boost young people’s confidence and tackle sensitive subjects linked to their physical and emotional health.



This Autumn, Into Film is launching a wellbeing season with hand-picked films, thought-provoking teaching resources and filmmaking activities to start conversations about topics such as body image, bullying, healthy relationships and online safety. Seventy-five per cent of teachers told us that watching and discussing films has increased pupils’ confidence, and many report increases in empathy and tolerance.

Wellbeing was also a headline theme at this year’s Into Film Festival, which took place from 4 to 20 November 2015. Free screenings, with associated teaching resources, of films such as *Cinderella* (PG), *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (PG), *The DUFF* (12A), *Force Majeur* (15) and *Amy* (15) did a fantastic job of encouraging young people to stop and think about relevant issues.

Find out more about Into Film’s wellbeing theme at: www.intofilm.org/wellbeing.

The Into Film Festival is a free and annual celebration of film and education for five to 19-year-olds across the UK. Free activities include UK-wide screenings, special speaker Q&As and master classes with industry experts, as well as exclusive events such as film previews, premieres and more. For further information about this year’s programme, visit: www.intofilm.org/festival.

Knowledge trails

1. **How after-school film clubs encourage thinking** – Film clubs provide young people with a rare opportunity to be part of something fun, creative and sociable. Sabrina Broadbent reports on FILMCLUB’s efforts to give more children the chance to get involved.
www.teachingtimes.com/articles/filmclub-creativity
2. **Epic dreams** – Andrew Beswick recalls the exciting experience he gave his students filming a *Celts v. Romans* blockbuster in a project of epic proportions.
library.teachingtimes.com/articles/school-film-project