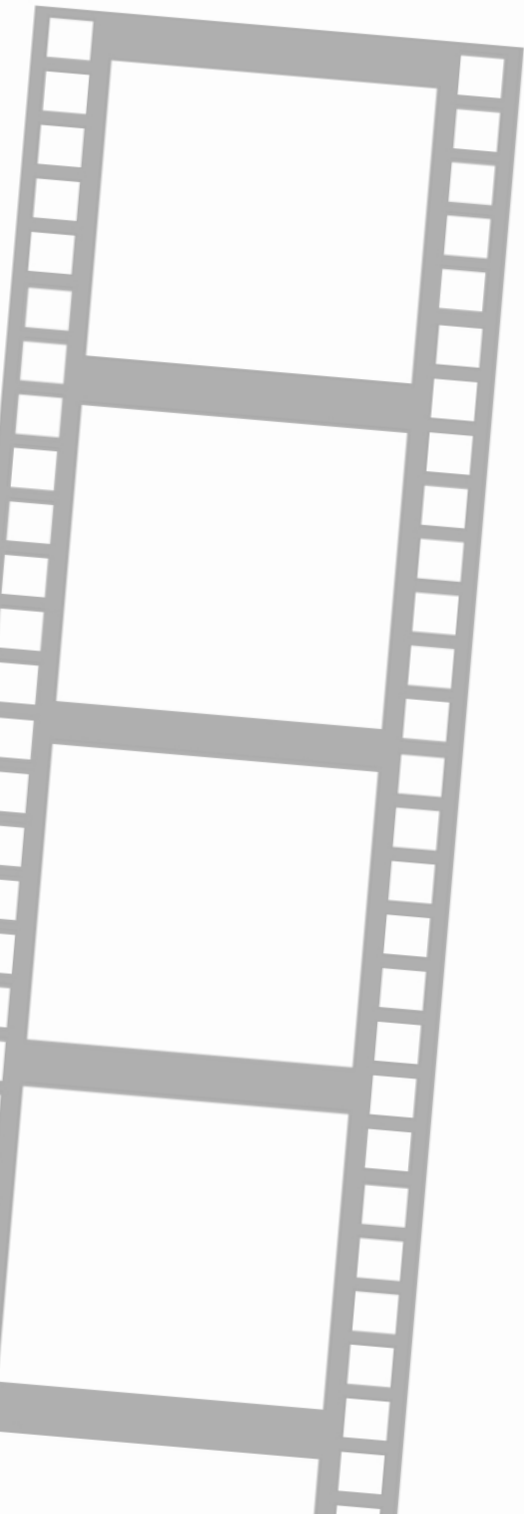# UNIT 5:
BEING A DIRECTOR

Introduction:

Shakespeare is perhaps the most "adapted" author of all time. Each time his scripts are transferred to screenplays, they are influenced not only by the adapter, but by the director as well. The vision of the director is what enables the same old stories to be told over and over in unique ways. It is that unique vision of every director that keeps the audience curious to see how a familiar tale can be told anew.

Every version of *Romeo and Juliet* starts with the same script, containing the same scenes and the same words. However, the difference between Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 version and Baz Luhrmann's 1996 version is extraordinary. It is the director's job to create a matchless work of art regardless of how recognizable the story is.

The function of the director is to oversee every creative element of a film. The script editing, casting, shot selection, shot composition, and post-production editing are just some of the elements of a film that are typically controlled by the director.

In Unit 5, students will have an opportunity to become directors. They will create original screenplays based on familiar material and ultimately turn those screenplays into films.

UNIT 5: LESSON 1
THINKING LIKE A DIRECTOR
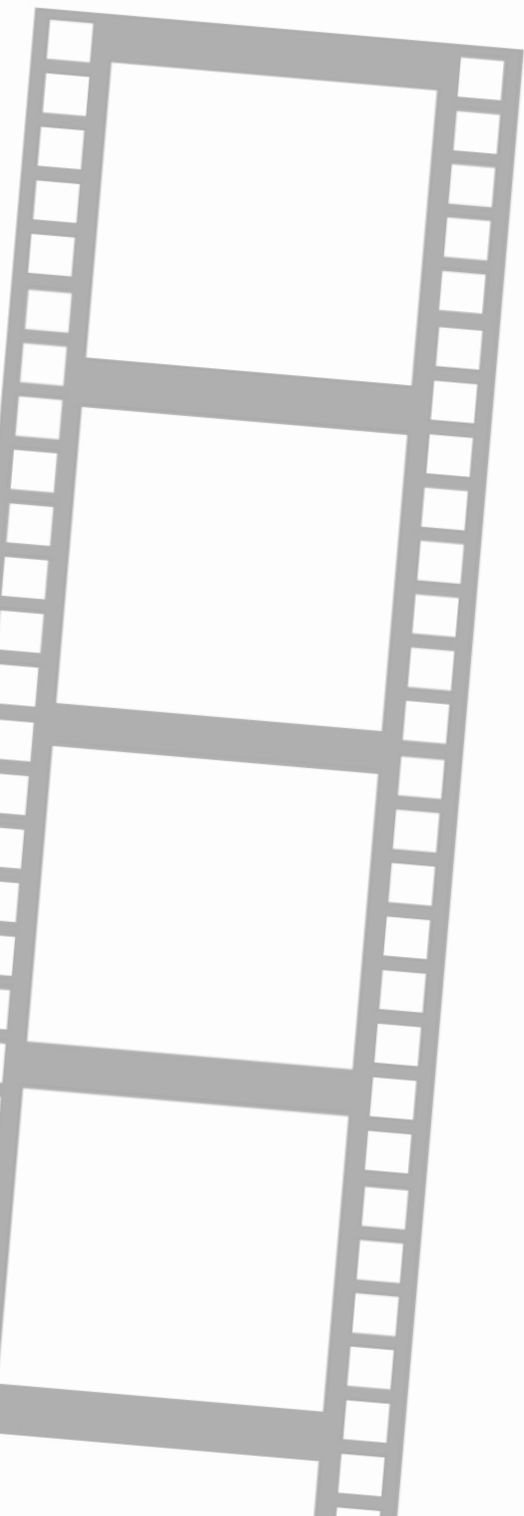
Objective:
To observe how directorial choices influence all elements of filmmaking

Materials:
• Copies of five different *Hamlet* videos or DVDs

(There are also enough available film versions of Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, King Lear, and Othello, should you prefer to teach from these scripts instead.)

For this lesson, IFC recommends using DVD copies of the films. This way class time is not wasted on fast-forwarding. Teachers may also transfer all versions to a single VHS tape (or, if you're really tech-savvy, to a DVD). You might even find a student who would volunteer to do this. Once you have made that compilation tape or DVD, you'll never have to rewind a tape or search for a scene again.

•The "Expert Group" Handout below

Introduction:
Hamlet, for many people, is best told classically (bring on the British accents and men in tights). *Hamlet* better serves others by being told from a modern point of view so that the concepts are easily grasped. Students who view different versions of the same scene will quickly learn the effect of directorial choices.

The Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com) lists 57 *Hamlets*, ranging from Sarah Bernhardt's short, *Le Duel d'Hamlet* (1900) and French silent film pioneer, Georges Méliès' version (1907) to Russian, Indian, German, and Italian versions. For this lesson, IFC recommends using these five:

Year	Director	Hamlet
1948	Laurence Olivier	Laurence Olivier
1990	Franco Zeffirelli	Mel Gibson
1996	Kenneth Branagh	Kenneth Branagh
2000	Michael Almereyda	Ethan Hawke
2000	Campbell Scott	Campbell Scott
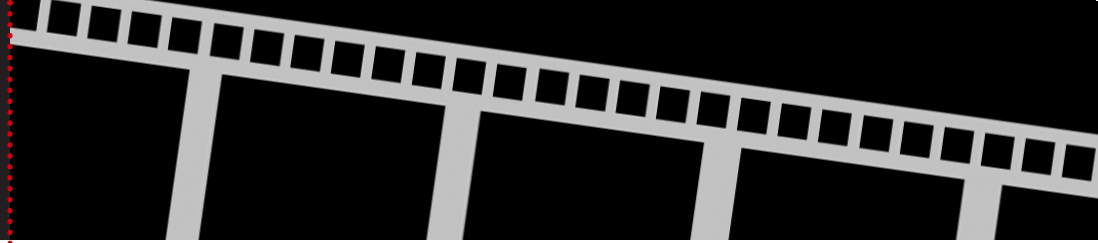
Feel free to substitute other versions of Hamlet. Tony Richardson's film with Nicol Williamson (1969), the BBC version with Derek Jacobi (1980), John Gielgud's Broadway adaptation with Richard Burton (1964), or the NY Public Theater production with Kevin Kline (1990) are all excellent adaptations. Some versions were made for television or recreated from stage versions, so the look and feel of them will be different from the commercial films.

The Auteur Theory

The *auteur* theory of filmmaking says that the director is the major creative force in a motion picture. *Auteur* is the French word for "author." In 1951, some young French critics associated with the French movie journal, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, put the "theory" forward. Just as a book has an author, they said, so must a film. The problem is that books are usually written by one person, whereas film is a collaborative art in which many people are involved, including set designers, costume designers, actors, cinematographers, sound technicians, etc. The *auteur* was the individual who clearly left the mark of his personality upon the entire film process. Generally, the *auteur* is the director.
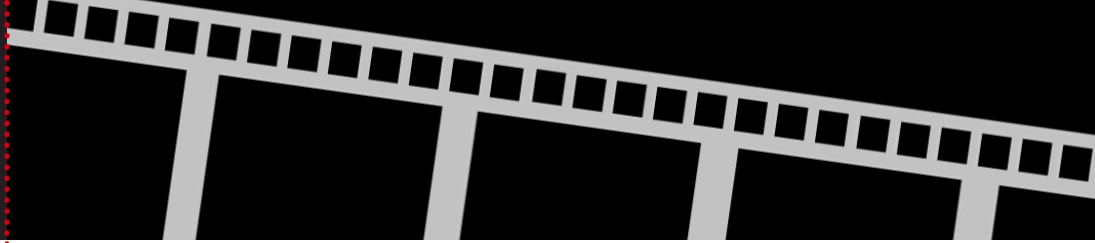
Procedure:

Organize the students into five groups:
1. Screenwriters
2. Cinematographers
3. Sound Technicians
4. Set and Costume Designers
5. Actors

Define the role of DIRECTOR. Take this opportunity to explain the *auteur* theory (see sidebar)-the theory of filmmaking in which the director is the key to the look and feel of a motion picture.

Pass out the Expert Group Handout to each group. Students should examine ACT III, SCENE 1 from *Hamlet* (in all five versions of the film) and take notes on their specific area. Each group should use a different approach:

1. **Screenwriters** should compare the text of the original play to the text used in the film versions. They should note missing and additional lines.
2. **Cinematographers** should note and describe camera movement and angles, lighting, etc. They should also observe the effect of editing.
3. **Sound Editors** should listen for all music, background sounds, sound effects, etc.
4. **Set and Costume Designers** should examine the look of the film. They should note and describe the sets, costumes, props, etc., paying particular attention to colors and symbols.
5. **Actors** should note and describe the varying performances, paying special attention to accents, subtext, and emphasis of certain words or certain lines.

Before showing the film versions of this scene, read aloud ACT III, SCENE 1 in class. Start with the literature. Since they will be seeing the scene five times, it's not necessary to do a comprehensive analysis, nor is it necessary to define all the words; students should fully comprehend the text after viewing the films.

Also, though it is not necessary to overwhelm students with film terms for this assignment, they should be able to identify terms from earlier lessons (i.e., basic camera angles and movements). All of those terms are in the Glossary.

Once the groups have been assigned and the text has been read aloud, view the first clip. In the first box on the handout, students should record which version they are watching for each task. After showing clip #1, give the students a few minutes to jot down their observations and discuss them within their groups. Open the class up for discussion of their findings. After calling on members from each "Expert Group," move on to the clip #2 and so forth. With each new version, rotate the focus of the groups. (Screenwriters become Cinematographers, etc.) Be prepared to spread this lesson over two class periods.
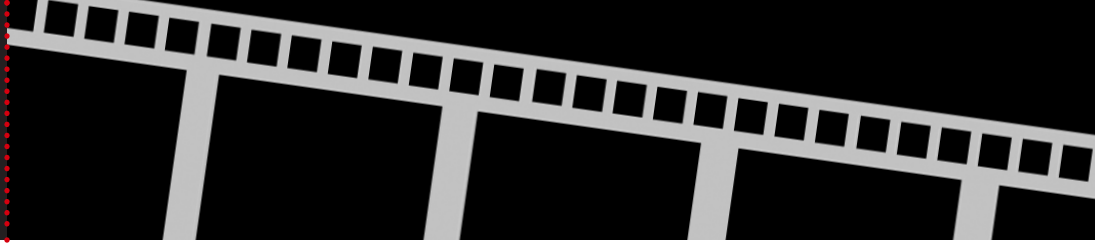
Hamlet Expert Group Handout

Director	Expert Group	Observations & Comments
	Screenwriter Closely follow the original text and note omissions, additions, pauses, stressed words, and rearrangements.	
	Cinematographer Note & describe camera movement and angles, lighting, etc. While it is not your official job, consider editing as well.	
	Sound Editor Listen for all music, background sounds, sound f/x, etc. (Turn away from the screen to get an unbiased opinion of the sounds.)	
	Set & Costume Designer Note & describe sets, costumes, props, etc. Pay particular attention to colors and symbols.	
	Actor Note & describe specific aspects of performances. (especially accents, subtext, and emphasis of certain words or lines).	

Hamlet 3.1

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. - Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.

Follow-Up:

The viewing of future film clips can be accompanied by discussion of text, sound, cinematography, set and costume design, and acting. Having been a member of an expert group, students will now be more informed and more articulate film viewers.

Assessment:

The goal of this lesson was for students to notice the strong effect of a director on all the elements of a film.

Evaluate the work in the following ways:

• Have the groups studied textual variance and questioned why some changes appeared in the films?

• Have the groups *listened* to the film and commented on the director's sound choices?

• Have the students taken notice of the cinematographers' technique and used the proper terms when describing what they have seen?

• Have the students observed and analyzed the set and costume design and how these elements added to the directors' vision?

• Have the students noted how the director's choices affected the actors' interpretation of the soliloquy?

Further Activities:

The goal of this lesson is to examine the influence a director has on a particular film.

To further demonstrate this, you could have your class compare a contemporary version of a popular film to the original film that came before it. Some films in which the influence of the director will be particularly interesting are:

• *The Alamo* (The John Wayne version is a trip.)

• *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (also makes an interesting literature-to-film discussion)

• *War of the Worlds*

• *Planet of the Apes*

Standards Addressed:

NCTE/IRA Standards

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for Students
The technology foundation standards for students are divided into six broad categories. Standards within each category are to be introduced, reinforced, and mastered by students. These categories provide a framework for linking performance indicators within the Profiles for Technology Literate Students to the standards. Teachers can use these standards and profiles as guidelines for planning technology-based activities in which students achieve success in learning, communication, and life skills.

Technology Foundation Standards for Students

1. Basic operations and concepts
• Students demonstrate a sound understanding of the nature and operation of technology systems.
• Students are proficient in the use of technology.

2. Social, ethical, and human issues
• Students develop positive attitudes toward technology uses that support lifelong learning, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity.

3. Technology productivity tools
• Students use technology tools to enhance learning, increase productivity, and promote creativity.
• Students use productivity tools to collaborate in constructing technology-enhanced models, prepare publications, and produce other creative works.

6. Technology problem-solving and decision-making tools
• Students use technology resources for solving problems and making informed decisions.
• Students employ technology in the development of strategies for solving problems in the real world.

UNIT 5: LESSON 2
THE PITCH
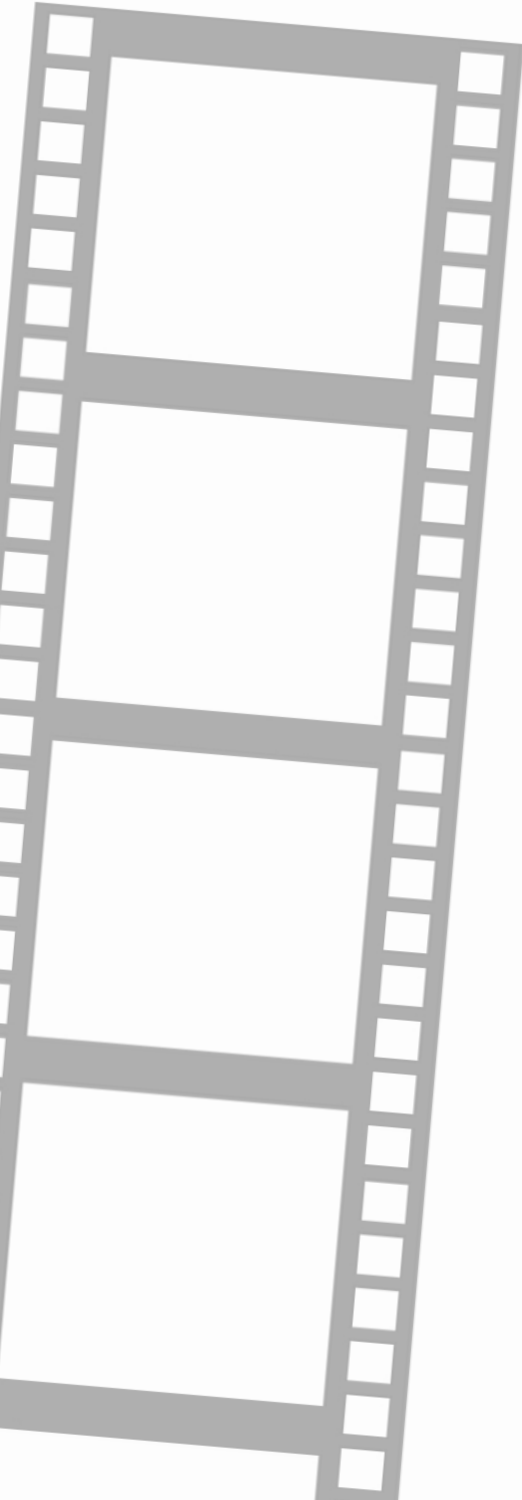
Objective:
To allow a piece of literature to inspire a short film

Materials:
• The text of the literary work that the student has selected
• A copy of the sample treatment from earlier lessons

Introduction:
Students are nearing the final project: the writing, filming, and editing of an original film. Once this lesson is completed, students will have the basic outline for a literature-based, short film, and they will have "pitched" it to their classmates.

Procedure:
Students now need to make a choice. Which piece of literature, of all the literature they've studied in class, will they choose to inspire the making of a short film?

Once they've selected a text, ask them to consider the following suggestions as they decide how to approach their films. (Of course, they may come up with their own ideas as well.) Once they've chosen a creative path, their next step is to write a treatment for their short film.

1. Look closely at the major characters of the work and consider their personality traits and flaws. Create a modern character who shares these traits and flaws and who might be the center of the film. Beginning with that character, conceive a plot for a short film.

2. Consider the major themes that the class discussed while reading all assigned novels, plays, poems, and short stories. Pick a theme from one of them that could be illustrated in a modern setting. Then, think of an original plot that could illustrate that theme.

3. Recall the plot lines of the works read in class. Select one that could be adapted either by making a film with a parallel plot line or one that could serve as a sequel (a movie or novel that continues a story begun in a previous work) or prequel (a movie or novel set at a time preceding the action of an existing work).

4. Think of a work whose setting was particularly interesting, unusual, or vivid. How could that setting be the centerpiece of a narrative film?

No matter how the students choose to allow the text to inspire their films, they should all stem from a literary base. However, the reference to the work could be as subtle as a casual allusion to the text within dialogue or even simply acknowledging the literary work as an inspiration for the film in the opening titles.

So, the film might begin with:

The Film Title
inspired by (or based on)

The Great Gatsby
by
F. Scott Fitzgerald

The example provided in the handout deals with a student inspired by *The Color Purple*. The film treatment deals with a young girl in an abusive relationship similar to that of Celie in the novel. In the treatment, the young girl is inspired by Celie's plight and takes action to confront her abusive boyfriend.

Once all members of the class have written their treatments, give them each 3-5 minutes to pitch their concepts to the rest of the class. (Explain what a "pitch" is and give them the handout.)

The class will be evaluating the concept and presentation of the pitch. (See handout below.)

Assignment:
Teachers can use as much or as little class time as they wish for students to develop their treatments and create their film pitches. It is important, however, that students have plenty of time (whether in class or at home) to create a solid treatment and pitch.

Follow-Up:

These treatments will ultimately evolve into the final project films. (Students should know that from the beginning of this lesson.) Not all the films will be made. Just like in the real world, the pitches are life or death for the film. The class's evaluation of each film pitch will decide which films will actually be made by the class. Choose a method for elimination and selection (voting is a good option) and narrow it down to 4-5 finalists.

Once the films have been selected, teachers will form the film crew, the screenplays will be written, and the films will be shot.

Assessment:

The goal of this lesson was for students to allow literature to inspire a creative idea for an original short film. Students also needed to effectively pitch their film concepts to the class.

Evaluate the work in the following ways:
• Did they select a literary work studied in class to inspire their film?
• Did they come up with a creative or inspired adaptation of an original work of literature?
• Did they write a film treatment based on their chosen piece of literature?
• Did they make an oral "pitch" to "sell" their film idea to the rest of the class?
• Did they listen to and ask questions about the other class members' treatments?
• Did they effectively evaluate the other class members' ideas and ultimately select the final films to be made?

Unit 5: Lesson 2: Assessment

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**your score**
Attention to Audience	Did not attempt to engage audience.	Little attempt to engage audience.	Engaged audience and held their attention most of the time by remaining on topic and presenting facts with enthusiasm.	Engaged audience and held their attention throughout with creative articulation, enthusiasm, and clearly focused presentation.	
Clarity	No apparent logical order of presentation, focus is unclear.	Content is loosely connected; transitions lack clarity.	Sequence of information is well-organized for the most part, but more clarity with transitions is needed.	Development of thesis is clear through use of specific and appropriate examples; transitions are clear and create a succinct and even flow.	
Presentation Length	Greatly exceeding or falling short of allotted time.	Exceeding or falling short of allotted time.	Remained close to the allotted time.	Presented within the allotted time.	
Content	Story is unclear and information appears randomly chosen.	Story is clear, but supporting information is disconnected.	Information relates to a clear story; there are many relevant points, but they are somewhat unstructured.	Exceptional use of material that clearly relates to a focused story; there is an abundance of various supported materials.	
Creativity	Delivery is repetitive with little or no variety in presentation techniques.	Material is presented with little interpretation or originality.	Some apparent originality displayed through use of original interpretation of presented materials.	Exceptional originality of presented material and interpretation.	
Speaking Skills	Monotone; speaker seemed uninterested in material.	Little eye contact; fast speaking rate, little expression, mumbling.	Clear articulation of ideas, but apparently lacks confidence with material.	Exceptional confidence with material displayed through poise, clear articulation, eye contact, and enthusiasm.	

Treatment and Pitch Handout

Now that you have an idea for your film, it's time to write a treatment. A treatment is a brief synopsis of your idea and how it will look on film. It is not a script. Your treatment should be about 1-2 pages in length, written in persuasive, snappy language. Look at the handout from the earlier lesson for guidelines. You don't need to include too many film terms at this point; save those for the screenplay. Your treatment is what you will use as a guide when you pitch your idea to the class. So, edit it and rewrite it until it's exactly what you want. Be sure to include a title and be sure that the connection to the literary inspiration is clear.

Making the Pitch

As the day for making your pitch to the class approaches, you should practice pitching your idea to your friends and family. Watch their reactions. Are they interested in your idea? Did you tell the story in a friendly, engaging manner? Do they want to hear more? If they do, you're headed in the right direction.

When the big day comes, relax! Remember that you're here to generate interest in the story that moved you to try to create a film in the first place. It's your moment to convince the class that your idea is worth filming.

Remember that you are SELLING yourself and your idea. Your goal is to hook the people listening to your pitch. Be upbeat and positive. Use creative props if you think they'll help illustrate your story. Don't read from your treatment, but do distribute copies. At the end, be willing to answer questions readily and be flexible about suggestions. Believe in yourself and be positive! Your goal is to make the class your ally, as they may want to champion your idea to the teacher.

Your pitch might start out something like this:

"Here's a film based on the themes and plot of Alice Walker's The Color Purple.

Visualize this. Lisa, a 17-year old girl, is dating a guy named Michael, who treats her badly. We see them in school, and whenever he sees her, he is rude to her or says something nasty to her. She tells him that she hates it when he does that, but he answers that he's only kidding and that he really loves her. Then, we see Michael with his friends and he's saying some nasty things about Lisa.

Then we see Lisa with her friends. She has some heavy makeup on her face which clearly shows that she is covering up a bruise. She seems depressed and sullen, and her girlfriends offer their help and tell her she needs to end this abusive relationship. She makes a decision based on what her friends have said and walks angrily into the school. We then see her meeting her boyfriend Michael, and she's had enough. She walks right up to him, slams his locker shut, and confronts him. [continue] "

That should give you some good ideas. Good luck!
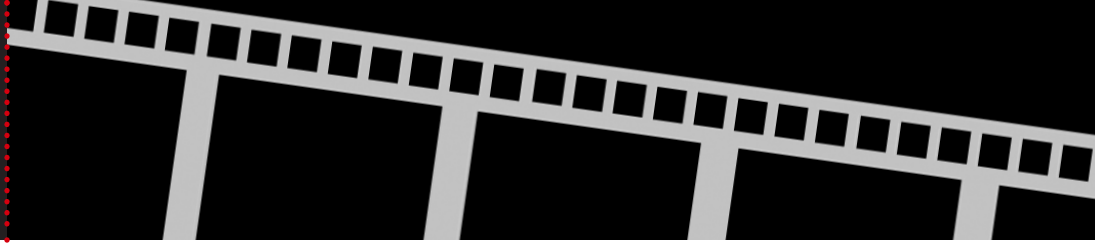
Evaluating the Pitch

Name of Student: _____

Film Title: _____

Assessor's Name: _____

Please evaluate the film proposal (pitch) using the following key:
1. Far Exceeds Expectations
2. Exceeds Expectations
3. Meets Expectations
4. Met some goals, with some problems
5. Many problems

CRITERIA	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity: Your delivery was clear and easy to understand.					
Specificity: You mentioned enough specific scenes, examples, and details.					
Relevance: Your treatment has a clear connection to a specific work of literature.					
Originality: The concept for your film is fresh and original.					
Practicality: Making your film is possible despite limited resources.					
Audience interest: I would want to be part of the team if this film was being made.					

Some Positive Comments:
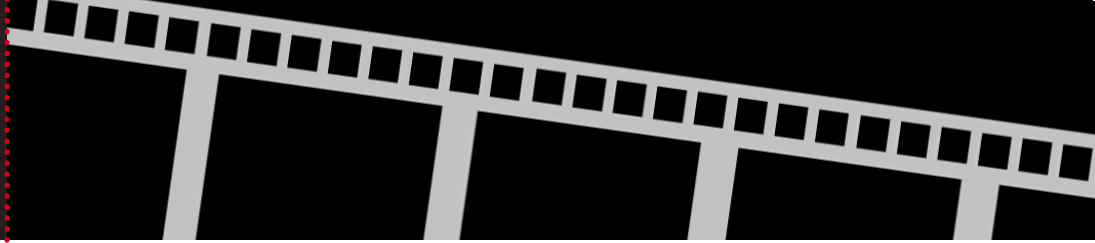
_____

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_____

_____

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4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

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1. Basic operations and concepts
• Students demonstrate a sound understanding of the nature and operation of technology systems.

2. Social, ethical, and human issues
• Students understand the ethical, cultural, and societal issues related to technology.
• Students practice responsible use of technology systems, information, and software.
• Students develop positive attitudes toward technology uses that support lifelong learning, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity.

4. Technology communications tools
• Students use telecommunications to collaborate, publish, and interact with peers, experts, and other audiences.
• Students use a variety of media and formats to communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences.

5. Technology research tools

• Students evaluate and select new information resources and technological innovations based on the appropriateness for specific tasks.

6. Technology problem-solving and decision-making tools

• Students use technology resources for solving problems and making informed decisions.
• Students employ technology in the development of strategies for solving problems in the real world.