

## **TEACHING TRAILERS** <sup>plus+</sup>

Following the success of our popular study pack Teaching Trailers (May 2000), Film Education are delighted to present Teaching Trailers Plus , featuring a selection of the forthcoming Summer releases for 2001.

This extensive resource has been compiled by Film Education in response to requests from teachers and students requiring up-to-date marketing material for classroom projects . It is designed to be used in conjunction with the Teaching Trailers Plus trailer reel, available free of charge from Film Education. The resource focuses on the study of film marketing , looking at posters, press kits and related aspects of genre and narrative in addition to study of the trailer reel itself.

As some of the activities are designed to be undertaken BEFORE viewing the trailer reel it is recommended that teachers read through all sections of the resource before starting work on the unit with students.

Film Education are proud of our unique connections with the film industry and will endeavour to continue to provide teachers and students with up-to-date materials for classroom study.

# PRESS KITS

**Press kits** are sent to journalists all over the country to give them information about forthcoming films. They are one of the basic tools of any publicity department. Kits include:

- **a set of stills** ie photos which have been taken during the making of the film. These may be images from the film itself, studio portraits of the stars, photographs of the production crew working with the actors and so on. These stills have been authorised for printing in newspapers and magazines; the publication does not have to clear copyright further. They are usually in black and white, because this reproduces better and is more cost effective.

- **a list of cast and crew credits.** This will be invaluable to a journalist writing about the film - all the information needed is to hand and more importantly, spelt correctly!

- **production notes** form the bulk of any press kit. This gives the journalist a synopsis of the film and provides interesting information such as elements of costume design, location choices, issues raised by the film, choices in casting and how the stars feel about their roles; all the sort of stuff which could be used to write an article for their publication.

- **biographies and filmographies of the cast, director and producer.** Again it is helpful to the journalist to have this information to hand to incorporate into a written piece.

The front page of a press kit will display the title of the film, written in the graphics which have been chosen for all the publicity surrounding the release. It will also contain the title and logo of the company which is distributing the film - they are of course responsible for the creation, production and distribution of the press kit itself as part of their role.

## Tasks

- Look at the examples of press kits here. How much space is devoted to each section and why do you think this is?

In what order is the information generally found? Why?

- Each press kit contains a synopsis of the film, which must make it appear attractive to the reader. Look at the synopses for Final Fantasy and pick out the words and phrases which have been included to make the film sound exciting.

The role of the synopsis is to highlight the plot and major character(s) and hint at what might happen without giving too much away. Think of three films you have seen and plan what you would include / exclude in a synopsis for each one.

- Read through the comments of the cast and crew about the film. Write down all the a) positive things b) negative things that are said about the film, cast and crew. Are you surprised by your findings? Can you explain them?

Choose one film. What aspects / features of the film have been highlighted by the press kit? ( eg location, stars, special effects )

- Look at the stills authorised by the publicity office to promote the film:

- What impression of the film do they give?

What type of shot is each?

- long shot
- medium shot
- close – up

What shots are used in general? Why do you think this is?

In the biography/filmography section you will find a list of all the films, TV and stage work undertaken by each of the principal stars. Choose a star, read through their previous roles and try to suggest reasons why they might have chosen to participate in each production. Think budget, past roles, style of film, location, possible personal interests, success of previous projects.

## Web sites

Film web sites can be official or unofficial . An official web site is set up by the distributors of the film as part of the marketing campaign. An unofficial web site is set up by fans wanting to express their own opinions and exchange information with other interested parties.

The inclusion of a web site in a marketing campaign has meant far greater accessibility to material about the film for an interested audience in two ways:

- Most web sites are created to coincide with the release of a film in the United States. This is generally in advance of the release date in the UK and other territories - information is thus available at a much earlier stage than was previously possible, before the poster and trailer campaigns start to raise awareness over here.
- Production information about cast, crew, stills from the film and even moving image clips are available for all to see. This information would previously only have been available to the press.

An official web site will be designed to complement the ‘ look ‘ of a marketing campaign, with the same graphics and images used as in the poster and trailer. However, the interactive nature of the Internet means a web site can involve an audience in the actual process of raising awareness to a far greater extent than was previously possible.

- Look at some of the web sites for the films which appear on the trailer reel and answer the following questions:

<http://www.tombraidermovie.com>

<http://aimovie.warnerbros.com>

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- How does the visual look of the film complement the style and content of the film? ( use your knowledge from the trailer reel )
- How does the visual look of the site reflect the age and gender of the target audiences for each film?
- What features of these sites do you consider to be educational? Explain your answers.
- What interactive features are there on each site?
- In which sites are you invited to submit an e – mail address? For what purpose? How might these be used to enhance the marketing campaign?
- How do the sites encourage you retain a permanent reminder of the film to be released?
- Compare the web sites for a) Josie and the Pussycats and AI or b) Cats and Dogs and A Knight's Tale in as much detail as possible.

# Identifying Genre

## Initial Impressions

### Titles

The title of a film is what first catches our attention and arouses our interest in a film. As such, the choice of a title is a crucial part of the marketing campaign and can make a big difference as to whether or not the film is successful at the box office. The title of a film, along with other aspects of the marketing campaign may be altered to fit the particular cultural requirements of the territory in which the film is released.

- What does a title need to do/be if it is to attract an audience for the film? What should it NOT do/be?
- Think of ten titles which you consider helped to sell the film to an audience. Why were they so effective?

### Title graphics

The title graphics of a film play an important part in giving us further information about a film. The choice of font, colour ( and background colour ) , size, shape and additional attached graphics such as the ears in Shrek are all possible indications as to the genre and target audience for the film.

- Look at the title graphics for the following films. What do each of them tell you about the film which they promote ? Be as specific as you can in your answer, including all the aspects mentioned above.

NB. It may help you to consider what other films you have seen with similar title graphics.

- Experiment with changing the colour , font and size of the graphics. How does this affect our perception of the film ?

### Images

Looking at the title graphics in isolation is an interesting exercise but we would never normally encounter them in this mode . We usually see them against the backdrop of a poster or in the context of a trailer ; in this way, the clues we pick

up from the graphics are reinforced and enlarged upon by the visual images we see and by the addition of further text in the form of a tag line ,credit block and critics' comments.

- Look at the stills here and try to match each one up with the most appropriate set of title graphics.

- When you have the correct match for each, answer the following questions :

- What further assumptions as to the narrative, genre and of audience of each film can you make ? On what are you basing your answers ? Be as detailed as possible, remembering to consider as many of the following as you can for each still:

setting,  
clothing,  
lighting,  
facial expression / body language of any characters  
film style eg animation

- How did the presence of stars help in giving you information about a particular film ? Why ?

- In which instances did you use prior knowledge of the following to help you make your choice ? Historical events / prequels / TV series / books / games ?
- This type of cross - referencing between different media is called intertextuality. All the films you have encountered so far are due for release over the Summer 2001 holiday period . Why do you think there is such a reliance on known texts in this set of films ?

## Genre as classification

Genre is a means of classifying which enables us to group together films according to narrative and film style. However, within each genre we can classify further into sub – genres. For example a film may fall mainly into the classification of science fiction but may feature a relationship which means a love story is a strong factor in the narrative.

- Look at the following stills for The Mummy Returns, High Heels and Low Lifes and Princess and the Warrior. If you had been given these instead of the previous choice of stills to determine genre, how would this have influenced your perception of the films?
- In teams of four, group the films you have seen on the reel in categories according to genre. What headings did you use? What criteria did you use? What difficulties did you encounter? Try overlapping the genre circles you have created to classify the films differently.

## Animation

- View the trailers for Recess, Final Fantasy, Tomb Raider and Shrek. Answer the following questions:
  - `who is the target audience for each in terms of age and gender ? What information are you using to come to this conclusion? - you should include detail of narrative, character, lighting, colour and setting in your answer.
  - animated films often create characters with exaggerated physical characteristics. Watch the trailers with no sound and identify a) the heroes/ heroines b) the villains c) the comedy characters. Which of their characteristics have been exaggerated and to what effect? How does the framing add to the overall effect ? Now listen to the soundtrack. How important are the voices in creating character ?
  - Animated tales often follow traditional narrative patterns. Shrek is a film which seems to conform to the rules of a fairy tale but it is not as straightforward as it seems...
  - List the traditional conventions you can identify in Shrek, then say what clues we are given that this will not be a straightforward fairy tale – are these mainly visual or verbal ? Would it work the other way around?
  - Visit the website for Shrek at [www.shrek.com](http://www.shrek.com)



- and read the character descriptions for Shrek, Donkey, Fiona, Farquard and the Dragon. Highlight which phrases suggest that Shrek is indeed a modern day fairytale.
- The image you see here is a teaser poster for Shrek. What indication is given (if any) that this is a fairytale with a difference? Design a main poster which conveys that this is the case.

## Science Fiction

- What are the conventions we expect to see in a science fiction film in terms of a) sound and b) visual images?
- View the science fiction films on the trailer reel. How is the text on screen used to sell the films?
- Who do you think is the main audience for science fiction films? Why is this?
- Why do you think so many are due for release over the Summer holiday period?

## Marketing a Film

When a new film is made, it has to be advertised like any other new product, to let people know it exists and to encourage them to go to the cinema to see it. The advertising of a film is known as film promotion or film marketing and the people who are responsible for this are the distribution company, so - called because they distribute (give out) the films to the cinemas and distribute the promotional material around the country.

The way in which a film is promoted can have a huge effect on whether or not it is successful. Films are expensive to make and if the public don't buy tickets at the box office to see the film, a lot of money will be lost.

- What films have you seen recently? What made you want to go and see them? Make a list of all the factors that influenced you. Then put them in order of priority.
- Make a list of all the different ways in which you might hear about a film. Put these in order as to which give you the most information. Now re-order them to show which are the ones which make you really want to see a film. What does this say about the way you personally make choices about your film viewing/how does this compare with your friends?
- What cinemas are there in your local area? Are there any differences between them? How do you find out details of what films are showing and when? Visit the web sites for several cinemas. How do the web sites reflect the different nature of the organisations?

## **Planning a promotional campaign for a film**

When the distributors agree to market a new film, they will watch it several months before it is released into the cinema and plan a marketing campaign. This includes deciding what should go into the posters, trailers, web sites and other material which will market the film. There are several important points to consider:

Who will be the most likely to want to see this film?

Anyone may decide they want to see the film but there are some people who are more likely to want to see it than others. These people are called the target audience and the marketing will aim to make the film look attractive to these people. For example, a film like *Recess* will need to appeal to children, whereas a film like *Josie and the Pussycats* will attract a teenage audience. Many films are made for people between the ages of 15 – 24, because this is the age group which visits the cinema most often.

What type of film is this?

Films can often be put into types such as comedy, horror, science fiction, family film. These are known as genres (the French word for type). The marketing will show the audience that they have seen this type of film before and if they enjoyed, they should come to see this one.

What is different about this film?

Although a film may be similar to one we have already seen, each film has something different about it, something unique. This may be the star or the director, or it could be something about the story or where it is set. It may even involve the style of the film. This is known as the Unique Selling Point of the film (USP for short). For instance, there are many films about dinosaurs but the Unique Selling Point of one might be that it is a Disney animation, another because it has computer generated images mixed with real life. A horror story might be unique because of the type of creature that comes to life or because Bruce Willis, who doesn't normally act in this type of film, is the star.

How much money can be spent on the marketing of this film?

If the film has cost a lot of money to make, it can be worth the distributors spending more money to market it. The amount of money spent on the marketing is known as the budget . If the marketing encourages lots of people to buy tickets at the box office to see the film, the cinema will make lots of money, the filmmaker will get back the money they spent on making it and the distributors will make money too, so everyone is happy!

## Narratives

When we watch a trailer we know from experience that we are seeing the most exciting, funny, significant or dramatic parts of a film and that we must interact with these to create a whole story from the parts we are given. A trailer is designed to create a 'want-to -see' reaction in an audience. To this end the trailer will give the audience some amount of information about a film in terms of narrative and character but equally will aim to raise questions which can only be answered by seeing the whole film.

For instance in *The Princess and the Warrior*

we see:

question raised by this

The heroine with a sea - shell

what significance will this shell have in the story?

Heroine knocked down in road

is she dead? is what we see a dream? the afterlife? is the rest of the trailer prior to the accident?

Heroine and friend jump off building

Why? what happens to them? is this real?

Watch three trailers. For each one, list five events that we see and alongside these, the questions that each event raises.

Which of the trailers you have seen gives a strong indication of the narrative in the film? Make a list of the features that are needed for this to happen.

Which trailers do NOT give you a great deal of information about the narrative? What DO they convey? What elements do they use to do this?

What is the narrative of Josie and the Pussycats? Read the synopsis and then create a voiceover which conveys more information.

View the trailer for AI . What indications are we given as to the narrative? Of all the information that we are given, what is the most crucial? At what point in the trailer are we given it and why? How important is the soundtrack in conveying meaning here?

Some trailers give us more information than others. This may be because they are teaser trailers, designed to whet our appetite for a film and 'tease' us so we want to know more. Teasers are followed up by a main trailer campaign closer to the film's actual release date. Trailers advertising sequels to successful films often don't need to give us as much info

- Watch the trailers for Planet of the Apes , Dr. Doolittle 2 and Josie and the Pussycats.

- Of the trailers that you have seen, which :

- tell the story
- create an atmosphere

## The Poster

The poster is the most important means of letting people know about the release of a new film. We normally only see a poster for a short space of time, so it must immediately catch our attention and make us want to see the film. This is why most things on a poster appear large and why bright colours are used. The poster must also get across information about the film such as :

the title  
what the story is about  
who is starring in it / directing it  
what type of film it will be  
what is unique about it

The poster uses both images (pictures) and text (words) to give us this information. The most important image is called the key image, because it is the key to what the film is about, but there will be background images too. The most important text is the title graphics and the names of the stars and director. The catch line (like a slogan on an advert) helps us remember the film and the credit block (the smaller writing at the bottom) tells us who produced and distributed the film. Every part of the poster is carefully put together to encourage us to want to see the film.

- A web site address is usually part of the credit block
- The title is large and centred so the name of the film takes precedence. The graphics look like the molten gold of Egyptian treasure and the style suggests antiquity through the tails on the letters.
- The central M is like an amulet and has a glow suggestive of both mysticism and menace.
- Predominant colours are gold on black, echoing the treasure of Egyptian tombs and the richness of the culture
- The central image reflects an Egyptian drawing in its regularity of form. Scantly – clad women fighting will attract the audience's attention and arouse interest in the plot.
- Background images confirm the traditional Egyptian setting and the watching crowds suggest a large scale production with emphasis on sets.
- Lighting appears candlelit – evokes mystery and romance and echoes the discovery of the tombs.

- New faces are mixed with recognisable stars from the prequel.
- Star names are not given high profile, suggesting the plot is more important than the stars in this film.
- The body language of the four women on the poster emphasises the different roles they will play in the narrative.
- Facial expressions are tense and watchful, suggesting excitement and danger.
- Handsome young people will make this film enjoyable to watch
- Size of the image conveys that these will be the central characters. Body language suggests a love interest and emphasises traditional male and female roles.
- Costume suggests a mixture of antiquity and modern.
- The Unique Selling Point is that this is a sequel to the very successful film The Mummy as echoed in the strong similarity of the marketing campaign.
- The genre is instantly recognisable as action / adventure, which traditionally attracts a family target audience. The poster emphasises that the film has something for everyone

## **POSTER - GENERAL QUESTIONS**

Look at a selection of posters and try to answer the following questions :

- What is the title of the film? What can you say about the way in which the title graphics have been written?
- Describe the key images on your poster. Why have they been chosen? What other pictures can you see ?
- What do you think the film will be about ? What type or genre of film will it be? What makes you say this?
- Who is starring in the film? Where are the stars' names placed on the poster? Why?
- What are the most important colours on your poster? Why do you think these were chosen?

- What is the catch line? (this is like the slogan on an advert)
- Who do you think is the target audience for the film? How has the poster been made attractive to these people?
- What do you think is the Unique Selling Point (USP) of this film? (What makes it different from other films like it?)
- What information can you find in the credit block (the block of writing at the bottom of the poster)
- Who are the companies involved in the distribution and promotion of this film? (Look at the bottom of the poster)

## The trailer

The trailer, like the poster must encourage us to want to see the film. A poster has a hard task – it must catch our attention and give us information about a film in one still image. It is much easier for a trailer to give us a real taste of what the film is like because it uses moving image, like the film itself.

Moving images, whatever they are, have a far better chance of catching our attention than something which is still. The trailer holds our attention because the images change really quickly and we must concentrate all the time or we may miss something. Added to this, a trailer uses sound to get its message across. Music, sound effects, speech from the film and the voiceover all join together to create an exciting mixture for our ears. The combination of sound and moving images is a very effective way of attracting us to see a film.

We usually see a trailer just before we are about to see a film, although sometimes a short version of them appears in the advert breaks on TV. Whether in the cinema or on TV, the distributors think carefully about who will be watching at this time and try to show a trailer which will be interesting to this type of audience. For example, a trailer for Thomas and the Magic Railroad would not be shown before an 18 certificate horror film at the cinema or in the break of Coronation Street because the distributors want as many children as possible to see it.

- At what point in the trailer are we told the name of the film? Why is this?
- Why are we told who is starring in the film? How is this information given to us?



- What type of action from the film do we see?
- What clues does the music give us as to what type of film the trailer is advertising?
- What can you say about the voice of the person delivering the voiceover? Why do you think this voice was chosen? What effect does it have?
- How does the speed of what we see compare to watching a clip from a film? Why is this? Does the speed alter through the trailer or stay the same?
- What information are we given in the very last frame of the trailer?
- Which is more effective in making you want to see the film, the poster or the trailer? Why is this?
- Where would you expect to see this trailer : (give reasons)
  - a) before what films at the cinema
  - b) before what TV programmes ?

## TEACHING TRAILERS <sup>PLUS+</sup> TASKS

- View the trailer reel provided. Have a piece of paper and a pen to hand. Write down the title of each film, the genre (type) of film it is and who you think the audience for each film is.
- How is the title used as a selling point both in terms of the actual title itself and its position within the trailer?
- What elements of the trailer enable you to immediately recognise the genre of the film? Why is it important from the distributor's point of view that the trailer highlights the genre of the film?
- Look at the trailers for Planet of the Apes, Final Fantasy and AI. What genre is each of these three films? What similarities and differences can you see between the three? How are the differences in style highlighted in the trailer?
- How did you decide who the audience for each film might be?
- All trailers have to be seen by the British Board of Film Classification before they are shown in this country. Why do you think we don't usually see the classification for a film as part of the trailer? In what instances would you see the classification of a film at the beginning of a cinema trailer?
- At the beginning of each trailer we are used to seeing the logo for the company which is distributing the film. How many distributors' names can you remember - and what are their logos?
- The trailers for 'Planet of the Apes', 'A.I.' and 'Dr. Doolittle 2' are teaser trailers, designed to whet your appetite for the film but not give too much away. What is the USP for each film and how does the trailer convey this?
- 'The Mummy Returns' is of course the sequel to a very successful film as is 'Dr. Doolittle 2'. How does the trailer market the film to both those who have seen the first films and those who haven't?
- Stars are a very important factor in marketing a film. Look at 'Dr Doolittle 2' and 'Harry Potter'. How have the trailers been constructed to make maximum use of the star potential?
- The director and/or producer of a film may also play an important role in attracting an audience to see a film. Look at 'Planet of the Apes' and comment on the way in which the director has been marketed in this trailer. Compare this with the director's profile in any of the other trailers on the reel. Can you think of

other ways in which the director/producer could be used on a trailer to help sell a film

- Choose one of the films whose main trailer appears on the reel. Your task is to create a teaser trailer for this film. Remember the USP of the film must come across in the teaser. Storyboard your ideas, including a soundtrack. If you have access to editing facilities you could take this one step further and produce your teaser on video, using footage from the main trailer.
- Trailers sometimes incorporate recommendations from journalists in the form of quotes – in much the same way that posters do. Look at the trailers for 'The Terrorist' and 'Room to Rent'. What do the comments say, who has made them and what does this tell you about the target audience for the film?
- Which is the more important feature of a trailer - vision or sound? Look again at the trailer for 'A Knight's Tale' and at one other from the reel, and comment on the sound used. In which of the other trailers you have seen does the soundtrack play an important marketing role?
- Trailers often incorporate a voiceover and this is important in setting the tone for the film. Listen to the voiceover for 'High Heels and Low Lifes' and 'Room to Rent'. Comment on the voice used and say how it is used as a marketing device. Compare the voice to that in 'The Mummy Returns'.
- Which of the trailers do NOT use a voiceover? What do they gain or lose by this?
- Which films on the reel are aimed at young children? How has the film language (lighting, colour, sound, framing, editing) been exaggerated to appeal to this audience?
- Write a set of guidelines for a trailer, assuming the person you are instructing has no knowledge of what a trailer actually is.

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