

How to Read a Movie like a Book: The Hunger Games with Sherry Rosenthal

Grades 6 - 12

In a world where information and entertainment often come in visual rather than print form, it is important to have critical tools to interpret visual media as we would written texts. In his groundbreaking book *How to Read a Film* (Oxford University Press:1997) James Monaco identifies six components of movies that, once understood, enable a viewer to “read” a cinematic work as one might a book. These are: **1) Meaning; 2) Basic Elements; 3) Mise-en-scene; 4) Cinematography; 5) Montage, and 6) Sound.** Identifying and understanding these six elements allows the viewer of a film to gain knowledge of it as a text, including its integrity and intent. This lesson provides a demonstration of how to “read” the film *The Hunger Games* (dir. Gary Ross, 2012) and offers in-depth analysis, using examples from this film, of the six components identified by Monaco.

Materials: Computer, The Hunger Games DVD, stills from the movie The Hunger Games taken from Google Images

The Lesson:

1. **Meaning** – Explanation of Monaco’s components of **Meaning**: 1) themes; 2) metaphors, and 3) sub-texts. Prompt as an optional discussion and/or writing exercise (teachers can stop the video and allow students to write and/or discuss): “What do you consider the main **Meaning** or message of *The Hunger Games*?”
2. **Basic Elements** – Explanation of Monaco’s **Basic Elements** – 1) title; 2) plot; 3) characterization, and 4) point of view. Prompt for a brief optional writing and/or discussion exercise on “**Characterization**” will be: “Who is your favorite **Character** in *The Hunger Games* and how would you describe them?”
3. **Mise-en-Scene**—Explanation of Monaco’s four **Mise-en-Scene** components – 1) setting; 2) costumes; 3) lighting, and 4) acting. Prompt for a brief optional writing and/or discussion exercise on “**Acting**” will be: Who do you think gave the best **Acting** performance in *The Hunger Games* and why?
4. **Cinematography** – Explanation of Monaco’s aspects of **Cinematography**: 1) tone; 2) camera angles; 3) focus, and 4) frame. I will point out examples from the film. My prompt for a brief optional writing and/or discussion exercise on “**Tone**” will be: What **Tone** is created through cinematography for the Districts? What contrasting **Tone** is created for the capital?
5. **Montage** – Explanation of Monaco’s parts of **Montage**: 1) cuts and editing between shots; 2) freeze frames; 3) sequences, and 4) the order of things. Prompt for a brief optional writing and/or discussion exercise on “**The order of things**” will be: What was the most exciting part of *The Hunger Games* and what did the film director do, as far as **The order of things** to make it so?
6. **Sound** – Explanation of Monaco’s components of **Sound**: 1) dialogue; 2) sound effects, and 3) music. I will use examples from the film. Prompt for a brief optional writing and/or discussion exercise on **Sound** will be: “What are some songs, music, or **sound effects** that you remember from *The Hunger Games* (example: the Mockingjay whistle) and what is happening?”

Connection to the Nevada Academic Content Standards for the Fine Arts

- Responding: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- Connecting: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

VA: Re 8.8.1 Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, artmaking approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

VA: Re7.HS.1I Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.

VA: Re7.HS.2I Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

Connection to Literacy: This lesson connects with and addresses literacy in terms of encouraging practice, and increasing acuity, in listening to and interpreting spoken dialogue; understanding vocabulary; and interpreting media messages and propaganda, as shown within the film. The lesson also features practice in learning and understanding important words, symbols, and meanings (e.g., the term "the reaping;" the characters' names and their relationships to plants and growth; the significance of Katniss's archery skill and her bow and arrow). Also, the lesson fosters "visual literacy" in terms of explaining how key elements of the original written story "translate" to film. Further, the lesson suggests ways of "reading" the film as one might a literary work, in order to enhance understanding of its characters, conflicts, dialogue, suspense elements, theme, setting, tone, and other elements.

Resources: I will also recommend, at the end of the lesson, reading the novel *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (Book 1 of the three-book trilogy) in order to compare and contrast how this story is "told" in print and film.

About the Artist

Sherry Rosenthal

Sherry Rosenthal is a teaching artist on the Nevada Arts Council's Artists in Schools + Communities (AIS+C) Roster in Literary Arts. She is a Professor of English at the College of Southern Nevada. Her education includes a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of California, San Diego and graduate study at UCLA Film School in filmmaking, editing, and criticism.

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