DARIEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CURRICULUM GUIDE

Critical Approaches to Film and Media

Approved by the Board of Education
on January 9, 2007

DARIEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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PREFACE

This English Department curriculum guide is designed to articulate the content and context of this course within the English academic program. Its goal is to serve as a resource and instructional guide for teachers, as well as a document that describes the elements of the English academic program in the district. It is essential, in order to ensure the continued quality of the English program at Darien High School, that the curriculum template be seen as representative of the course and not complete in or of itself of the whole course curriculum. The Department's ability to add materials and to request new texts that add dimension or depth and the teachers' ability to create new units of study based on research or resources they discover is crucial to the quality of study for students in the English program. The professional development workshops that teachers attend frequently, both in and out of the District, generate new ideas and opportunities for the curriculum. Selection of new texts is a collaborative process in the Department, and the inclusion of new titles is carefully considered in light of the curriculum's objectives. Although unit titles and essential questions might change as the course is evaluated from year to year, the instructional goals serve as the foundation of study for all students at this level. The dynamic nature of the English curriculum is one of its greatest strengths. Our goal in instructional design is to provide a combination of flexibility, cohesiveness, and integration in all of the course structures we offer as part of our program.

Since our program is skill-based, our instruction uses a variety of literature and activities to accomplish its goals. We have tried, however, to create curriculum guides that provide a consistency within their framework, so that students in one section of a course are learning common skills and experiencing similar assignments in reading, writing, research, and presentation.

Our goal in the development of the curriculum guide is to provide clear articulation that ensures the existence of consistency and the capacity for creativity in our approach to instruction.

SECTION I - Course Information

Our students live in a world dominated by visual media. Films, television, the internet and video games surround them, and they are constantly influenced by the thousands of images that pass before their eyes on a daily basis. Although teachers frequently use these media in their classrooms, students rarely "view multimedia materials actively and critically" in the ways or to the extent that they examine print media. In keeping with Darien High School's mission to enhance "the development of students as critical thinkers," we must help make students aware of how—for artistic, political and commercial reasons—film can inspire, inform and/or manipulate audiences through camera angle, editing, and music. While great filmmakers have used film as a form of artistic expression, advertisers use it to sell and the "spin masters" of advertising and television news use it to influence public opinion and consumer habits. Students must "increase their understanding of film's aesthetic quality and value," and learn that there is no such thing as neutral filmmaking, that filmmakers have in their craft an extremely powerful tool. Artistic masterpieces, news programs, documentaries, commercials, and popular films all use an array of techniques to present information and a particular point-of-view. Through a careful analysis of film's history, its evolution and its technical composition, this course seeks to prepare its students to see the world around them from an informed and critical perspective.

Students will critically view, write about, and discuss a wide spectrum of narrative and documentary films in pursuit of a greater understanding of the ways film is used to convey meaning, express points-of-view, and influence public opinion. The course will begin with a survey of historically important films that trace the evolution of the medium over the last one hundred years; during this portion of the class, students will view parts of early silent films like The Battleship Potemkin (Eisenstein), City Lights (Chaplin) and The Birth of a Nation (Griffith). The course will proceed chronologically, thematically and stylistically, as students study the work of cinema's great early directors (Hitchcock, Welles, Hawks, Ford, Kubrick, Wilder); emerging genres (Film Noir, the Western, Science Fiction/Fantasy etc.); stylistic movements (French New Wave, Cinema Verité, Impressionism, montage, etc.) as well as how films from different time periods reflect "the spirit of the times" (The Manchurian Candidate as an expression of Cold War hysteria, for example). The final segment of the course will focus on the technological and stylistic innovations of contemporary film (focusing particularly on modern classics like Schindler's List, The Hours, Annie Hall, Pleasantville, Big Fish, Traffic, etc.), and also on the influence of other modern forms of visual media (television, advertising, the internet) on our collective consciousness.

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

The Language Arts Philosophy

Students communicate with the world around them through the use of language. Language is comprised of several components, primarily reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Language arts is the instructional program that teaches these components as interdependent and interrelated parts of the communication process.

The aim of the Darien Public Schools' Language Arts Program is threefold: to help students become effective language users; to produce graduates who demonstrate their ability to think, read, write, speak, and listen proficiently; and to assist students in developing language fluency, not only in the school setting but in the wider world.

Acquisition, development, and mastery of both basic and advanced language arts skills are a continuous process. Students attain higher levels of skill development in incremental stages. Measurable gains in language arts skills are realized when challenging language activities occur in meaningful contexts and through purposeful applications.

(from *Darien Public Schools K-12 Language Arts Guide* – 1997)

Darien English Department Statement of Philosophy

The English Department of Darien High School provides for its students a climate that fosters intellectual development, that encourages aesthetic appreciation, and that promotes critical inquiry. It offers a curriculum that recognizes the differences in abilities and goals of our students and which helps each achieve maximum growth. We wish to encourage within each student a sense both of individuality and of connection to others, and to foster a love of language and literature. Our goals include encouraging creativity, scholarship, and inquiry. We believe the English curriculum should include the important works of western literature and works that reflect multicultural diversity within the United States and throughout the world. Through interdisciplinary courses, students make connections to other academic areas and real-life contexts. We believe the English curriculum should comprise a core of required courses as well as elective courses from which students may choose on the basis of their interests, talents, and needs.

The English Department believes all forms of communication - including reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing - are part of the English instructional program. Though these aspects have been treated as distinct skills in the past, current thought views all forms of communication as interrelated and complementary. The Department believes that students learn in multiple ways; therefore, we support an English program that addresses multiple learning styles and encourages interpretation through various kinds of communication such as art, photography, and music, etc. We also believe the rapid advancement in communication technology requires the integration of technological skills in contemporary research, composition, and presentation so that students are better prepared to be successful learners in today's world. As a consequence, the language arts classroom is changing from a lecture hall into a communications workplace where students learn to find meaning under the guidance of teachers who facilitate, rather than simply transmit, learning. We believe students learn best in an active learning environment where they have opportunities to collaborate in "real world" inquiry, where the process of learning is as important as the product of learning, and where the development of individual skills is integrated into complex, real-world activities and evaluated using multiple forms of authentic assessment.

The English Department believes that our philosophy of teaching and learning is as important as our course descriptions, our district, state, and national goals for student achievement, our strategies for fluency in reading, writing, and discussing, our rubrics for evaluation, and our selection of texts. We hope that new teachers as well as returning teachers will read carefully our philosophy and consider it to be the foundation of our curriculum work. "How" we teach is as important as "what" we teach.

The English Department has agreed on certain assumptions about teaching and learning:

- Teaching and learning take place in an historical, cultural context.

- Students have a better understanding of their responsibilities when they understand the goals of a course, the reason for selective texts, and the purpose of assignments.

- When possible, the input from students in the design of an assignment engages them in the process of taking responsibility for their own learning.

- Learning takes place best in a classroom where an ethic of care is observed by the teacher and the students and clearly articulated.

- A community of learners develops when both individuality and diversity are encouraged and where individual intellectual and creative abilities are respected and cultivated.

- Students achieve their potential when they are given models of excellence and when expectations are clear and challenge their intellectual and creative capabilities.

- Teachers, aware of multiple theories of intelligences, create curriculum and assignments to acknowledge a diversity of learning styles and abilities. Students should be guided to think probatively, reflectively, narratively, poetically, visually, meta-cognitively.

- Differences in a classroom are acknowledged and rewarded with availability of choices, when possible, in reading and writing assignments.

- Students develop a commitment to curriculum and performance when they are invited and encouraged to make choices among clear, humane, and responsible methods of inquiry, interpretation, and criticism.

- Choosing a topic or making a persuasive argument depend on having a sense of what other people are saying and developing a relationship to a critical community of thinkers, readers, and writers.

- Teachers inspire students to take personal possession of a text and become fluent thinkers when they offer students multiple methods of inquiry and response instead of imposing an interpretation between the students and their experience of literature.

- According to the editors of *Rereading America,* students develop a habit of mind necessary for academic inquiry when they acquire the ability to imagine and value points of view different from their own, then strengthen, refine, enlarge, or reshape their ideas in light of those other perspectives. This intellectual habit includes openness to new and old ideas and a willingness to test those ideas

against experience, literature, belief, and history. Critical thinking, then, requires a diversity of reading experiences and exposure to multiple voices.

- As readers, our students should be concerned with both the questions posed by the text and the questions we bring to the text from our own differing interest, gender, and cultural background.

- Teachers create opportunities for responsible critical analysis when students are encouraged to enter the contemporary critical debate that has evolved around the value of teaching traditional texts of the canon and the value of teaching texts written with a diversity of ethnic, racial, and gendered voices.

- Students learn meaningfully and enthusiastically when they are invited to be active learners.

- Students who write to learn use writing as a means of interpretation and inquiry rather than a means of translating and transmitting ideas. Writing leads to thinking and re-thinking, shaping and re-shaping, questioning our questions.

- When students participate in self-evaluations, they are clear about expectations and the criteria of assessment; consequently, they take more responsibility for their performance and maturation in a course.

- Students are not isolated learners; interaction among peers is essential for sharing knowledge and experience and for appreciating each other's work.

PROGRAM GOALS

Language Arts Goals

The overarching goal of the Darien Public Schools' Language Arts Program is to produce students capable of demonstrating the highest levels of communication proficiency and fluency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Basic Assumptions, Instructional Principles, and Teaching Strategies

1. Students come to school with different levels of knowledge and skill upon which further learning will be based. While specific language skills are initially taught to all students through direct instruction, students acquire more sophisticated levels of communication through the integration of the four primary language arts components in a variety of interrelated and interdependent activities and experiences.
2. Skillful communication, however, is more than a working knowledge of the primary language arts components. It is the composite of all acquired skills, achieved through the proficient use of the reading, writing, speaking, and listening components.
3. When students are immersed in an atmosphere that supports a love of learning and engaged in topics that interest them, learning how to communicate skillfully occurs in a natural, integrated way.
4. Language arts learning is enhanced when students are provided with a language-rich environment and given opportunities to communicate in a variety of ways.
5. Language arts instruction must be embedded in all curriculum areas.
6. Excellent communication models for students are essential for continued growth at all grade levels. Models of appropriate student and professional writing and speaking provide examples for students to emulate; they also set challenging standards for students to meet.
7. A wide variety of high quality literature, both fiction and non-fiction, must be read.
8. Building upon students' existing knowledge on a topic is a fundamental means of engaging students in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Drawing upon students' current base of knowledge by challenging them to analyze, anticipate, and predict information and themes found within their reading develops readers who come to understand and relate to what they read.
9. The most effective way to teach writing systematically is as a process: brainstorming, composing, conferring, revising, editing, and polishing for others to read.
10. The teaching of writing should focus on the process of writing as a means toward an end: developing clear, thoughtful, polished pieces of writing.
11. The development of strong, basic language skills (e.g. grammar, punctuation, phonics, vocabulary, and spelling) is an essential part of the language arts

program. Skill development is best addressed by a combination of direction instruction and individual instruction within the context of each student's own reading and writing experiences.

12. Speaking and listening skills need to be addressed in all grade levels. Students need opportunities to speak confidently and proficiently in informal and formal settings appropriate to grade level; they need to become adept at listening for ideas and information, tone, and point of view.

13. The effective use of technological resources is an important part of developing students' skills in research and communication.

14. The Language Arts Program and its stated goals must be supported by all staff throughout the District. Regular communication among staff members and administration, as well as District support of appropriate ongoing staff development activities, is essential.

Critical Approaches to Film and Media Goals

The goals of *Critical Approaches to Film and Media* mirror those of the Darien Public Schools, but extend beyond those over-arching goals to specific ones intended to build upon the work done by students and teachers in the primary and middle school grades and to prepare students for the new challenges and expectations of both high school and college courses. These additional goals are:

1. to identify the role film plays in the contemporary world;
2. to examine the ways in which films convey meaning;
3. to understand the role of shot composition, editing, music, and screenwriting in the construction of this meaning;
4. to look at films from various time periods and areas of the world in order to explore the similarities and differences of diverse peoples and their beliefs;
5. to understand, through film, how different people define themselves and their experiences;
6. to encourage close, critical viewing as a means to recognize, analyze, and evaluate recurring issues and patterns of conflict in contemporary life;
7. to think analytically and use visual evidence to support arguments;
8. to respond to visual works through analytical and narrative writing;
9. to organize ideas into outline form, and to utilize these outlines to craft structured, analytical pieces of writing; and
10. to develop methods of inquiry for enjoying, studying, discussing, and writing about film as art.

OVERVIEW

Because students at Darien High School have not formally studied cinema prior to taking this course, *Critical Approaches to Film and Media* must be designed in a way that will introduce students to as many concepts related to filmmaking and appreciation, and as much actual content, as is possible for a semester-long course. The learning segments will proceed thematically and chronologically, and will ask students to consider:

- the evolution of film as an art and form of entertainment/mass communication;
- the particular conventions and concerns of different film genres;
- the ways in which contemporary films respond to/revise/pay homage to classics;
- the motion picture as an accurate chronicle of the times in which it was produced and which it depicts;
- the ability of a film to capture the values and social mores of a given time and place; and
- the ability of film to shape public opinion and make political and artistic statements

What follows, then, is an outline of each learning segment.

Segment One – *The Early Development of the Motion Picture* and *Key Concepts in Film Study*

In this unit of study, students will familiarize themselves with the language of cinema as they learn about the beginnings of the industry/art form. They will become acquainted with the basics of *mis en scene,* shot and scene composition and editing, and will compare different editing and framing techniques. Their introduction to these concepts will be through screenings of clips from some of early cinema's most studied films – Chaplin's *Modern Times* and *The Gold Rush*; Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin; A Man With A Movie Camera,* and *The Birth of a Nation*. They will also watch clips from some classic and contemporary films (*Touch of Evil, Lost in Translation, Jaws, The Talented Mr. Ripley,* etc.) Since filmmakers of this era were inventing new techniques as they filmed and edited, these films serve as the perfect starting point for any beginning student. **Key Concepts and Terms**: *framing, editing, continuity editing, shot composition, mis en scene, montage, tempo, cutting, cross-cutting, lighting, scoring.*

Segment Two – *Snapshots of America: Capturing the Spirit of the Times*

In this unit, students will continue to build on their cinematic vocabularies as they examine the ways various American films have successfully captured the spirit of a given time. Since any work of art is inarguably a product of the time and place of its origins, this is an essential lens through which students must learn to see films. Screenings may include: *Citizen Kane, The Manchurian Candidate, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Do the Right Thing, Smoke Signals, Good Night and Good Luck, Almost Famous.* **Key Concepts and Terms**: deep focus photography, narrative structure, "Capra-esque," the

uses of color and high-contrast black and white photography, the breaking down of boundaries between film and viewer (the "Fourth Wall").

Segment Three – *International Cinema: Cultural Values, Social Mores*

At the end of the first marking period, students will be asked to consider what certain foreign films have to say about the people and places from which they come. Having just examined American films as a unique perspective on American History, students will be prepared to apply this mode of thinking to the larger world. They will be asked to consider, for example, the influence that the ancient code of *bushido* has on modern-day Japan (as evident in the films of Kurasowa), and what Italian films of the fifties and sixties say about gender roles and double-standards. They will be introduced to the ground-breaking school of *French New Wave* cinema through the films of Godard and Truffault. Possible screenings include: *Monsoon Wedding (India); Divorce, Italian Style* and *Ciao, Professore (Italy);Rashomon, Ikiru* and *Tokyo Story (Japan); The 400 Blows* and *Breathless* (France); *In the Name of the Father (Ireland).*

Segment Four– *An Exploration of Genre*

In the second marking period, students will learn to identify and analyze the different conventions of form and content that make up popular genres of film. They will evaluate the thematic concerns of these genres and identify repeated visual motifs. Ultimately, they will understand what makes a western "a Western" and what makes Film Noir "noir." Screenings may include: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, The Searchers, Double Indemnity, The Third Man, Sunset Boulevard, Annie Hall, Dr. Strangelove, The Trouble with Harry, M, Strangers on a Train, Rear Window, Jaws, Anatomy of a Murder, Minority Report, The Road to Perdition, Casablanca, The Apartment, It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World, The Producers, The Natural, Finding Neverland, The Fisher King, Pleasantville, E.T: The Extra Terrestrial.*

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Segment One – ***The Early Development of the Motion Picture/Key Concepts in Film Study***
- What goes into the construction of a scene?
- What different choices does a director have in framing a shot/staging a scene?
- What is editing, and how do different editing choices affect meaning and viewer reaction?
- What roles do the Director of Photography, Editor, Director, Producer, etc. have in the filmmaking process?
- What characteristics of style and content mark the first era of motion pictures?
- What is the difference between shooting a scene in one continuous take and using different *montage* editing techniques?

Segment Two – ***Snapshots of America***
- In what ways do all films capture the spirit of a given time and place?
- How have different American films commented on American history?
- How do race, ethnicity and class shape an individual's perception of him/herself and his/her country?
- In what ways do classic and contemporary films differ in their presentations of the American experience?

Segment Three – ***International Cinema***
- In what ways do all films capture the spirit of a given time and place?
- How do international films differ stylistically and thematically from American films?
- What pictures do these foreign films paint of their respective countries and people?
- How can international films serve to "bridge the gaps" between one country's perception of another?

Segments Four through Eight – ***An Exploration of Genre***
- What is a *genre?*
- What formal/visual conventions identify a given genre?
- What thematic concerns identify a given genre?
- What explains the continuous appeal of different film genres?
- How do modern genre films attempt to revise, reshape, sabotage, or pay homage to classic genre films?

PROCESS SKILLS

Reading and Responding

Content Standard 1: Students will read and respond in individual, literal, critical and evaluative ways to literary, informational and persuasive films.

a. describe the thoughts, opinions and questions that arise as they view a film, demonstrate a basic understanding of the film, and identify inconsistencies and ambiguities
b. examine the fit between the film and prior knowledge by reconciling differences, extracting clues or evidence, making inferences, drawing conclusions, predicting events, inferring motives and generalizing beyond the surface
c. demonstrate literary and aesthetic appreciation of the film, awareness of the filmmakers' style, understanding of visual features, and ability to challenge the film and think divergently
d. adapt appropriate strategies to deepen initial understanding and go beyond the film to judge its artistic quality
e. ask and answer their own and each other's critical and analytical questions
f. apply their understanding of formal/visual features of each genre to their interpretations of that genre
g. describe theme, symbolism, tone and other complex elements of fiction, and identify point of view, manipulative language and other elements of bias
h. use the literary elements of a text (theme, symbolism, imagery, conflict, etc.) to draw conclusions about a film
i. entertain, explore and defend multiple interpretations of all films they study
j. apply collaborative skills to elaborate on concepts being addressed and to describe processes used in achieving results

Producing Texts

Content Standard 2: Students will produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.

a. select the appropriate organizational pattern for addressing audience, purpose and point of view
b. identify and use effectively the salient features of all appropriate oral, visual and written discourse
c. determine which primary and secondary sources are appropriate to the task (research paper, analysis) and integrate and elaborate upon information effectively in the final product
d. identify and use the most effective process for them to create and present a written, oral or visual piece

Applying English Language Conventions

Content Standard 3: Students will apply the conventions of standard English language in oral and written communication.

    a. demonstrate command of capitalization, punctuation, usage and spelling skills, and utilize effective strategies and appropriate resources for proof-reading and editing
    b. use the spoken and written syntax made standard by television announcers and newspaper editorialists and use the diction of skilled writers and orators
    c. evaluate the language they use in written and oral tasks for its suitability for the audience being addressed
    d. draw conclusions regarding the evolution of language and how it influences and reflects societal changes

Exploring and Responding To Films

Content Standard 4: Students will use the language arts to explore and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.

    a. view a combination of "classic" and contemporary films, determine the ways in which they shape or have shaped popular culture, and analyze the reasons for their being effective
    b. analyze the appeal of various works and determine their artistic value
    c. determine the various influences on filmmaker and analyze the impact of those influences on the film
    d. explain how all of the conventions and devices in a film are used by a filmmaker to express tone, create mood and establish overall theme
    e. view films and identify and explain the human experiences they convey
    f. name and explain their aesthetic reactions to works

STUDENT PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

Viewing/Thinking

Strategies:
Students will be able to do the following:
- View, analyze and evaluate films of varied origins and complexity
- Integrate material drawn from different disciplines (history, literature, art, and music).
- Draw on their newly-acquired knowledge of film terminology and technique to inform their analyses.

Responses:
Students will be able to do the following:
- Formulate discussion topics and questions
- Find relevant information from supplementary reading materials
- Make connections between films and recognize similarities of theme and values
- Support arguments or opinions by reference to evidence presented in sources outside the text
- Compare and offer critical analysis
- Identify different directors'/critics' points-of-view on a topic
- Consider a variety of interrelationships between those who create films, a particular film itself, contexts, and the viewer
- Show understanding by being able to adopt an alternative point of view to other students or critics
- Discuss style used by different filmmakers
- Acknowledge in writing and discussion a range of interpretations of films.

Interest and Attitudes:
- Students will explore the historical and cultural contexts in American and international cinema.

Writing

What the Student Writer will do:
- Edit work to improve coherence
- Summarize critical essays on various films
- Express meaning precisely
- Organize written text accurately and appropriately for purpose, situation, and audience
- Develop critical essays coherently
- Offer detailed analyses of entire films, series of films, or even a single scene of a film.

What the Student's Writing will show:

- Paragraphs with topic sentences, textual support and a cohesive structure
- The ability to present relationships and argue or persuade
- Passages written with clarity and accuracy
- A use of vocabulary that shows an awareness of ambiguities and shades of meaning
- A mastery of key film terminology

ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES AND TOOLS

As **viewers and thinkers**, *Critical Approaches to Film and Media* students will exhibit their understanding and proficiency through the following:

- Tests and Quizzes on film terminology and critical terminology
- Discussion of initial understanding and individual interpretation
- Application of concepts to other films/texts.

As **writers**, students will exhibit their understanding and proficiency through the following:

- Analytical Essays
- Scene Analyses
- Technical Critiques

As **oral communicators**, students will exhibit their understanding and proficiency through the following:

- Participation in debate, small and large group discussions and student teaching segments

GRADING GUIDELINES

Evaluation of the students' work in this course will be based on the following:

1) Complete and thorough writing of analytical essays and scene analyses.
2) Self-, group-, and teacher-assessments of papers, class and small group discussions, editing sessions, tests, quizzes, and visual presentations.
3) Participation in class and small group discussions.
4) Teacher assessment of mid-year and final examination work.

	Expectations of Students	**% of Report Card Grade**
Homework	On time and complete	12.5%
Quizzes		25%
Essays, Tests, Presentations, and Projects	On time and complete	50%
Participation/Conduct	active and consistent participation	12.5%
Final Exam		20% of the final grade

NOTE:
These percentages can change to reflect types of assignments given in different quarters and emphasis placed on various tasks. Students will be given weights for assignments at the beginning of the quarter.

SECTION II - Units of Study

Summary of Learning Segments

Unit Title	Duration (Weeks)

First Quarter

Segment 1: *The Early Development of the Motion Picture*   (2 weeks)
         and *Key Concepts in Understanding and Evaluating Film*

Segment 2: *Snapshots of America*: Capturing the Spirit of the Times   (3 weeks)

Segment 3: *International Cinema*: Different Values and Social Mores   (3 weeks)

Second Quarter   An Exploration of Genre

Segment 4: *The Western*   (1 week)

Segment 5*: Film Noir*   (2 weeks)

Segment 6: Comedy   (2 weeks)

Segment 7: *The Thriller*   (1 week)

Segment 8: *Blurring Reality – The Magical, Fantastic and Surreal in Film* (2 weeks)

SAMPLE UNIT: *The Early Development of the Motion Picture* **and** *Key Concepts in Film Study*

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What goes into the construction of a scene?
- What different choices does a director have in framing a shot/staging a scene?
- What is *mis en scene?* Framing? Blocking?
- What are the differences between an establishing shot, a medium shot and close-up?
- What is a one-shot? What is a two-shot?
- What is editing, and how do different editing choices affect meaning and viewer reaction?
- What roles do the Director of Photography, Editor, Director, Producer, etc. have in the filmmaking process?
- What characteristics of style and content mark the first era of motion pictures?

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES

Students will gain knowledge and initial understanding of these issues by:

- closely viewing selected clips from some of the most-studied early, classic and contemporary films (between 7-10 different clips)
- reading a number of supplemental texts on shot composition, scene construction, editing and *montage*.
- identifying directorial choices relating to editing, framing and shot composition in a given scene.

Students will gain and develop an interpretation and analysis of these issues by:

- discussing observations from in-class screenings in small and large groups.
- independently viewing a film of their choosing and writing a detailed single-scene study.
- analyzing the evolution of film techniques in films from different time periods.

- discussing the holistic merits and weaknesses of one visual style over another.
- analyzing the ways in which form influences the way people react to a given scene or film.

Students will be able to make connections, synthesize, and extrapolate connections between different films by:

- writing a comparative analysis essay on a series of clips from the same period and from different periods.
- tracing the visual and structural evolution of narrative films from the 1920s to the present.

Students will be able to evaluate, judge, order, and take a critical stance on these issues by:

- debating the visual merits and weaknesses of the first silent and sound films.
- comparing older and more contemporary perspectives on film study with older, more dated critical approaches

VOCABULARY

Key vocabulary, terminology, and objective information for this unit include:

> *mis en scene, scene, shot, shot composition, framing, tracking shot, establishing shot, medium shot, close-up, tempo, lighting, shot scale, "fourth wall," dissolve, lap dissolve, wipe, fade, pan, editing, continuity editing, mis en scene, montage, long take, cutting, cross-cutting, parallel structure,*

Other vocabulary is drawn from the individual texts and material under study.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Sample Quiz
Film Aesthetics: Mis en Scene, Editing and Montage

Please answer the following questions using examples from the clips we have viewed in class or from last night's reading.

1. When putting together the various shots in a scene, the director has to make sure to maintain a sense of *continuity*. Why is this necessary (and what does it mean?), and what are some ways of doing this?

2. As you read last night, there is a theoretical dispute between proponents of editing (and montage) and advocates for the long take. What are some of the criticisms of the long take as opposed to editing? What are some benefits to shooting a scene in a long, uninterrupted take?

3. The terms *editing* and *montage* are closely related, but they are not the same thing. What distinguishes standard continuity editing from montage?

Sample Written Assignment
Scene Analysis

Now that we have examined the various choices directors must make in constructing and editing a scene, I'd like you to go home and write an analysis of a major scene in one of your favorite movies.

Start by selecting a film that you enjoy and are familiar with. Then, sit down and watch the particular scene you have chosen to analyze. Once you have done this, watch the scene again, only this time with a pen and paper. Next, watch your scene a third time, only now without sound. Pay close attention to the *mis en scene.* (That is, all of the factors that contribute to what you see in front of you.) What is the camera doing? What is in the frame? How long do the shots last? How does the editing affect your reaction to and involvement with the scene? What role does the music (or lack thereof) play? How about the lighting?

This may sound daunting, but it is really quite simple. This is **not an essay**, **so no thesis or formal introduction is required**. All you have to do is follow the structure provided below:
- 1st paragraph – a short introduction naming the film and placing the scene in a larger context. Describe what is being communicated in the scene and what importance the scene has to the film as a whole.
- 2nd paragraph – a detailed description of the mechanics of the scene: camera, editing, acting, staging/framing, lighting, etc.
- 3rd paragraph – an analysis of the mechanics, discussing how the *mis en scene* affects the scene's impact, and how these mechanics deepen viewers' understanding of characters and theme.

I recommend that for this assignment you choose to view a *serious* film. (It's not that I have anything against comedies—in fact I love them—but they are typically more focused on performance and humor than visual expression.)

Your analysis should be about **two pages**, typed.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

In order to assess student performance, students will exhibit their knowledge and understanding through the following performance assessments:

- Quizzes on film terminology and film aesthetics (see sample quiz)
- Discussion of film for understanding and interpretation
- Discussion of additional literary and artistic works for understanding and interpretation
- Participation in Debate and Group Discussion
- Interdisciplinary Writing Prompts
- Analytical Essays

Students will also be assessed based upon regular and thoughtful participation in discussions. Student participation grades will be based upon level of engagement, thoughtful and regular contribution, and level of preparedness. Students may also complete journal responses on the films viewed (specific topics may include a response to critical questions, important quotes, thematic ideas, connections to other films). Responses will be graded based upon depth of thought, analysis of issues and ideas, complexity of issues and questions raised, level to which thoughtful and insightful connections are made, and use of specific evidence and examples. In addition to journal responses, students will also be assessed based on an analytical essay and persuasive writing essay. Students will be encouraged to use frequent textual references and quotations to support their ideas. Student performance will be assessed based upon clarity and complexity of thesis, supporting evidence and discussion, seamless integration of quotations, overall depth of thought, relevance of references and quotations, introduction and conclusion, essay structure, clarity of language, grammatical correctness, and appropriate title.

CAREER AWARENESS

Students who complete this unit have done much to prepare for potential futures in film study, literary study, film/video production and the various media industries. No matter what fields students eventually enter after school, they will constantly be influenced by visual media.

SAMPLE CORE TEXTS FOR STUDENTS

Screenings in this unit may include small portions of:
A Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov)
Battleship Potemkin (Sergei Eisenstein)
The Gold Rush (Charlie Chaplin)
Modern Times (Charlie Chaplin)
Touch of Evil (Orson Welles)
The Talented Mr. Ripley (Anthony Minghella)
Jaws (Steven Spielberg)
Lost in Translation (Sofia Coppolla)
Rope (Alfred Hitchcock)
Touch of Evil (Orson Welles)
Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock)
M (Fritz Lang)

ADDITIONAL TEXTS/ RESOURCES FOR USE BY STUDENTS

excerpts from:
Barsam, Richard. <u>Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film</u>. New York:
    W.W. Norton and Company, 2004.
Buckland, Warren. <u>Teach Yourself: Film Studies</u>. London: Hodder and Staughton,
    1998.

(There will likely be other short excerpts on film editing, montage and depth of shot.)

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

In this and all subsequent units, students will use the following technology as a means to enhance learning:

Computer / Writing Labs will be used to allow students to write journal responses, draft and revise analytical essays, and research text and background information on the Internet

The Technology Lab may be used to allow students to view the video resources and respond on computer immediately after viewing parts of the film.

The Learning Connections Center offers potential for students in different sections of the course to work together on collaborative projects.

SAMPLE UNIT TWO: An Examination of Genre – *Film Noir*

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
(These essential questions can and will be applied to the study of many film genres.)
- What is *film noir?*
- What formal conventions (of shot composition, editing, mis en scene, etc.) distinguish *film noir* from other genres?
- What are the most common thematic concerns of the *film noir* genre?
- In what ways do classic *noir* films (like *Double Indemnity, Sunset Boulevard, The Postman Always Rings Twice, Laura, The Maltese Falcon, The Big Sleep, Touch of Evil*) reflect the societal/political concerns of their era of origin?
- How do contemporary films *noir* reshape, revise and pay homage to the formal and thematic conventions of the classics of the 40s and 50s? (films like *Chinatown, LA Confidential, Minority Report, Blade Runner, The Talented Mr. Ripley)*

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES

Students will gain knowledge and initial understanding of these issues by:

- closely viewing select *films noir*, both classic and contemporary
- reading a chapter from a film text entitled "Film Noir."
- identifying directorial choices relating to *mis en scene*, editing, framing, lighting and shot composition in a given scene.
- Screening additional films *noir* on their own.
- Identifying common visual and conversational patterns in different films of the genre.

Students will gain and develop an interpretation and analysis of these issues by:

- discussing observations from in-class screenings in small and large groups.
- independently viewing a film of their choosing and writing a detailed single-scene study.
- analyzing the evolution of film techniques in films from different time periods.
- discussing the holistic merits and weaknesses of one visual style over another.
- analyzing the ways in which form of films *noir* influences the way people react them.
- analyzing how the particular lighting, framing, editing and script-related aspects of films *noir* reflect a certain attitude in America c.1945-1955.

Students will be able to make connections, synthesize, and extrapolate connections between different films by:

- writing a comparative analysis essay on a series of films from the same period and from different periods.
- tracing the visual and structural evolution of *noir* films from the 1940s to the present.

Students will be able to evaluate, judge, order, and take a critical stance on these issues by:

- debating the visual merits and weaknesses of *film noir* in relation to other genres.
- comparing older and more contemporary examples of *film noir*.

VOCABULARY

Key vocabulary, terminology, and objective information for this unit include:
chiarro-scurro, fragmentation, sardonic, deep focus photography, high contrast lighting, importance of dialogue, "femme fatale," moral relativism, hard-boiled, mis en scene, cinematography, the *Hayes Production Code (*as well as *the Compensatory Moral Value Clause* and the *Prurient Interest Clause*.)

Other vocabulary is drawn from the individual texts and material under study.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Film Noir: Screening Guide

Tonight you will be reading in detail about the formal aspects of *film noir*, one of Hollywood's most heavily stylized genres. Today as you watch Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (perhaps the most famous and critically praised *noir* of all time), please keep track of the following in your notes:

- lighting (high-contrast images with a heavy emphasis on shadows, silhouettes and skewed images)
- subjective, fragmented and jarring camera angles; unbalanced images
- complexity of narrative, which at times can seem convoluted and incoherent

- flawed, stereotyped characters and moral ambiguity
- setting, mood and atmosphere *

Tonight please read the short excerpt on *film noir* <u>and</u> the two essays located on the following websites:

http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue02/infocus/filmnoir.htm
http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue02/infocus/double.htm

By the way, if you enjoy *Double Indemnity*, please check out some of these other classic *film noirs*:

- *Chinatown*
- *The Maltese Falcon*
- *The Big Sleep*
- *The Third Man*
- *Laura*
- *Anatomy of a Murder*
- *M*
- *Sunset Boulevard*
- *The Lady from Shanghai*
- *Notorious*
- *Seven*
- *Touch of Evil*

* *from* <u>Film Studies</u> by Warren Buckland. Chicago: NTC Publication Group, 1998.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

In order to assess student performance, students will exhibit their knowledge and understanding through the following performance assessments:

- Quizzes on film terminology and film aesthetics (see sample quiz)
- Discussion of film for understanding and interpretation
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Responses will be graded based upon depth of thought, analysis of issues and ideas, complexity of issues and questions raised, level to which thoughtful and insightful connections are made, and use of specific evidence and examples. In addition to journal responses, students will also be assessed based on an analytical essay and persuasive writing essay. Students will be encouraged to use frequent textual references and quotations to support their ideas. Student performance will be assessed based upon clarity and complexity of thesis, supporting evidence and discussion, seamless integration of quotations, overall depth of thought, relevance of references and quotations, introduction and conclusion, essay structure, clarity of language, grammatical correctness, and appropriate title.

CAREER AWARENESS

Students who complete this unit have done much to prepare for potential futures in film study, literary study, film/video production and the various media industries. No matter what fields students eventually enter after school, they will constantly be influenced by visual media.

SAMPLE CORE TEXTS FOR STUDENTS

Screenings in this unit may include:
Double Indemnity
Sunset Boulevard
Anatomy of a Murder
Out of the Past
Laura
The Maltese Falcon
Key Largo
The Big Sleep
Touch of Evil
The Talented Mr. Ripley
LA Confidential
Minority Report
Blade Runner

SECTION III - Related Goals and Standards

Academic Expectations from Mission Statement

1. Read actively and critically for a variety of purposes.
2. Write effectively.
3. Listen actively and critically.
4. Access and evaluate multi-media and print information efficiently and critically.

Darien Public Schools' K-12 Curricular Language Arts Goals

The overarching goal of the Darien Public Schools' Language Arts Program is to produce students capable of demonstrating the highest levels of communication proficiency and fluency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Basic Assumptions, Instructional Principles, and Teaching Strategies

1. Students come to school with different levels of knowledge and skill upon which further learning will be based. While specific language skills are initially taught to all students through direct instruction, students acquire more sophisticated levels of communication through the integration of the four primary language arts components in a variety of interrelated and interdependent activities and experiences.
2. Skillful communication, however, is more than a working knowledge of the primary language arts components. It is the composite of all acquired skills, achieved through the proficient use of the reading, writing, speaking, and listening components.
3. When students are immersed in an atmosphere that supports a love of learning, and engaged in topics that interest them, learning how to communicate skillfully occurs in a natural, integrated way.
4. Language arts learning is enhanced when students are provided with a language-rich environment and given opportunities to communicate in a variety of ways.
5. Language arts instruction must be imbedded in all curriculum areas.
6. Excellent communication models for students are essential for continued growth at all grade levels. Models of appropriate student and professional writing and speaking provide examples for students to emulate; they also set challenging standards for students to meet.
7. A wide variety of high quality literature, both fiction and non-fiction, must be read.
8. Building upon students' existing knowledge on a topic is a fundamental means of engaging students in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

9. Drawing upon students' current base of knowledge by challenging them to analyze, anticipate, and predict information and themes found within their reading develops readers who come to understand and relate to what they read.

10. The most effective way to teach writing systematically is as a process: brainstorming, composing, conferring, revising, editing, and polishing for others to read.

11. The teaching of writing should focus on the process of writing as a means toward an end: developing clear, thoughtful, polished pieces of writing.

12. The development of strong, basic language skills (e.g. grammar, punctuation, phonics, vocabulary, and spelling) is an essential part of the language arts program. Skill development is best addressed by a combination of direct instruction and individual instruction within the context of each student's own reading and writing experiences.

13. Speaking and listening skills need to be addressed in all grade levels. Students need opportunities to speak confidently and proficiently in informal and formal settings appropriate to grade level; they need to become adept at listening for ideas and information, tone and point of view.

14. The effective use of technological resources is an important part of developing students' skills in research and communication.

15. The Language Arts Program and its stated goals must be supported by all staff throughout the District. Regular communication among staff members and administration, as well as District support of appropriate ongoing staff development activities, is essential.

The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards

1. Reading and Responding. Students will read and respond in individual, literal, critical, and evaluative ways to literary, informational, and persuasive texts.

2. Producing Texts. Students will produce written, oral, and visual texts to express, develop, and substantiate ideas and experiences.

3. Applying English Language Conventions. Students will apply the conventions of standard English in oral and written communication.

4. Exploring and Responding to Texts. Students will use the language arts to explore and respond to classical and contemporary tests from many cultures and literary periods.

National Standards for the English Language Arts (sponsored by NCTE and IRA):

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

SECTION IV - Learning Resources

ADDITIONAL SAMPLES ASSIGNMENTS/MATERIALS

Writing a Film Analysis

As I mentioned in your syllabus, each quarter you will be required to submit one formal film analysis. You may select any film from our class (or after-school) viewings as the subject of this paper, but whichever film you choose, the analysis must be turned in no later than one week from the screening. Additionally, I will not accept any papers given to me with less than a full week (seven days) remaining in the quarter.

Now then, what exactly does this film analysis entail?

Start by selecting a topic. This should cover **one specific aspect of the film** in question. (Please **do not** attempt to write an analysis of everything you think is important in the film.) For example, you may choose to write about the use of color or non-linear narration in Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic*, or about Frank Capra's vision of America as presented in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. As you can see from these examples, your paper **may focus primarily on either form or content**. No matter what the main focus of your paper, you should be able to comment on how one affects the other. (If you are writing about Capra's vision of America in *Mr. Smith*, you should include an analysis of how Capra visually presents this vision to his audience. If your paper focuses on a film's form, it should comment on how the technique in question influences the themes of the story.) Later, in the second marking period, you will also be able to write a *genre* analysis.

All analyses should be **3 pages**. And whatever you do, please do not summarize the plot of the movie. I've already seen it… Feel free to come and see me if you need help.

The Language of Cinema: Key Film Terms

Talking about Film	Types of Shots	Camera Movements	Types of Cuts
form and content	establishing shot	pan	hard cut
mis en scene	long shot	tilt	fade(in/out)
framing	medium shot	zoom	wipe
shot	close-up	track	overlap
editing	one-shot	push in	dissolve
continuity editing	two-shot		
tempo	P.O.V. shot		
cinematography			

The Grapes of Wrath
Take-Home Test

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord/ He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored/ He has loosed the fateful lighting of his terrible swift sword/ His truth is marching on.
> "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," Julia Ward Howe (1861)

Respond to **three** of the following questions:
1. As you can see, the film's title comes from the song "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." What relation does the film bear to the above quotation? (This is tough, and took me a long while to figure out, but I think I have it now. Do your best, and please give examples.)
2. Jim Casey is a former preacher who gives up old-time religion, dies to save his fellow men, and whose initials are J.C. (Sound like anyone you know?) What role does he play in the film? What is the new calling he finds, and why does he have faith in it but not religion?
3. Who are the villains in this film? What does the answer to this question tell you about the attitude of the film toward individual people? Toward right and wrong?
4. According to the film, what should the role of the federal government be in helping its helpless and homeless?
5. What does this film have to say about dignity?

Here are some quotations by which I am continually stuck; perhaps they will help you gather your thoughts:
- "A good guy don't pay no attention to what some heel makes him say."
- "Maybe there ain't no sin and no virtue – there's just what people does."
- "Then who *do* we shoot?"
- "That's what makes it our'n – bein' born on it, workin' on it, and dyin' on it – not no piece of paper."
- "Hey – that ain't penny candy. That's five cent candy." "What's it to you?"
- "Preacher's gotta know. I don't know…I gotta ask."
- "Why ain't there more like it?"…"You find out. I can't."

Again, you only have to respond to three of the above questions. As always, be thorough and use examples from the film to support your ideas. Each response should be a well-developed analytical paragraph. You may use your notes, but may not work in conjunction with other members of the class.

<div align="center">

***The Magificent Seven* Response**
(1960, d: John Sturges)

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Tonight I'd like you to respond to some of the thematic concerns of *The Magnificent Seven*. In other words, beyond the plot and gunfighting, what does this film have to say about its characters and what they do? How do the characters see the world and their place in it? What is the film's comment on the idea of the gunman for hire? And so on…

DUE: Wednesday, November 8th
        between 1 and 1 and ½ pages, typed and doubled-spaced

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NOTETAKING AND SCREENING GUIDES

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Students are required to remain active viewers during each class screening. Here is a student handout regarding notetaking strategies while viewing:

<div align="center">

Some Thoughts on Notetaking During Screenings

</div>

I'd like you to take notes as you watch films in class, and even when you do independent screenings for class. It's important, though, not to spend so much time taking notes that you miss out on the experience of watching the movie. "So," you ask, "how can I both take notes and enjoy the experience of watching the movie? And what kinds of notes should I take, anyway?" Good question…

- learn to abbreviate (e.g. CU, ES, TS, OS, LT, etc.)
- note important visual details/patterns
- identify key shots/sequences
- transcribe in shorthand key bits of dialogue
- comment on mis en scene (color, cinematography, framing, lighting, music, etc.)
- jot down ideas about thematic concerns of the film

For each screening, students are given a screening guide directing their attention to a number of specific visual/thematice aspects of the film in question. What follow are some sample screening guides:

<div align="center">

Screening Guide: *M* (1931, d: Fritz Lang)

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While watching *M*, please pay particular attention to:
- how certain images/objects convey meaning
- the director uses of montage in the opening sequence
- how the director employs parallel editing in certain sequences
- the film's use of light and shadow
- the film's social commentary

Important Terms and Facts:
- The film is considered German, though Fritz Lang was born in Austria.
- It was filmed (and takes place) in 1931, between the two World Wars.
- Early German films gave birth to a movement/style called "German Expressionism."
- *M* was shot ½ on sound film stock and ½ on silent stock.

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Screening Guide: *The French New Wave*

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Breathless (1960) d: Jean-Luc Godard
The 400 Blows (1959) d: Francois Truffaut

Pay attention to the following as you watch *Breathless* and *The 400 Blows*:
- ✶ **the pace and style of editing (particularly the use of "jump cuts")**
- ✶ **scenes shot on location**
- ✶ **lighting and sound recording**
- ✶ **the extent to which the films exhibit qualities of *Cinema Verite***
- ✶ **scenes which appear to be improvised**

<div align="center">

Screening Guide: *Run Lola Run*
(1999, Germany, d: Tom Tykwer)

</div>

During our screening of *Run Lola Run*, take note of the following:
- the film's pace, and the relationship between its pace and content
- the film's treatment of **time**
- the editing
- music
- any other non-traditional features and techniques you notice

The Rules of the Game
Genre Conventions: The Western

Instead of just telling you what to look for as you screen a number of Westerns, I'm going to ask that you arrive at your own understanding of the formal and thematic conventions of the genre. As you watch *The Magnificent Seven, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* and possibly another film, ask yourself the following:

1. What **settings** appear most often?
2. What kinds of **iconography** (buildings, objects, costumes, etc.) are familiar aspects of the genre?
3. What are some common **visual patterns or styles**?
4. What aspects of **narrative** are characteristic of the Western?
5. Are there any **themes or social messages** consistent in different Westerns?
6. How would you characterize the **types of characters and the nature of characters' relationships?**
7. What is the **worldview** of this genre?
8. What is the particular appeal of this genre to an audience? What audience would it attract?

ADDITIONAL TEXTS/ RESOURCES FOR USE BY STUDENTS

excerpts from:
Barsam, Richard. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film*. *New York:*
    W.W. Norton and Company, 2004.
Buckland, Warren. *Teach Yourself: Film Studies*. London: Hodder and Staughton,
    1998.

(There will likely be other short excerpts on film editing, montage and depth of shot.)