# Using film to develop literacy skills

# Film as text.

Film and visuals play a central role in the lives and cultural understanding of young people. Using film as text provides us with opportunities to support communication, comprehension and written expression. It can be an extremely effective tool for improving literacy skills.

The average US teen spends up to 3 hours a day in front of a screen (according to Nielson), so let us use that interest to make them critical consumers of media and better writers!

# Outcomes in some projects using film as text

There have been several recent projects, investigating the efficacy of using film as text. One such is the Media Literacy Project based in Bradford, England. This project involved over 1,000 children in 37 schools over a three-year period. The final results, published recently, the children demonstrated above average progress in writing (the original aim of the project) but also improved in reading results. 93% of the students achieved a level 4 (the appropriate level for their grade) whereas the previous year only 77% had achieved this level.

Media Literacy Project

Another such project - The Leads Partnership Project: Improving Literacy Through Film (2014/15) recorded a number of improvements in pupils who were regularly engaged in film watching and filmmaking, including: 96% improvement in average points' progress in reading; 60% improvement in average points' progress in writing; and 75% improvement in attitude to learning.

Leeds Partnership Project

# Activity 1. Name that film

Can you tell what film is summarised here?

**Once upon a time,** there was a young boy who had lost his parents and was raised by wolves.
**One day** it was decided that he must go back to his village to live because a man-hating tiger had been made aware of his presence.
**Suddenly,** he was taken hostage by a gang of unruly monkeys
**The hero** confronted the tiger and scared him away.
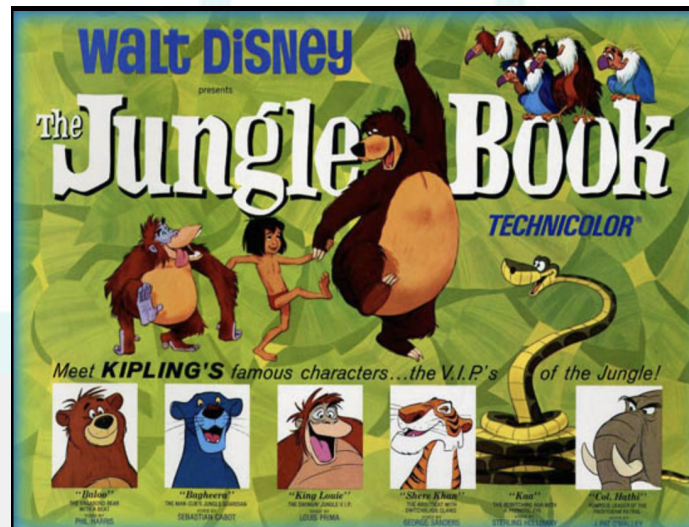**Finally**, the hero was welcomed back to his village and lived happily ever after.

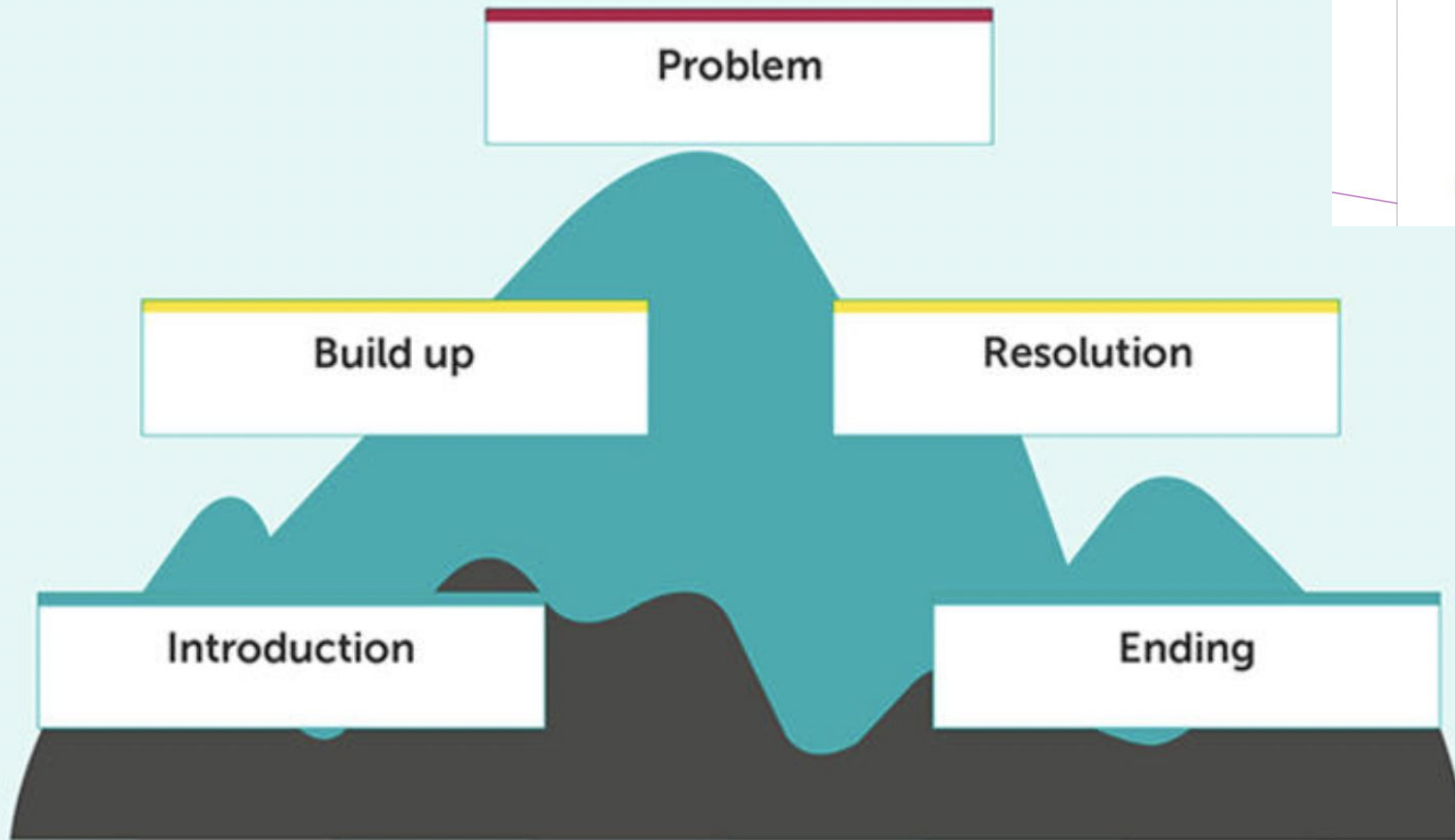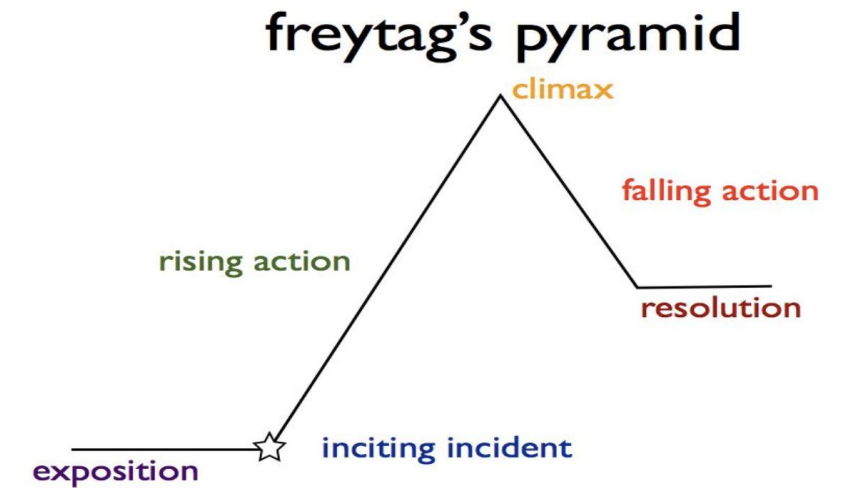| Once upon a time | One day | Suddenly | The hero | Finally |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

Students can begin with creating a synopsis, or summary of a film, using the template supplied, to deconstruct a favourite film.

Students can be divided into groups and each group can feed back their plot summary to the rest of the class who guess what film they've summarised.

# Activity 2: Story mountains

freytag's pyramid

climax

rising action

falling action

resolution

exposition

inciting incident

Problem

Build up

Resolution

Introduction

Ending

The story mountain is a simplified version of a story arc (or Freytag's pyramid).

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Most films follow a set of narrative structures but within these strictures the narrative possibilities almost infinite. They are a useful tool to facilitate pupils in planning a coherent and structured narrative.

In a standard story arc, we being with equilibrium (normal life and routine), then an inciting incident (something unusual) happens and changes everything for the protagonist (main character) by giving them an obstacle (problem) to overcome. Finally during the climax (the most exciting part) the protagonist finds a solution and a new equilibrium is born. The protagonist has usually learned something about themselves by the end of the narrative journey.

Students should begin by reviewing favourite films to follow the narrative structure, to see how it works, before designing their own.

# The 3Cs and the 3Ss

The 3Cs (colour, character, camera) and the 3Ss (story, setting, sound) are features of all film texts. They can be used as a basis to deconstruct or construct any text, and build on pupils' prior knowledge and engagement with a variety of visual media from a young age.

Let's see what that feels like!

# Activity 3: Sound on/vision off



Mog's Christmas Calamity
Christmas 2015
FUTURE SHORTS

Pupils will

- Demonstrate and develop active listening skills
- Deduce and infer meaning and consider purpose of a film text through analysis of sounds
- Demonstrate prediction and encoding skills

1. Choose a short sequence from a film – preferably one which contains a variety of different sounds and has little or no dialogue. Play the soundtrack, without images, twice through for pupils to listen to, encouraging them to identify the different sounds they hear.
2. Lead discussion using questions like: Is there music in the film? Are there moments of silence? Was it quiet/Was it loud? What instruments could you hear? Was it fast/ was it slow? Was there any speech/dialogue? How did the sounds make you feel?
3. Ask pupils to respond to the clip, by thinking about and writing down what they heard and what they would expect to see. Encourage pupils to consider all the Cs and Ss – what colours are they imagining? When will they see a close-up or an establishing shot? What characters will there be? What does the setting look like? Where and when is the story taking place?
4. Now ask pupils to demonstrate their ideas by drawing a picture of the scene and labelling it with descriptions of the sounds, using paper and colouring pencils or an app that you use in school.
5. FInally, watch the clips with the images. Take a still from the sequence and ask pupils to imagine that this was a book and to write the opening and closing paragraph/chapter to explain the story for the reader.

This activity will help learners to hear sound when they read and write and support deeper analysis and construction of richer texts

Teachwire

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# Activity 4: Mind map the film for predictive writing

Pupils will

- Demonstrate and develop active listening skills
- Deduce and infer meaning and consider purpose of a film text through analysis of 3Cs and 3Ss
- Demonstrate prediction and writing skills
1. Choose a short  sequence from a film or a trailer (to get an impression of a full story)
2. GIve pairs or small groups a copy of the [3cs and 3Ss question card](#) Assign each group *one* of the items to focus on.
3. Watch the film again and support groups of learners to discuss the questions for their assigned C or S.
4. Facilitate the creation of a class 3Cs and 3Ss mind map
5. Use the mind map to form the basis of a piece of predictive writing about the story. Depending on English level and learner age this could include writing the first chapter of the book of the story of the film, writing a synopsis of the story in 50 words or writing an entry for an IMDB entry/a review site entry to guide viewers on who would enjoy the film/encourage audiences to watch it.

Wales

# Activity 5: Record & Playback

Used to illustrate understanding of a point, revision material, discussion starter.

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