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## CURRICULUM

This teaching guide has three curriculum objectives:

- To help students and teachers using films and videos in the context of the following secondary school curriculum – English Language Arts, Film and Media Studies, Social Studies, and Visual Arts
- To assist educators who are planning to teach film studies for the first time
- To suggest ways in which traditional literary concepts may be taught using a medium other than printed text

## STAR WARS AND THE STRUCTURE OF THIS FILM GUIDE

This guide has been developed around one of the most popular and successful movies in the history of cinema: George Lucas' 1977 science fiction epic, *Star Wars*. Virtually any film can be used to look at the role of sound and lighting in movies. What's important is to break down how the visual language of filmmaking is used by looking closely at different kinds of shots and examining how shots are linked together in certain kinds of editing patterns. Another way of saying this is that rather than simply watching a film, to really understand how a film works, it's important to deconstruct how the filmmaker has used individual elements to tell his or her story.

Since its original release in 1977, *Star Wars* has become one of the most recognizable stories in the history of film. It has also been instrumental in popularizing a whole new kind of Hollywood film: the blockbuster. Blockbusters are big budget movies dominated by special computer effects, action-based storylines, and popular Hollywood stars. Although *Star Wars* is now considered one of the early blockbusters, it didn't start out that way. In fact, many Hollywood producers expected the film to fail miserably when it was released. As we know, it didn't. Instead, George Lucas' comic book melodrama went on to draw generations of moviegoers into a universe that existed "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away."

That *Star Wars* and the three follow-up films (*The Empire Strikes Back* [Irvin Kershner, 1980], *Return of the Jedi* [Richard

Marquand, 1983], and *The Phantom Menace* [George Lucas, 1999]) in the series have been able to do this is no small feat. The Rebel forces and the Empire are neither part of our world nor our time. But if we think about it for a moment, in another way, they are.

The Rebel forces and the Empire are part of our world because we learn about their story with the aid of various kinds of shots, sounds and lighting techniques that we've seen in any number of movies. Because these shots and edits are so familiar to audiences they work to turn this far-off tale into an adventure we identify with and understand.

As the film begins, audiences enter into the world of Luke, Han Solo, Princess Leia, and Darth Vader. On one level, what allows us to do this is the skilful manipulation of cinema's visual language. In this guide, we look at two of the most important elements in the visual language of movies: Sound and Lighting.

**Note:** Some films noted in this guide may not be appropriate for all students. Please use your discretion when selecting films for your classroom. Classroom activities are provided after each section along with an answer key at the end of the guide. Answers are not provided for all activities as some questions depend on teachers to choose films they are already working with in their classes.

## FILMMAKING AND SOUND

Sound has always been part of the film experience. But it wasn't until the release of *The Jazz Singer*, on October 6, 1927, that images were forever linked with words, sound effects, and music.

Prior to *The Jazz Singer* movies weren't exactly silent. Live orchestras often performed commissioned music scores during the screening of movies like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919) and *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926). Even in smaller towns where a full orchestra wasn't available, a piano or organ was typically used to accompany movies. Sometimes, live actors would even be hired to stand behind the screen and speak the lines for their on-screen characters. All of which is to say that film's silent era was never really silent at all. It just didn't involve the kind of sound we're used to in movies today.

By the end of the 1920s, a variety of sound systems (Vitaphone, MovieTone, Phonofilm, and the new optical sound system produced by Western Electric) were in use in theatres across North America. These sound systems don't really compare with the powerful audio systems we're accustomed to in movie houses today. Currently, Lucasfilm's THX sound system and Dolby Stereo speaker systems have revolutionized movie sound. Even at home, the development of surround-sound home theatres with multi-speaker television sets has dramatically improved the quality of sound for home video screenings. As a result of these technological changes, sound itself has become a much more important element in the visual language of film.

### Categories of Sound

It is helpful to divide the use of sound in film into two categories:

**Diegetic Sound** (pronounced die-uh-JET-ic) – which refers to all those audio elements that we see inside the film frame, including dialogue, doors slamming, footsteps, etc.

**Non-Diegetic Sound** – which refers to all those audio elements that come from off-screen, including the musical score and sound effects like the ticking of a clock, etc.

### Why distinguish between diegetic and non-diegetic sound?

The most important reason for distinguishing diegetic from non-diegetic sound is to draw attention to the way sound effects are used in movies.

For the most part, audiences don't notice the sounds that come from inside the film frame. We may pay attention to a particular song or the sound of a scream from off in the distance. But when we hear characters speak, slam doors, or travel in cars, we rarely notice how crucial each of these sounds is to the overall success of the movie. It's only when the synchronization between an action and a sound effect is broken that we notice the role of the sound effects. Think, for instance, of any foreign language movie you've seen that has been dubbed into English. Dubbed films are disappointing because the actors' lips don't synchronize with the dialogue, leaving the film feeling hollow and unsatisfying. By noting the different ways diegetic and non-diegetic sounds are used, the point is to become aware of how these sounds help to shape a film.

## activity 01

The following activity is a group exercise and has been designed for use with the film or video of your choice. Students should be divided into groups prior to the start of the film.

The power of sound in a film is easiest to see by identifying the diegetic and non-diegetic sound effects heard in the opening and closing five minutes of a movie. The opening and closing scenes in movies are intended to make the strongest possible impression on audiences and so often it is in these sequences where elements like sound are used most.

*Working in small groups, use the chart on the next page to assess the role of diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Determine the major themes in the movie you have watched. Then choose five examples each of diegetic and non-diegetic sound effects from both the opening and closing five minutes of the film. When you are selecting your examples, choose sound effects that have some relationship to the main themes in the film. List your examples in the left hand column of the chart. In the right hand column, suggest how the selected sound relates to or helps to draw out the film's main themes.*

EXAMPLES OF DIEGETIC SOUND	RELATIONSHIP OF DIEGETIC SOUND TO THE FILM'S MAIN THEMES

EXAMPLES OF NON-DIEGETIC SOUND	RELATIONSHIP OF NON-DIEGETIC SOUND TO THE FILM'S MAIN THEMES