FILMMAKING STARTER PACK

IBSC CONFERENCE 2019

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this filmmaking starter pack is to offer four simple film projects to assist teachers new to filmmaking help their students communicate meaning in film. The projects are focused around elements of film language, rather than technical aspects of film production, in order to develop students' understanding of film grammar and expression. The films require no specialist equipment and good results can be easily achieved using iPhones and iMovie. Where possible advice is given regarding teaching content that works well to support the development of knowledge in relation to each task.
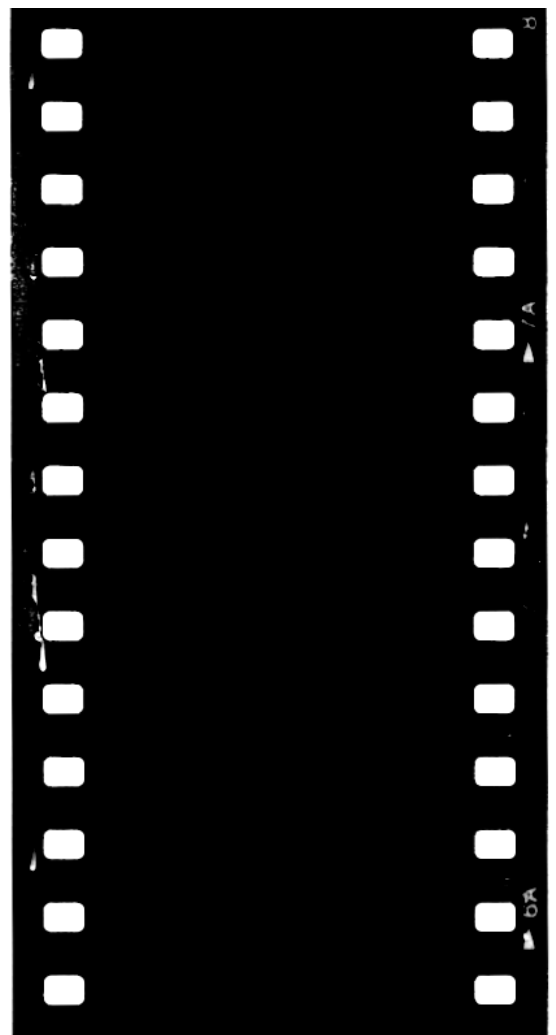
CONSIDERATIONS

The first consideration relates to storytelling, which is what we want the boys to do. We don't have much time in schools to get through everything and we must remember, we are making short films, not features.

So, focus on:
· One small cast
· One location
· One problem to solve
· One line of dialogue (to start)

The first two of these are for efficiency and productivity. Every time you move location you add complexity and time. You must pack up and set up. Similarly, the more cast members the more people you must try to get in the same place at the same time and keeping them out of mischief while you get the perfect close-up of your protagonist is a challenge that a young director can do without.

CONSIDERATIONS

We focus on one problem for narrative clarity. Boys can get lost in too many subplots and lose sight of the story they are trying to tell. Ask boys to remember whose story it is, hopefully theirs, and focus on that.

We only include one line of dialogue, at least to begin with, because film is about the moving image and removing dialogue helps the boys focus on allowing the camera to tell the story. It also reduces time spent doing retakes because an alarm went off, or a dog barked, or the director sneezed during the dialogue sequence.

The second concept is to keep the films short. 1-2 minutes is plenty of time, especially when beginning, but don't let them come in under 30 seconds. Think of how much information is packed into a good TV advertisement. You want boys to spend their time on the idea not on location.

Finally, let the boys know their time budget. Spend 50% of your time on pre-production, 25% on production and 25% on post-production. In fact, in a six-week unit my classes will spend three weeks planning the film (which they initially hate), one week shooting the film and two weeks editing it. That's only one week with a camera in their hands, although they may be out getting pick-up shots in the first week of post-production.

HAPPY FILMMAKING!
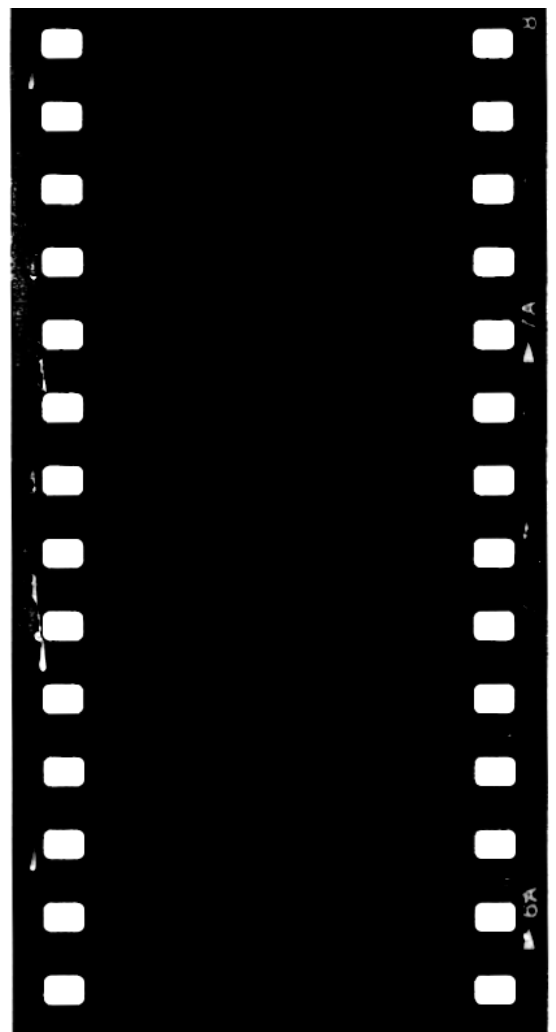
FILM 1
MACHO WALK

This is an introductory film-making project, which will allow students to gain some familiarity with equipment as well as some of the basic terminology of camerawork and framing techniques. It should cover a basic unit of action, such as two people bumping into each other.

Product: At the conclusion of this project the student(s) will create a 1-2 minute film demonstrating the following elements:

Master Shot
Follow up shots
Cross cutting
Cut-ins
POV sequence
Match-cutting
Cutaways

Objectives: This project is designed to allow students to:

Gain familiarity with the equipment
Practice each stage of film creation: shooting, capturing, and editing
Reinforce cinematic vocabulary

Support Lessons: Success in this task will depend on lessons in:

Basic Camera Operation
Basic Capturing and Editing Techniques
Introduction to Video Editing Software

Links: This project connects well with study in Primitive Cinema and Silent Film

Resources: Essential resources include a Glossary of Terms.

FILM 2
REVERSE ENGINEER

By taking someone else's work and recreating it, boys reinforce the cinematic lessons learnt in the first film task. This project asks students to select a 1-minute extract from a film of their choice, which they study thoroughly and then attempt to replicate as closely as they possibly can. In their replication, students are required to create everything themselves, including sound effects. For expediency students may wish to locate and use the original score (but it must be credited). In preparation, they will write the script (not merely photocopy it) in standard format and then will create the storyboard as a checklist for shooting. They are expected to get as close as they possibly can to the original, with the exception that the setting and actors must be adapted to take place in a school environment. This is a great opportunity for boys and their teachers to have a bit if fun together - Heads of School can make great Godfathers!

Product: At the conclusion of this project the student(s) will create a 1-minute replication of a scene from a professional film of their choice.

Objectives: This project is designed to allow students to:

Fully appreciate the complexity of creating a scene from the ground up
Discover many of the rules for editing on their own
Reinforce the lessons of Film 1

Support Lessons: Success on this project will depend on lessons in:

Feature script format
Basic 3-point lighting

Links: This project connects well to a film studied in class where students recreate a sequence from the studied film.

FILM 3
GENRE SEQUENCE

In this project, students investigate a chosen film genre from Western, Horror or Action films. For this project, they will create a short film that meets some of the conventions of that genre through creating a famous sequence from each; a high-noon shoot out (Western), a jump scare (Horror), or a chase sequence (Action). The idea is to get students to recognise that good films are those that evoke a response in their audience. It is not necessary that these films tell a complete a story; a piece of a story is sufficient, as long as there is clear evidence of genre conventions somewhere between the fade in and the fade out. Scripting and storyboarding should be familiar processes by now.

Product: At the conclusion of this project the student(s) will create a 1-2 minute film that meets the conventions of a particular genre.

Objectives: This project is designed to allow students to:

Demonstrate deep knowledge of a particular genre
Learn how good films affect us as an audience
Develop skills in pacing and building tension

Support Lessons: Success on this project will depend on lessons in:

Genre theory

Links: This project connects learning in genre theory and history. Teachers may choose to focus on one genre in depth or cover all three.

 Resources: Essential resources include examples of each style of sequence. The final scene from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (Western), the corridor sequence from *The Exorcist III* (Horror) and the chase sequence from *Casino Royale* (Action) are all good examples to use.

FILM 4
PERSONAL NARRATIVE / DOCUMENTARY

This task is, obviously, the final film for this starter pack. It is a more open film task in that the final product is less defined than the previous three. The film may take the form of a fictionalised narrative film, based on real events or ideas, or a documentary. At this point in their development, boys are encouraged to explore ideas and subjects that are of significance to them. This project should therefore have checkpoints along the way. When and how these are required is up to the discretion of the teacher, but might include:

1. Idea Development
2. Pitch Session
3. Finished screenplay
4. Crew Formation
5. Complete pre-production
6. Complete production
7. Complete post-production

Product: At the conclusion of this project the student(s) will create a film that explores a significant aspect of their lives.

Objectives: This project is designed to allow students to create a complete statement in film.