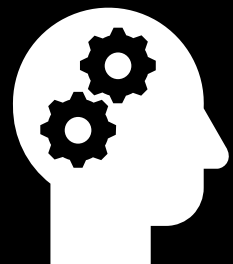
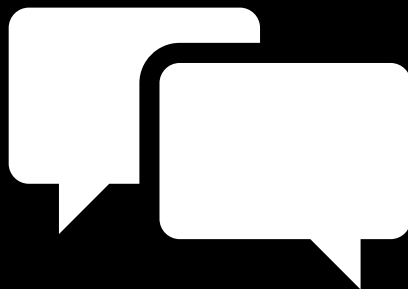
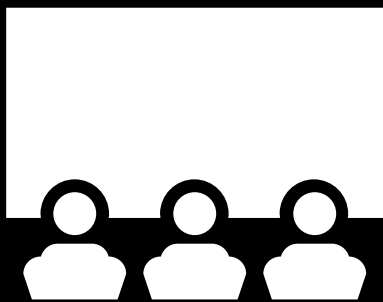




A-Level Film Studies

Northampton School for Girls

Summer Transition Work



Watch

Discuss

Analyse

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How to use this booklet

This booklet has a number of functions. It sets out the course content for Film Studies, gives a brief explanation of the course and some of the films we study, as well as suggesting some activities for preparing for the course over the summer.

The key part of this is the 6-week unit of work to complete before the summer. The aim of this set of activities is to:

- Keep you engaged with learning so that the return to learning at the start of the course isn't a huge shock to the system
- Give you a deeper appreciation for the study of film, regardless of prior experience with the subject
- Allow you to practice your research and critical writing skills in a low-risk environment
- Begin to develop your viewing skills so you know how to focus on elements other than the narrative when watching films

What is Film Studies?

Film studies has existed as an A-Level qualification for a number of years, but the most recent update to the specification brings a new level of rigour to the course recognised by a number of prestigious universities around the UK.

Film studies allows you as a learner to explore all areas of the set films. This includes both societal and industrial contexts, narrative approaches, use of features of film form, spectatorship, and theories including Marxism, surrealism, expressionism and auteurship. As well as understanding these elements, you will learn how to apply them to the relevant film text, exploring the purpose of each director's work and how effectively their ideas are conveyed.

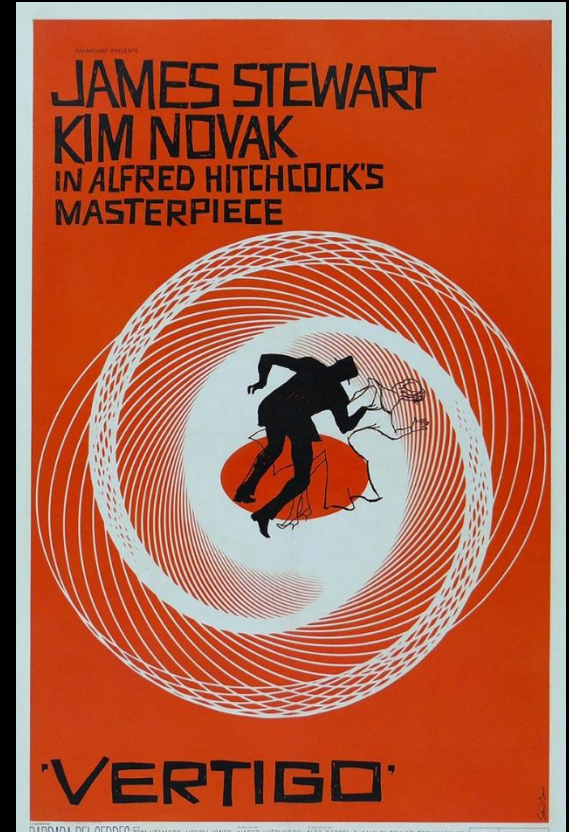
The course also promotes the study of films across more than 100 years of cinema. Although our earliest films are from the 1920's (Buster Keaton's short films) we have to look at the Lumiere Brothers and their work from the late 1800s to truly appreciate the development of film. We continue through the years to watch the work of some true visionaries, (Hitchcock's 1958 thriller *Vertigo* is next on our timeline) award winners (such as multi award winning director Milos Forman, and his film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) and modern icons (such as Shane Meadow's gritty drama, *This is England*). We also explore the non-English language film, delving into the cruel world of Facist Spain in Guillermo Del Toro's *Pans Labyrinth*, and the blood-soaked favela created in Fernando Meirelles' *City of God*.

Film Studies also offers an outlet for your creativity through the coursework, which is worth 30% of your final grade. After watching award winning short films like *Stutterer*, *Curfew* & *The Gun Slinger*, you will use their influence to create a screenplay for your own short film. The accompanying evaluative analysis will allow you to further develop your critical writing, giving you the chance to consider how successful your project has been.



Above: Milos Forman's work *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is explored in relation to the changing Hollywood landscape of the 1970s.

Below: Hitchcock's classic *Vertigo* is examined alongside the decline of the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood.



What are the course components?

Component 1: Varieties of film and filmmaking. Written examination: 2½ hours. 35% of qualification

This component assesses knowledge and understanding of six feature-length films.

Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 (comparative study)

One question from a choice of two, requiring reference to two Hollywood films, one from the Classical Hollywood period (1930-1960) and the other from the New Hollywood period (1961-1990).

Section B: American film since 2005 (two-film study)

One question from a choice of two, requiring reference to two American films, one mainstream film and one contemporary independent film.

Section C: British film since 1995 (two-film study)

One question from a choice of two, requiring reference to two British films

Component 2: Global filmmaking perspectives. Written examination: 2½ hours. 35% of qualification

This component assesses knowledge and understanding of five feature-length films (or their equivalent).

Section A: Global film (two-film study)

One question from a choice of two, requiring reference to two global films: one European and one produced outside Europe.

Section B: Documentary film

One question from a choice of two, requiring reference to one documentary film.

Section C: Film movements – Silent cinema

One question from a choice of two, requiring reference to one silent film or group of films.

Section D: Film movements – Experimental film (1960-2000)

One question from a choice of two, requiring reference to one film option.

Component 3: Production. Non-exam assessment. 30% of qualification

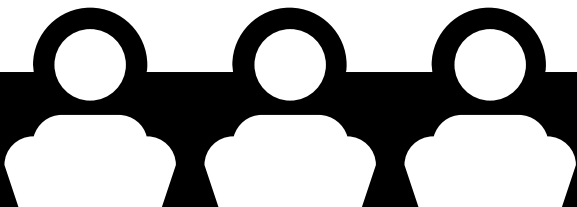
This component assesses one production and its evaluative analysis. Learners produce:

- A screenplay for a short film (1600-1800 words) plus a digitally photographed storyboard of a key section from the screenplay
- an evaluative analysis (1600 - 1800 words).

What steps can I take to prepare for A-Level Film Studies?

I haven't studied Film before

- Ferris Bueller's Day Off
- Juno
- Whiplash
- Attack the Block
- Slumdog Millionaire
- Spirited Away



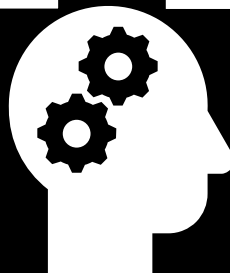
Watch some films from the GCSE course to acquaint yourself to the variety of texts we will explore.

I have completed the GCSE Film Studies course

- Rear Window
- Man on the Moon
- The Shape of Water
- La Haine
- Hot Fuzz
- The Help



Watch selected work from directors we will study, as well as films that will help you relate to the messages of some of our focus texts.



Pick one of the films you have watched to **analyse**. You need to analyse the following:

- What messages are conveyed in your film
- How the messages are conveyed
- What elements of the film were enjoyable and why?
- How well did your chosen film do both commercially (box office success) and critically? (reviews, award show success)
- What did the film teach you about the society in which it was set? Did this seem realistic / plausible?

What further study should I consider if I am new to Film Studies?

If you are a non-GCSE student, you might want to look at the materials available on the A-Level Film Studies google classroom. Use the following class code to join: **lrjrp7q**

You may also want to look at the YouTube stream **Film Studies Fundamentals**, which has videos exploring the different elements of film studies that creators use to make meaning in their work. Take notes on what you see. We will recap all of this when the course begins, but this means you will already have a base of knowledge to draw from.

Finally, just watching a variety of films in a more focused way than you have before is a fantastic way of preparing for studying Film. Put your phone down, pay attention and consistently consider: why is the director showing me this now, in this way, using this film technique?



What further study should I consider after the GCSE course?

If you are continuing your study of Film to A-Level, don't throw your GCSE notes away! Go through them to ensure your understanding of micro features is absolute, and up to date – remember that memory decay can erode this knowledge.

To prepare further, consider researching some of the theoretical elements of the course. A basic understanding of the following areas will be really beneficial:

- Auteur theory
- Marxism
- Propp, Todorov, Levi-Strauss and Barthes narrative theories
- Marxism
- Laura Mulvey's theory of Male Gaze

As well as understanding these theories, see if you can identify where aspects of each theory are present in some of the films you have viewed.

Finally, look at your coursework project from Year 11, and see if you can expand it to a satisfactory conclusion without the shackles of a word limit! Once it is complete, further develop your evaluation using the following questions:

- Which methods were most successful for generating ideas for your screenplay?
- How did you pick your genre, and what other genres would you feel comfortable writing?
- How did you write authentic and convincing dialogue?
- What was more important, the dialogue spoken by your characters or the accompanying actions? Why?

What other A-Level prep can I do?

A-level study requires more independence than your GCSE courses. You will be required to write critically, research effectively, and organise your notes efficiently.

Critical Writing

Look on the google classroom (class code **lrjrp7q**) for **two different critical writing guides**. You will also be given guidance on this during your PSHE lessons.

Research

Familiarise yourself with using **viable** sources for your research. For film, that means using reputable sources for reviews, such as:

Roger Ebert – www.rogerebert.com

The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/film+tone/reviews>

Empire – www.empireonline.com

BBC Culture - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/culture/tags/film-reviews>

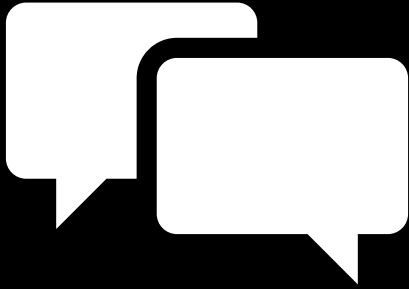
When searching for information, you should also try and get into the habit of using Google Scholar, which will give you more academically focused results - <https://scholar.google.co.uk/>

Organisation

To prepare for the course, ensure you have a lever arch folder for your notes, along with dividers. The dividers are key, because different parts of the course are taught by different members of staff, and are independent from one another. We will also complete some work digitally using school laptops – be prepared to use your study session time to print off and file these notes!

Anything else?

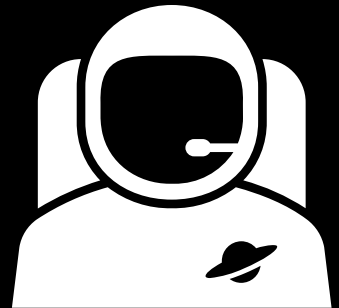
Discussion



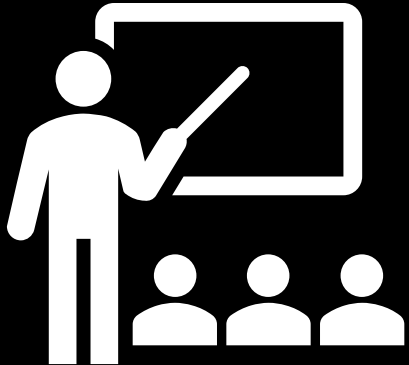
Discussion is a key part of your Film Studies A-Level. It doesn't matter if you love or hate a film we are studying – you just need to express that opinion, and be prepared to defend it. Don't have an opinion about film? Then why are you taking this A-level?!

Exploration

To be a rounded student of Film, you need to explore a number of genres outside of your normal watching sphere. Be adventurous, and look at new genres, languages and times to find a film focus you haven't previously experienced.



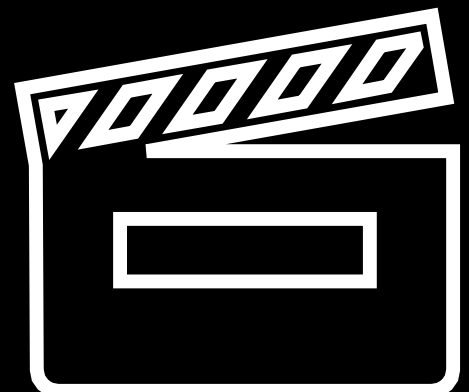
Presentation



For some parts of the course, you will be expected to present your ideas to your peers. This means speaking to a group in an engaging way. If the idea of this worries you, look at some speaking tips online – and remember, reading your text off of a slide is banned in SFC3!

Surround yourself with Film!

As well as watching films, keep up to date on the latest developments in film by listening to Podcasts like Kermode & Mayo on the BBC, and reading publications like *Empire* and *Sight & Sound*.



A 6-week taster: Please complete these weekly tasks before the summer!

Week 1 – What is your relationship with film?

1. Start with an admin task – join the google classroom! The class code is **5drsqmz**. Check you can access the materials currently on the classroom.
2. Now to begin the proper introduction to Film...and it starts with you! Lots of our thoughts and interpretations of what we see on screen are influenced by our own experiences. Start by making a wordcloud (see wordle.com or wordcloud.com) and filling it with your favourite genres, films, directors & performers. Make sure you save it – this is going to go on the inside of your folder. There's an example below, although yours should be more detailed:



3. Now that you have considered your film preferences, I need you to pick a film you have seen that other people most likely have not. For example, lots of people will have seen blockbuster films from Marvel & Disney – but who has seen the fantastic independent film *Whiplash*? Or *Winter's Bone*, which features a pre-Hunger Games Jennifer Lawrence? Pick your obscure favourite, and write an essay explaining why it should be watched by the masses. You need to write at least three paragraphs, each with a different focus. If you're unsure of what areas you might consider, use the below list for ideas:
 - Acting
 - Setting
 - Camerawork/cinematography
 - Narrative
 - Specific characters that really spoke to you
 - Context – the issues the film made you more aware of

This is also a test of your academic writing skills – can you persuade me to watch your selected film?

Week 2 – Step Outside of your Comfort Zone

This week I want you to be open minded in your approach to watching films. Lots of us love big, blockbuster films from producers like Disney, Universal and Twentieth Century – and that’s okay! They are designed to be enjoyed by the masses so that they make lots of money at the box office, but that doesn’t mean you should feel bad for enjoying them; there is no place for snobbery in Film Studies!

However, that does mean that there are a lot of films that we might not be aware of because they didn’t have the huge marketing budget that some of the bigger films do. With that in mind, explore and watch one film from each of the following categories, and write a brief paragraph on what you learnt & enjoyed from watching each film. There are some suggestions for each, although you are welcome to select any film that fits the category.

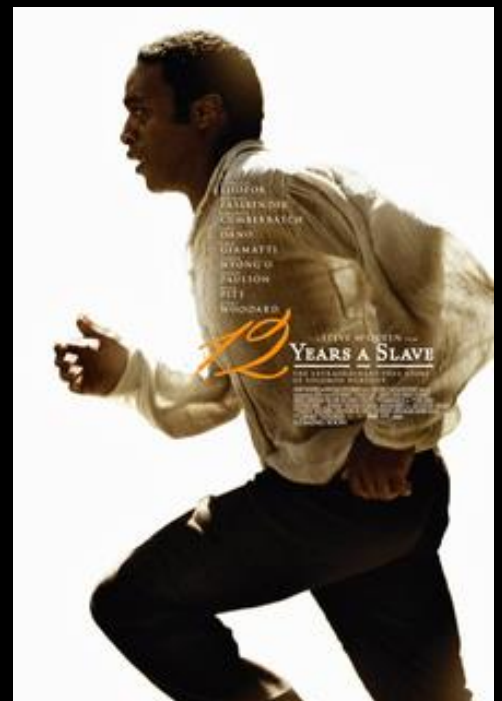
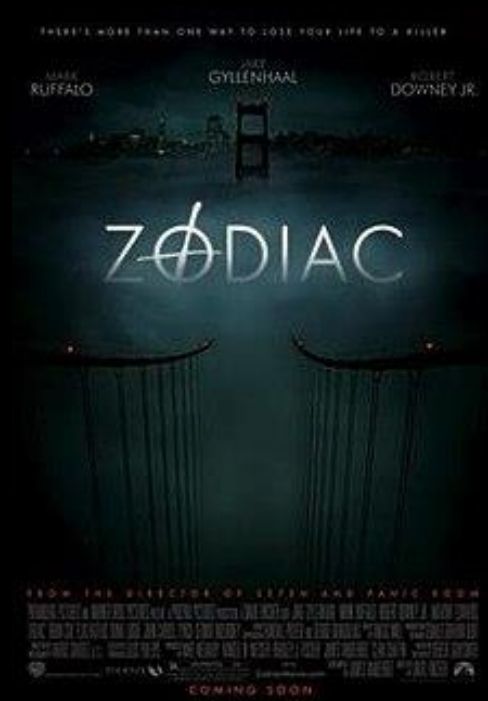
1. A non-English language film	2. A film that was shot in black and white	3. A film produced by an independent studio.
<i>Ida</i> (2013)	<i>The Artist</i> (2011)	<i>Frances Ha!</i> (2012)
<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	<i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941)	<i>Donnie Darko</i> (2001)
<i>Victoria</i> (2015)	<i>Casablanca</i> (1942)	<i>No Country for Old Men</i> (2007)
<i>House of Flying Daggers</i> (2004)	<i>Schindler’s List</i> (1993)	<i>Submarine</i> (2010)
<i>Taxi Tehran</i> (2015)	<i>Sin City</i> (2005) Disclaimer: This is an 18 and very violent!	<i>Little Miss Sunshine</i> (2006)

Week 3 – What is film actually for?

One thing you'll need to be aware of as a Film Studies student is the fact that some people will not consider this area of study to be significant. Be prepared for a lot of “Oh, so you just watch films then? Sounds like a right doss!” However, those uneducated and ignorant simpletons are wrong, as film is both an economic and intellectual gem that should be granted much more respect. For example, the UK Film Industry is worth £5.2 billion to the UK economy, and produces more than £2 billion worth of services.

We should also be interested in the cultural capital of film, and its ability to educate, present new ideas and change perceptions. I would like for you to watch one of the following films – ideally pick one that is unfamiliar to you in terms of the subject it covers. After watching, please research:

- How authentically the film portrays the event of the narrative
- How those involved in the production of the film made it authentic (including their research & preparation before production began)
- Why those involved in the film felt that the story needed to be told
- Any controversies or criticisms of the way the film portrayed the event it covers



Week 4 – Franchise Fatigue

As we've looked at already, the dominant studios within the Film Industry tend to produce crowd pleasing films, particularly those that appeal to key audience demographics. However, some studios who are more risk averse can end up relying on the tried and tested formula of a certain type of film too often, leaving audiences bored by seeing the same formulaic narratives and themes across all new releases.

Your challenge this week is to look into a film franchise that flopped. The genre of the franchise is up to you, but there must be some element of failure to it – this can be in terms of losing money, gaining negative reviews or even having the franchise cancelled or further releases scrapped.

Once you have picked your franchise, create an information pack, explaining:

- How and why the franchise flopped
- How the studio reacted to the failure of the franchise
- How the franchise could have been saved
- Other franchises similar to it that were successful and why

I have made some suggestions below for franchises you might like to investigate – but as always, feel free to pick one that isn't included!



Week 5 – Fix the Film Industry

As much as we all love film, there are still a lot of issues within the Film Industry, with representation being at the heart of this. Representation within film refers to how the world is shown – and this is something that can have a huge impact on audiences. Imagine that every film you see has an evil tortoise in it that nibbles people's legs to the bone...you'll grow up thinking that all tortoise are really dangerous and to be avoided at all costs. A silly example, but you get the point.

Filmmakers therefore have a responsibility to represent the world fairly, but this is not always the case. I would like for you to research one of the following issues regarding representation within Filmmaking, and consider how this issue could be solved:

- Whitewashing (for examples, see *Ghost in the Shell*, *Aloha*, *The Lone Ranger*)
- Female representation (both in front of, and behind the camera – remember there has only been 1 female winner of the best director Oscar!)
- BAME representation (A 2016 study showed that only 29.1% of speaking characters in the top 100 films of that year were from a non-white group)
- Inclusion for those with a physical or mental disability (in the UK industry, only 5% of screen workers consider themselves to be disabled)

Please make sure your research includes properly cited sources for the information you have found. If you are struggling to organise your ideas, you can use the following structure:

- Background to the issue
- Examples of where the issue is present
- Reasons for this issue still existing
- Work being done within the industry to address this issue
- Any examples of success/positive changes being made to counter this issue



Week 6 – Cinema: Who has the power?

To finish our introduction to the Film Industry, we are going to look at the group that drives studios to make films: the audience!

Please use the following website for your research today:

<https://www.dcm.co.uk/audience>

Read through the audience profiles and do some **evaluation**. Decide:

- Which group is the most powerful and why?
- Which group is the easiest/least risky to cater to as a filmmaker?
- Which group is the most reliable in terms of their loyalty to cinemas?
- Which genre is the biggest risk for studios based on the audience profiles?

Based on everything you have learnt about audience demographics, and the previous 5 weeks' worth of work, pick one of the essays below to complete:

“Hollywood has a problem with representation that will take decades to fix.” To what extent do you agree?

“Modern films are predictable and formulaic – no-one can be surprised at the cinema anymore.” To what extent do you agree?

“Film making is the perfect medium for educating people about important events.” To what extent do you agree?

Regardless of which question you pick, you need to:

- Write in a clear academic tone
- Refer to facts and statistics you have found during your research
- Refer to specific films you have studied to further your understanding of the key issue
- Show an understanding of both sides of the statement

