

Film Studies Curriculum Intent

Dorothy Stringer was one of the first schools in the city to offer GCSE Film Studies around a decade ago. Since then, not only has the department grown here but we have also helped other schools in the area to implement their own version of the course. The department includes teachers who have a background in film – in both a practical and academic capacity.

The Film Studies department's philosophy has always been the same. We want our students to leave the course not just with a theoretical understanding of the medium but as able filmmakers. Although the GCSE course only allows for the production of one two minute film, we always include a practical understanding alongside what is needed academically. For example, we will always try and tell students how they could recreate a million pound effect on their own budget. We've found this has a positive effect on their understanding of the subject and their results at the end – as it helps them better see the director's view. However, the main reason we teach like this is because we – and they – want them to be filmmakers. And so it is important that everyone sees them as this from the start.

We follow the Eduqas exam board, which is broken down into three sections: US Film, Global Cinema and the production. Although the exam board has a strict choice of films and content that needs to be covered, it is broad enough that students leave with a range of skills and a deep understanding of the subject. With the exam papers, centres are given a choice of films for each section. The films we selected our below in the outline of the course.

In year 10, the course is started with teaching students how to 'study' film. The first half term is tightly packed with content. Students have to learn a whole new way of talking about film as well as a new way of watching films. They are introduced to the idea of Film Language. Students are introduced to the four micro elements (also known as film forms): Mise-en-scène, Cinematography, Sound and Editing. Through these elements, students begin to understand how meaning is created and how movies have an effect on an audience. The students have to work very hard in those first few weeks.

Here it is important to mention that it has always been the case that Film Studies students are incredibly keen. Most of students would still be doing elements of the course (researching directors, reading about film theory, making films etc.) even if the course didn't exist. Therefore, although there is a lot to do and remember, they relish the challenge.

Most of the rest of year 10 consists of preparing for the Global Cinema examination (Component 2). This is a study of three films from three different areas of non-American Cinema. For each film, students use their understanding of the four micro elements to analyse key sequences from throughout the film. They are also taught the social, historical, technological, institutional and political contexts of the film and evaluate how this has impacted the final production. Each also has a specialist area of film that is taught and they will be assessed on in the final exam.

The different sections, the film our school *usually* teaches, and the specialist areas are outlined below:

- Section A: Global English Language film. **District 9 (2009).**
 - Narrative and Genre.
- Section B: Global Non-English Language film. **Tsotsi (2005).**
 - Representation

- Section C: Contemporary UK Film (post-2010). **Attack the Block (2011)**
 - Aesthetics

Most of Year 11 is preparation for the other examination – Key Developments in US Film (Component 2). This exam again looks at three films – all American – but is in a very different format to C2. The majority of the exam is a comparison between two films (one pre-1960; one pre-1990) from the same genre. Once again, students will analyse the micro elements and study the contexts of the movies. However, this is also done in a comparative way and – as you will see below – there is a large number of specialist areas for them to study. The second section of the exam is a study of the key developments in film and film technology. Students have to learn a timeline of key events in film history and show understanding of how these have impacted cinema and the film industry. The final section of the exam is a study of an independent US film. However, this is done through looking at a written article about the film. Students have to analyse the article, key sequences with micro elements and the films contexts and use it all to be able to explain how much they agree or disagree with the article.

The different sections of the exam, the films our school *usually* teach, and any specialist areas are outlined below.

- Section A: US Film Comparative Study (2 films). **Rear Window (1954)** and **Witness (1985)**.
 - Themes
 - Narrative and Genre
 - Representation
 - Aesthetics
- Section B: Key Developments in film and film technology
- Section C: US independent film. **The Hurt Locker (2009)**
 - Specialist Writing

There is a lot for them to remember for the exams and so recall and retention techniques are taught explicitly along with the course content. It is a lot for students to do in just two years. Every lesson becomes vital but students have always put in the effort needed to keep up

To prepare them for those exams, we have mock and practice exams throughout the year. Each exam tests them on the content they have learnt so far, which means the exams get longer and broader as the course goes on. Some of these exams, particularly ones that require official marks for the school, are marked and graded solely by the class teachers (and moderated within the department). However, for a few years now we have also encouraged students to mark their own work and give themselves feedback to improve. This is led by the teachers, who use Eduqas' own mark criteria (though with the language simplified to be accessible by all), as well as model answers. Students are encouraged to be as critical of their work as possible, so that they are always aware of how to improve and naturally begin 'live marking' in the final exams.

Of course, learning all this new content and skills means students having to learn a whole new vocabulary. In addition to having a new way of looking at films, they also have a new way of speaking and writing about them. There are many Tier 2 words that they will use in other subjects (e.g.

representation, aesthetics, juxtaposition, etc.) such as English. But there is also a huge number of Tier 3 words they have to introduce into their own lexicon. These are words such as: contrapuntal sound, match dissolve, narrateme, Mise-en-Scene, and a wide range of new words covering different areas of film. Within a few months, students are using this terminology in a natural way in both their writing and class discussions.

As well as the exam sections of the course, there is also the Non-Exam Assessment (NEA). The NEA is worth 30% of their final grade and students are assessed on their technical and creative abilities, as well as their understanding of genre and narrative. They need to take all the knowledge and understanding they have learnt from studying films and use it to create their own. Although there is a choice between producing a film extract or a short screenplay, we have always chosen the film production. This is because of our above philosophy – to create filmmakers – and because our students want to be challenged on their filmmaking abilities. We have a range of industry standard filmmaking equipment and it is important to us that they learn how to use it and our able to leave with their own finished short film. The production is split up throughout years 10 and 11

The NEA is where the department really uses the benefits of home learning. Although there are number of home learning activities throughout the course (preparing for new units, revision tasks, research questions etc.), it is in the preparation for their NEAs where the ability to do home learning really enhances what they can do in class. From the very start of year 10, students begin planning their films at home by creating premises, synopses, scripts, storyboards, etc. The film begins from a small idea and then home learning pre-production tasks help them to expand on their idea until they are ready for the film shoot.

Over the years, we have encouraged students to shoot their films in a number of different ways and in a number of different places. In the past, this has included over night stays or day trips to different locations. However, the most common and favoured method is to use the many different settings we have on our campus and to shoot in school. We are lucky enough to have a variety of locations, both inside and out, and shooting in school makes it easy of them to do practice shots beforehand and pick up any extra shots afterwards. Usually, this shoot is done in the second term of year 10 around February/March all students are off their usual timetable for two days and instead shoot and direct their own films. As every student has to create an original individual film, they take it in turns to act and assist on each other's productions. Students are responsible for everything in their own films, so costume and prop choices are as important as shot selections. Staff are on hand to assist with the equipment.

After the shoot, students use their home learning time to record and find sounds, and film any pick up shots that are needed. Their productions are then returned to at the end of year 10 and start of year 11 where they are edited in class. We use a range of different editing software – all taught from scratch – as each student's film has different post-production needs. Whilst there are numerous programs available, we only use ones that are similar in style ton ones that would be used in the industry. Once the film has been edited, the final part of the NEA is completed – an evaluation of their film. In the evaluation, students have to comment on how the production process influenced their finished film, how they were inspired by existing films and what genre conventions they used and their effect on the audience.

There is no KS3 for Film Studies meaning the GCSE is the first time they are introduced to the subject. While some subjects, like art and computing, have some transferable technical and creative skills, the subject that lays the best foundation is KS3 English. It is in this subject where they begin to use their analytical skills, think about audiences and start to look for deeper meanings in texts.

Although they may not all have heard the word, KS3 English is where students first start to look for connotations and think about how technique creates meaning. Some of the students at Dorothy Stringer also take the Cultural Capital class in Year 9. This really benefits Film students as it gives them a greater understanding of engrained British culture and even has some basic film analysis.

Students who take Film Studies are often surprised about how much it crosses over into the other subjects they take in Year 10 and 11 at Dorothy Stringer. The analytical skills in Film are used in a number of subjects where they have to read and understand any form of text. Subjects such as History and English, where students show an understanding of a range of materials and their intended audiences, are benefited by the skills taught in Film Studies. Students are also able to use some of the practical skills they learn in other options subjects and use them in Film Studies. And vice versa. For example, GCSE Photography helps students better understand the camera and the visual medium of storytelling. And Film Studies encourages Photography students to think about Representation, Film Language and Audiences in their photos. Drama is another subject with useful and helpful crossover.

There is also a chance for Film students to use their skills in an extra-curricular capacity. For example, many Film students become involved with lots of filmmaking activities around the school. This has included an anniversary documentary, filming and editing of sports events, and creating DVDs of plays and dance shows. There are always lots of additional possibilities for them to use their filmmaking skills at school.

The majority of our students go on to study Film Studies (or a related subject such as Media Arts or Film Production courses) in Post-16 Education. Those who do go on to take the A-Level or equivalent are well-prepared for the course. The GCSE course is designed as a steppingstone to the A-Level and we always keep in contact with different colleges to see what they offer and how we can prepare our students. Once they have finished the A-Level, many of our students go on to study Film at degree level. Ex-students often contact us to let us know what film projects they are working on or where they are studying, and Dorothy Stringer Film Students have joined courses all over the country and the world. We keep in good touch with our old Film Students and are always impressed with their latest films – at both an academic and professional level.

One other benefit for film students is how much the course raises their (and the school's) cultural capital. Studying a range of films from across the world and for each film they learn a deep understanding of the context (social, historical, technological, institutional and political) behind the making of the film. For example, when we look at British film students look at various aspects of British culture and Britain's cultural history. The film that we have chosen to study is about teenagers and so students are able to think about stereotypes about themselves. This gives them an understanding of their own culture how it has been shaped today. Studying films from the past, and comparing films from different decades, allows students to see how culture is changed by the society in which it is made. Looking at Global Film gives them an understanding of cultures that are outside their own and broadens their own cultural capital. Every unit we study enhances their own cultural capital and their understanding of wider cultures. When they come to create their NEAs, they have a chance to show their understanding of our culture in a practical way.

As stated throughout this Curriculum Intent, we have always thought of our classes as being full of potential filmmakers. Whilst we mean 'filmmakers' in a creative rather than professional context, many of our ex-students leave with ambitions to work in the film industry. After university, many of alumni have gone on to employment working on both feature and short films, as well as television, adverts and music videos. As we are a relatively new subject, our alumni have not had a chance to

'make a name' for themselves, like some of our media studies students have gone on to in the media industry, but lots of them are climbing the competitive ladder. And they appear to be on the trajectory to a successful film career in the future.

We are also equally proud of our many students who have financed and produced their own short films after leaving us. It is always great to receive invitations to film festivals with ex-students work being shown. They are being recognised as a part of the British film movement and we love to see how far their work has come.

Careers in the film industry have always been highly competitive and fought after. However, the British Film Industry is a very healthy industry (employing over 70,000) and is always on the lookout for new talent and those who want to start working in film. Many huge high-budget productions (such as Star Wars and Marvel) have been made here, employing thousands. There is also a large and successful independent industry which creates a whole other range of opportunities. And industries, such as TV or Video Games, where filmmakers and those who can read film are also sought. The rise in technology has made a range of avenues possible for our students' futures.