Film Language Glossary

This brief guide provides some of the key terminology for analysing film in the classroom. Having an awareness of these terms and concepts will help you better articulate your ideas and opinions in discussion and writing as well as helping to improve your film production work.

Shot Type

Long shot – shows background, establishes where you are.

Mid shot — shows torso and some background.

Close-up — head and shoulders, usually used to show emotion. Draws our attention to face or object.

Point-of-view shot – helps us to see the action from a character's viewpoint and thus empathise with them.

High angle shot – camera looks down on person/object, making them look vulnerable.

Low angle shot – camera looks up at someone/thing, making them appear powerful.

Camera Movement

In the same way that framing can be used to enhance our involvement in the film action, the way in which a camera is moved can be used to direct our attention to emphasise a particular viewpoint. Camera movements include:

Panning shot – where the camera moves slowly across from side to side from a fixed axis.

Tilt shot – where the camera moves up and down from a fixed axis.

Crane shot – where the camera, mounted on a crane, moves around at a distance above ground level.

Tracking shot – where the camera follows the action, moving along tracks laid for that purpose, often pulling backwards from a scene.

Hand held – this technique is often used to suggest a greater sense of authenticity, for example it could be used to provide 'eye witness' accounts of situations, linked to the point-of-view of a particular character or characters.

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Mise en scène

This term is used in film to describe what is in the frame and why. There are several areas to consider when talking about mise en scène:

- **Setting and props**
- **Costume and make-up**
- **Body language and facial expression**
- **Lighting and colour**

Each of these factors combines to give the shot a certain 'look' or 'feel'. What is put in or left out of a shot can make a big difference to the signals we receive about what sort of film it is and how we are supposed to feel at this point. For instance, a simple shot of a tree can be made to look threatening by adding a vulture and a storm and shooting it in darkness. The same tree can be given a very different look by having children playing beneath its sunlit branches.

Lighting

Lighting quickly creates an atmosphere on screen. If it is dark and shadowy we might be made to feel uneasy, as in a thriller; if the lighting is bright we feel happy and confident. The filmmaker can use lighting to draw our attention to a person/ object or equally, to hide them.

Sound

There are three elements to a film soundtrack:

Dialogue – this can be used to give us clues as to character and what might happen next.

Music – this creates atmosphere, affecting us on a very emotional level.

Sound effects (SFX) – again, very effective at creating atmosphere. These sometimes do not fit with the image that we are seeing, thus creating a disorientating effect.

Editing

The term editing refers to the changing shots within a piece of film. The speed with which this happens has important role in creating atmosphere. For instance, if there is a car chase on screen, the editing will be rapid, making us excited. A countryside picnic scene, on the other hand, will probably feature slow editing; we relax and take in the details on the screen.

Title Graphics

The way in which the title and credits of a film are written and the colours chosen for both of them and the background tell us what type (genre) of film to expect. A horror film might employ a red Gothic font, whereas a science fiction film may use a bright green colour on a black background.