Reading film

IB DP Film textual analysis full package

Reading film

- name the four systems of film language: **mise-en-scène**, **cinematography**, **editing** and sound;
- move from what is on screen to what it suggests and why it matters in the film;
- place an extract in its production, historical, cultural and genre context;

Reading film (2)

- choose a focused extract of no more than 5 minutes;
- write a **textual analysis** that argues instead of listing techniques.

Film language: the four systems

- **Lighting**: **high-key lighting** is bright and even, common in comedies; **low-key lighting** has deep shadows, common in horror and film noir.
- **Shot size** : from extreme long shot (a person tiny in a landscape) to extreme close-up (one eye). A close-up brings us near a character's feelings; a long shot shows a person in their world.
- **Camera angle** : a low angle looks up and can make a character seem powerful; a high angle looks down and can make them seem small or trapped.

Film language: the four systems (2)

- **Camera movement**: a pan turns the camera from a fixed point; a tracking shot moves the whole camera, often on a dolly; a handheld camera shakes and can feel urgent or real.
- **Editing**: a **long take** holds one shot without cutting; **montage** joins short shots so that together they create a meaning none has alone; **continuity editing** hides the cuts so that action seems to flow.
- **Sound**: **diegetic sound** comes from inside the story world (a door, a radio); **non-diegetic sound** is added for the audience (the score, a narrator).

Context and the extract

- **Denotation**: an extreme long shot from behind; Antonio and Bruno walk away into a crowd of hundreds of men leaving the stadium; the music rises; the film ends.
- **Connotation**: they shrink until we can no longer pick them out: two people among thousands with the same problems.
- **Significance**: the film's argument is that Antonio's story is not unusual; post-war poverty is everyone's story. The neorealist choices (real streets, a non-professional actor, the open ending) are the argument.

Writing the analysis

- give the timecode of the moment you discuss (for example 01:22:05);
- describe the technique exactly, using the correct term;
- complete the chain: **denotation**, **connotation**, **significance**;

Writing the analysis (2)

- link back to the film as a whole;
- cite your sources, separating the film itself and other primary sources from secondary sources such as books and articles.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Film guide* (first assessment 2019).
- D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (12th edition, 2019).
- S. Rebello, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* (1990).
- V. De Sica (director), *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, 1948); A. Hitchcock (director), *Psycho* (1960).

Common errors

- Listing techniques without explaining what they suggest or why they matter.
- Retelling the plot instead of analysing how meaning is made.
- Writing a review ("the film is brilliant") instead of an analysis.

Common errors (2)

- Choosing an extract longer than 5 minutes, or one where film language does little.
- Writing pages of history instead of a short, useful **context** paragraph.
- Forgetting timecodes or the list of sources.

Key terms

- **Textual analysis**: a written analysis of a film extract of at most 5 minutes, in at most 1,750 words.
- **Mise-en-scène**: everything placed in front of the camera: setting, costume, lighting and acting.
- **Montage**: joining short shots so that together they create a new meaning.

Key terms (2)

- **Diegetic sound**: **sound** that comes from inside the story world.
- **Denotation / connotation**: what is literally shown / what it suggests.
- **Neorealism**: an Italian film movement of the 1940s that filmed ordinary people in real locations.

Check yourself

- 1.
- State the word limit, extract length and HL weighting of the **textual analysis**. 2.
- Name the four systems of film language. 3.
- What is the difference between diegetic and **non-diegetic sound**?