

Reading films in the classroom

Before children start making their own films, it's important to look at how other people do it. Look at short sections (no more than a minute or two long): opening sequences, key scenes, television advertisements or trailers.

Moving image sequences build up their meaning in a number of different ways, and it's a good idea to look at each of these separately.

Activities

The whole sequence

- How long is the sequence?
- How many separate shots are in it?

Individual shots

(Use the pause button)

Look at everything you can see in the shot and describe it.

Now describe what kind of shot it is, using the right technical terms if you can.

Think about the following:

- Framing
- Lens
- Camera position
- Camera movement
- Lighting and colour

Why has the shot been filmed in this way?

What does it tell us about

- the characters
- the setting
- the story?

How the shots are connected together (editing)

- Is the editing fast or slow?
- Does it speed up?
- How are the shots joined together - with cuts, or with transitions?
- If there are transitions, why have these been used?
- Does the sequence show action that seems to be continuous ('continuity editing')?
- Or does it link a series of different images to build up an impression ('montage')?
- If it's 'continuity editing' sequence, is it all set in one place, or in two places where things are going on at the same time? ("cross-cutting")

Effects

Are there any special effects - special colours, sepia, black-and-white, computer graphics? Why?

Titles and text

Are there any words on the screen? If so, what style of type is used? What does it suggest?

Sound

You can try playing the sequence without the sound to see what difference it makes.

Then try playing different music.

You can also start by covering the screen and listening to the sound first:

- What can you hear?
- What sort of images would you expect?
- What type of film do you think it is?
- If there's music, what kind of music and how does it make you feel?
- If there are voices, what sort of person is talking?
- If there is natural sound, what is it?

Characters

In an opening sequence which features several characters, you can look at what the sequence tells us about the character. Each group could discuss a different character. You can consider all the things above, and also things like:

- what are they wearing?
- are they big or tall, fat or thin, rich or poor?
- how are they speaking?
- what are they doing?
- how do they behave towards other people, and how do other people behave towards them?
- what kind of place are they in?