

The Film Review Assignment

Learning Goals: The student will understand:

- that films are a form of literature and can be analyzed accordingly
- terms used in film analysis
- the impact of types and length of shots, camera angles and movements, edits, etc. in the development of meaning in the film
- the significance of the mise-en-scene, the placement of actors and arrangement of the scene
- the significance of casting, acting and script in developing the dramatic aspects of the film

The assignment: Because we have only scratched the surface of cinematography, I would like you to compose a **review** of *Rebel without a Cause*. A review usually consists of only a superficial analysis of the cinematic aspects because it is directed to the “layman” audience, so **you should focus mainly on the dramatic and literary aspects** in the analytical portion of your review. However you should discuss any outstanding cinematic aspects which contribute to the meaning of the film, but do not focus on them.

The method: The audience for your review consists of people who have not seen the film. Your job is to critically review the film in order to help your readers make a decision about seeing it. Therefore, your review must not reveal so much about the film that you spoil it. In other words, do not reveal the ending. You will want to utilize the information you gathered based on the “Gathering Information for Your Film Review” handout. You may reflect enthusiasm or disdain for the film in your review, but save your strongest language for the conclusion.

Writing Your Film Review

Look over the notes you made based on the handout “Gathering Information for Your Film Review.”

- I. Plan your **introduction**. Use a “hook” (an opening paragraph that catches your reader’s attention). For example:
 - Describe a scene, incident, or bit of dialogue from the film,
 - remind your reader of this director’s last movie (or other movies of the lead actors), or
 - connect the movie to something happening in society today.
- II. After the introduction, follow this organizational plan:
 1. Description/summary
 2. Analysis (**the major portion of the review**)
 3. Evaluation
 4. Conclusion

Gathering Information for Your Film Review

THE BASICS:

1. What is the title of the film?
2. Who are the main actors in the film?
3. Who directed the film?
4. Who wrote the screenplay?
5. Who was responsible for photography?
6. Who produced the film?
7. Who wrote/played/sang the music?
8. If you plan to mention any technical aspects of the film, you should find out the name of the people responsible for those aspects (such as editor, costume designer, and so forth).

DESCRIPTION/SUMMARY OF THE FILM:

1. What other movies is this movie like?
2. Who are the main characters?
3. What is the setting of the film?
4. What is the main situation or source of conflict?
5. Summarize the plot (without the ending!) in no more than five sentences.

REMEMBER: Your reader wants to know enough about the movie to make a decision about going to the movie, but not so much that there's no need to go!

LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE FILM:

1. What themes do you discover in the movie?
2. Do you notice any symbols/motifs/images that recur in the movie?

EVALUATION OF THE FILM:

A. Dramatic Aspects

1. Characterize the plot/story of the movie. Is it involving, convoluted, simplistic, realistic, unbelievable, highly unlikely, well-structured, unresolved? (Add to this list if you need to.)
2. How would you characterize the dialogue? Do people talk this way in real life? (Or if realism was not a goal of the movie, was the dialogue amusing, poetic, or moving?)
3. Describe the acting. Do you believe that the actors are the characters?
4. Describe the sets, costumes, and make-up if these elements of the film's design are significant.

B. Cinematic Aspects

5. What did you notice about the *film's* cinematography? Did the director employ a lot of camera movements? close-ups? high or low angles? distorted lenses? special visual effects?
6. What do you notice about the film's editing? Are there quick cuts? Lengthy shots? Fade-in/fade-outs? Dissolves? Special optical effects like wipes, irises, and freeze frames?
7. What do you notice about the film's sound effects and music? What do they add to the overall effect of the film?

GLOSSARY OF FILM TERMS

A. Types of Shots

Long Shot – (a relative term) a shot taken from a sufficient distance to show a landscape, a building, or a large crowd

Medium Shot – (also relative) a shot between a long shot and a close-up that might show two people in full figure or several people from the waist up

Close-up – a shot of one face or object that fills the screen completely

Extreme Close-up – a shot of a small object or part of a face that fills the screen

B. Camera Angles

High Angle – the camera looks down at what is being photographed.

“Eye Level” – a shot that approximates human vision – a camera presents an object so that the line between camera and object is parallel to the ground.

Low Angle – the camera looks up at what is being photographed.

C. Camera Movement

Pan – the camera moves horizontally on a fixed base.

Tilt – the camera points up or down from a fixed base.

Tracking (Dolly) Shot – the camera moves through space on a wheeled truck (or dolly), but stays in the same plane.

Boom – the camera moves up or down through space.

Zoom – not a camera movement, but a shift in the focal length of the camera lens to give the impression that the camera is getting closer to or farther from an object.

D. Duration of Shots

Shots also vary in time from **subliminal** (a few frames) to **quick** (less than a second) to **“average”** (more than a second but less than a minute) to **lengthy** (more than a minute).

E. Editing

Cut – the most common type of transition in which one scene ends and a new one immediately begins

Fade-out/Fade-in – one scene gradually goes dark and the new one gradually emerges from the darkness

Dissolve – a gradual transition in which the end of one scene is superimposed over the beginning of a new one

Wipe – an optical effect in which one shot appears to "wipe" the preceding one from the screen; special wipes include flip wipes, iris wipes, star wipes, etc.

F. Sources of Sound in Film

Voice-over narration, dialogue, sound effects, and soundtrack music (underscoring)