Castle View
Media
Department

GCSE Film Studies

Examination Handbook

Exam

Paper 1: Exploring Film (1 hr 30 minutes, 30%)
Four compulsory questions focusing upon film genre. These questions will assess the knowledge and understanding of film language and key industry and audience issues. The film genre will be **Superhero movies**
Paper 2: Exploring Film outside Hollywood **(1 hour, 20%)**
Three compulsory questions on one film produced outside Hollywood film – Bend it like Beckham. Questions will be based on: - Characters, narratives, themes and issues in the film chosen   - The way people, places, events and issues are represented in the film and   - A creative question involving individual responses to the film (e.g., reviews, blogs, website entries)

Language

The most important aspect of any Film Studies course is learning how to analyse films using the appropriate terminology.

You already have a good understanding of the different conventions used by film-makers. They will be sophisticated audiences aware of how different aspects of film language make them feel as a member of an audience; so in learning film language they will be merely putting technical terms to this unspoken understanding.

An introduction to film language starts with the basic differences between:

Macro elements of film language	Micro elements of film language
The macro elements of film language are key concepts of the whole course. It is important to emphasize to students that all their work in Film Studies is in some way linked to these.	Micro elements are the smaller details by which audiences make meaning of narrative, genre and representation. These are:
Narrative **Genre** **Representation**	**Camerawork** **Editing** **Sound** **Mise en scene** **Special effects**

For analytical purposes these areas are separated but students should always be making links between areas of their learning.

MACRO ASPECTS OF FILM LANGUAGE

Many references have already been made as to how the study of micro aspects of film language can be used to gain knowledge regarding genre and/or narrative. As key concepts it is important to make connections between elements of learning with **GENRE, NARRATIVE and REPRESENTATION**. The study of macro elements of film language should also be used as a stepping stone into Paper 1.

It is important for you to be able to define, recognize and analyse film genre. The best way to do this is to compare different films and the conventions they use. You should watch as many extracts from a variety of films, including ones that are not easily identifiable as one particular genre, to make you aware of the complexities around genre and how it is not a rigid concept.

MICRO ASPECTS OF FILM LANGUAGE

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Cinematography is the consideration of the visual impact of moments in a film. Camera shots are chosen to draw our attention to various aspects, important to the development of the narrative. Long and wide shots establish the setting or dramatic events; close-ups bring our attention to significant props or emotional expression. All films use the camera in this way so it is easy to find suitable clips; but you may also want to find clips with low and high angle shots, tilted frames and 360° shots.

Possible examples:

- Spotting shots – Use stills to identify shots.
- Analyse how shots are used in a range of genres.
- Construct storyboards – for an exciting/climactic part of a specific genre film. This is an excellent way for you to learn various aspects of film language but particularly helps you to connect genre with cinematography choices.

EDITING

The most significant aspect to talk about when looking at editing is how it affects the pace of the narrative. You need to be aware of how the choices of edits used effects the narrative flow; i.e. dissolves maintain the connection between scenes; fades often signify an ending of some sort. But often is more important to look at the timings of shots and what images the edits cut between. This is of great importance as it can build up drama, fear or excitement.

Possible examples:

- Trailers are great for studying editing as they often use lots of different types of edits and the pace created is obvious.
- Watch a couple of sequences from different genres and compare how they use editing to create pace and atmosphere in different ways, appropriate to that genre.
- Film a short sequence and edit it in 2 different ways, experimenting with styles and speed to see what difference this makes to the narrative.

SOUND

You need to be clear of the differences between diegetic and non-diegetic sound and how they impact on the film. Music is one of the most significant aspects of a film's sound, as it is used so regularly to build atmosphere, to identify particular moments in the narrative. It is also interesting to consider ambient sound as an important part of establishing setting and sound effects related to aspects of genre, e.g., exaggerated knife noise in a horror film; loud punch sounds in action movies.

Possible examples:

- Play the sound from an extract of a film without the images and see if you can guess the genre/what film they are watching is happening/what.
- Compare how a couple of film's use music to create tension. Practice describing how music builds and what kind of music is being used – orchestral/rock, piano etc.
- Watch a trailer and examine the different uses of sound within it. Often sound effects, music, dialogue and narration will all be used so you can consider the significance of each use to how the film is being marketed to its target audience.

MISE EN SCENE

Analysing mise en scene is a matter of tying together the aspects outlined below and considering their importance in terms of the development of the narrative. Analysing the mise en scene in one still image can also help students consider genre conventions.

Mise en scene includes:

- The positioning of characters within the frame
- Facial expressions and body language
- Settings and props
- Costume, hair and make-up.
- Lighting & colour

Props and costume are important in portraying the time and place in which a film is set and the positioning of characters and body language reveal much about their place in the narrative. Lighting and colour can be taught separately as there is a lot to discuss, such as how the positioning of lights creates certain moods, how colour can be symbolic and how lighting and colour are used in particular ways to connote genre.

Possible examples:

- Obtain some still images from films from different genres and ask students to annotate the mise en scene saying how its use reflects the genre of the film. (Available on various websites, including imdb.com).
- Look at an extract from a film set in a clear historical period and comparing the props, costume and settings used with real historical examples in order to comment on authenticity. (This could bring up important discussions about whether authenticity is important.)
- Compare the use of lighting and colour in 3 films from different genres. (Sci fi/horror/action adventure are particularly good choices). Look for how they establish setting and what is connoted by the use of particular colours -e.g. blue=cold, red=violence, white=innocence.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

You do not need to be experts in special effects but you should be able to discuss the nature of different special effects and what they add to the film. Extras on DVDs can be good resources as they often include explanations of how special effects are used within the film. It is also interesting to discuss the place of special effects in audience pleasures, particularly with genres like the disaster movie. We expect amazing special effects in some genres and they can play a large part in our appreciation of a film.

Possible activities:

- Compare the use of special effects in an original film and its remake – such as King Kong. Discuss the differences technology has made to the viewing experience.
- Debate the place of CGI in contemporary films. Some Directors are rejecting them in favour of real stunts and actors (e.g. Casino Royale 2006); but would Lord of the Rings trilogy been created so successfully without them?

Exploring Film (1 hour 30 minutes) 30%

The first examination is called 'Exploring Film' containing four questions about film genre. During the course you will have studied the concept of genre and its importance in terms of audience, film production and marketing.

This paper will focus upon Genre. **The Superhero Movie will be the set Genre.**

The knowledge and understanding students gain gained through their practical coursework will also help you to explore the ways in which certain Superhero Movies communicate to their audiences. You will study at least two Superhero Movies in class and will have noticed and discussed the similarities and differences between the films. You are encouraged to watch and explore several other Superhero Movies in order to allow a deeper awareness of common patterns in terms of characters and narrative structures and to explore the ways in which genres can be fluid and change over time.

The questions in **Section 1** of the paper will relate to a sequence from a Superhero Movie which will be shown three times at the start of the examination. It will usually take about 20 minutes to watch and make notes on the sequence.

In **Section 2** the questions will then broaden out in order to allow you to compare the sequence to the Superhero Movies you have studied in class.

Section 3 will use print based resource material which relates to the Superhero movie. You will be asked to identify typical genre features. You will also need to analyse the layout, images and text used and comment on why or how they have been used. You should also consider carefully how this material appeals to its target audience.

In **section 4** you will have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of genre in a creative way. Here the pre-production and production work you have completed for coursework will provide a solid foundation. The questions in this section will give you the chance to show the importance of genre in terms of audience appeal and to demonstrate how it is used by the organisations which produce and market films. This section will also require the ability to identify the typical features of the Superhero Movie, for example, codes and conventions, camera techniques, characters, narrative structures, audience appeal.

Choice of Films

Aside from the usual restrictions of availability and certification there is no prescription on the films to be considered. One focus of genre study is to spend time considering the parameters of the genre itself. What is a Superhero Movie, what is not and why? Indeed if intelligent argument is used by a student in any assessment to justify a 'left of field' selection this should be rewarded. Nevertheless this is guidance and a basic (probably imperfect) definition of the Superhero Movie might be:

> *"A Superhero movie is a movie with action, fantasy and science fiction film; that is focused on the actions of one or more superheroes, individuals who usually possess superhuman abilities relative to a normal person and are dedicated to protecting the public."*

Even with a tight definition the list of potential films is longer that one first imagines. As a general guideline at least one film from the 1970's and 1990's cycles will be studied. There are many lists available on the internet the contents of which provide debate in and of themselves as a general guide here are some of the main ones:

Superhero Movies

1976

Superman The first big budget 'serious' mainstream movie. Launches a 5 film franchise. Genre off & flying? DC

1989

Batman 1st Batman re-boot. Tim Burton brings the dark & the strange. Launches a 4 film franchise. DC

The Punisher Marvel's first attempt to launch an 'adult' movie, unfortunately without success. Marvel

1998

Blade Breakthrough movie. Marvel succeeds on screen (at last) It can be done! Launches a 3 film franchise. Marvel

2000

X-Men Breakthrough movie II, Marvel succeeds on screen with traditional superheroes– flood gate about to open. Launches a 5 (so far) film franchise. Marvel

Unbreakable Original screenplay that draws on superhero genre conventions, mainstream crossing complete, almost? Original screenplay

2002

Spider-Man First Marvel-based box-office smash. It was the film audiences had been waiting for . with great power …. Launches a 3 (reboot to come) film franchise. Marvel

2003

Daredevil First attempt to launch a less well-known Marvel character, largely faithful to the source, with limited success. Marvel

X2: X-Men United The franchise continues, this time with critical acclaim as well. Marvel

Hulk First attempt to launch one of Marvel's 'biggest' heroes. Ang Lee's interpretation does not franchise launch. Marvel

2004

Hellboy Guillermo Del Toro turns down Harry Potter & The Prisoner Of Azkaban to direct this independent comic. Launches a 2 (to date) film franchise. Dark Horse Comics

The Punisher Marvels second attempt to launch an 'adult' movie - without success. Marvel

Spider-Man 2 The franchise continues, this time with critical acclaim as well. Marvel

Catwoman First big flop in this 'new-era' of superhero with this DC Batman spin-off. First female headline superhero. Studio suspicions (chauvinism) confirmed? DC

The Incredibles Animated 'original' (are you the Fantastic Four in disguise?) screenplay that draws on superhero genre conventions. Mainstream crossing complete …. Birth of a new genre? Original screenplay

2005

Elektra A 'limited success' for this spin-off from the Daredevil movie. First attempt at the Marvel 'universe on screen'? DC

Batman Begins Re-boot number 2. Chris Nolan finds the Dark Knight. Launches a 3 film franchise. Are the Brits coming? DC

Fantastic Four All guns blazing as 20th Century Fox launches Marvel's first family for the family. Limited success. Launches a sequel rather than a franchise. Re-boot to follow. Marvel

Sin City Not strictly 'super' or 'heroic' but puts the comic book onscreen, almost literally. Dark Horse Comics

2006

X-Men: The Last Stand The first unloved 3rd child. Despite highest box office of the franchise (loved by Paramount then), the critics begin to turn ….? Marvel

V for Vendetta An updated film version of Alan Moore & David Lloyd's British terrorist / anti-hero's fight against a near future Fascist dystopia. Reality intervenes when its Bonfire Night release is put off for 5 months due to real terrorist bombings in London. DC

Superman Returns First re-boot. Bryan Singer can't repeat his X-Men success. Not enough of a re-boot. Too much homage - a bit boring, genre fatigue setting in? DC

2007

Ghost Rider Nicolas Cage finally gets a superhero part with this Marvel second rank Marvel character. Successful enough for a sequel. Genre firmly entrenched here as the 'formula' is clearly on display.

Spider-Man 3 The second unloved 3rd child. Despite highest box office of the franchise (loved by Sony then), the critics turn …. Marvel

Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer Second and final instalment (re-boot to come). Less box-office than the first. A vehicle to launch a Silver Surfer franchise – yet to appear! Marvel

2008

Superhero Movie A Hollywood parody. Truly a recognisable mainstream genre now or signal for a cycle coming to an end? Original screenplay

The Incredible Hulk Re-boot number 1. Hulk fan Edward Norton tries his best with Marvel's Jekyll & Hyde green giant. The first Marvel post-credits scene shows Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) in recruitment mode. A teaser for Iron Man and the first step in transferring the Marvel universe concept to the screen and film franchising. Additionally an unused opening features a glimpse of

Captain America. Box-office could have been better leading to more changes to come for Marvel's 'jolly green giant'. Marvel

Iron Man Marvel Studio's first 'solo' effort (Paramount to distribute).Receives critical approval and good box office. Post-script hints at franchise to come (The Avengers) All systems to go for Marvel Studios? Nick Fury sneaks into the post-credits teaser. The transfer of the Marvel universe approach to franchising continues as we get the first Avengers hint. Marvel

Hancock Original screenplay star vehicle for Will Smith. With great power comes heavy drinking & anti-social behaviour. Toned down from an R rated script. Does good box-office. Perhaps this 'new-genre' has legs? Original screenplay

Hellboy II: The Golden Army Follow up to Del Toro's Dark Horse first instalment. Box-office improves. No news on part three. Dark Horse Comics

The Dark Knight BOOM! POW! WOW! Holy …. Batman. Huge second instalment of the franchise threatens to become alltime box-office number 1. Writes Chris Nolan's ticket to do what he wants in Hollywood. Ensures part 3 (at least) and Hollywood's continuing love affair with the genre. DC

Punisher: War Zone Third (and final?) attempt to sell an adult 18 certificate Marvel character. Violent, sweary, minimal box office again. Fails to reflect the comic's popularity of this Marvel stalwart. Marvel

The Spirit Frank Miller (comic legend) put in charge. This affectionate faithful homage to Will Eisner's 40's hero baffles audiences & critics alike earning mediocre box-office and a setback for Miller? Original Screenplay

2009

Watchmen Warner Brothers finally produces a version of the 'Citizen Kane' of comic books. Fan faithful, 18 certificate, 'ultimate editions' runs between 3 to 4 hours on DVD/Blu-ray.Critical reactions mixed, fans enjoy, general audience kind of get it, box-office uninspired, Alan Moore remains silent…. DC

X-Men Origins: Wolverine First 'spin-off' from the main franchise. Popular Wolverine a safe bet. Box-office seems to think so. Wolverine in Japan points to the next sequel. Marvel

2010

Kick-Ass The Brits are here. Matthew Vaughn secures independent finance as Hollywood not interested in 'sweary little girls'. On completion, secures distribution through Lionsgate with requests for more of the 'sweary little girl'. A hit financially & critically, sequel on the way. Original screenplay / Marvel

Iron Man 2 Improves the box-office on the first film. Critics less impressed (what will they have to say about the traditionally unloved third film that is now confirmed for 2013). Post-script glimpse of Mjolinir (Thor's hammer) strengthens the Marvel 'universe' approach to a film franchise. Marvel

2011

The Green Hornet Seth Rogan in this independent comic-based comedy. More mainstream genre points then…. WXYZ Radio Series / Dynamite Entertainment

Thor (3D) The Brits are here part 2. Kenneth Brannagh directs this third entry into the Avengers roster. Chosen to manage the Shakespearean tone of Asgardian conversation. No news on sequels. Its role in the success of The Avengers more important at this stage. Marvel

X-Men: First Class Second-spin off from main franchise. A prequel. More of a 'teen-vibe' to focus on that key-demographic. Marvel

Green Lantern Ryan Reynolds in DC/Warners attempt to launch a third major superhero hero into the cinema. DC

Captain America: The First Avenger Fourth Avenger hits the screen. Chris Evans cast as the American icon (will audiences expect him to burst into flame as the former Fantastic Four's Human Torch? A definite re-boot for that franchise then?) Still enough general interest in 'Cap' since his recent death & rebirth in the comics? Avenger's success riding on it? Marvel

2012…

The Avengers First to be distributed by new Marvel owners Disney. Paramount guaranteed at least $115m as part of the deal. The franchise of franchises (a super franchise?) unites Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, Black Widow (no solo outing for Scarlet/Natasha yet), Nick Fury (after multiple Sam Jackson cameos) and The Hulk (a Mark Ruffalo re-cast meaning another re-boot?). Fans wait with baited breath for the box-office on this comic to film universe experiment…. Marvel

Untitled **Spider-Man** re-boot (3D) Here we go again, new cast, new crew, a 'New Day'? Marvel

Untitled **Batman** Sequel (The Dark Knight Rises?) The pressure is on (it's his fault). Chris Nolan to top The Dark Knight and produce a 'loved' third entry into the franchise. No joker…. DC

The Man Of Steel (Superman) Chris Nolan to produce, Zack Snyder (300, Watchmen) to direct, second re-boot …. DC

Iron Man 3 Franchise already out of favour with the critics, and Favreau off the franchise. Can Downey Jr. break the 3rd installment hoo-doo? Marvel

The Flash Early days on this DC stalwart. Script underway. DC Wonder Woman As yet, continues to patrol 'development hell'. DC

Other Marvel possibilities Ant-Man, Deadpool, Doctor Strange, Nick Fury. A lot will depend on the 4 or 5 films to be released in 2011 & 2012. Marvel

Film Language

Any initial work centres on the review of genre theory and an attempt to define the Superhero Movie. Once this ground work has been done then testing this can be done through screening whole films and/or sequences. Sequences in particular are used to consider elements of film language, either as part of a whole film or a small selection. The macro elements of film language are probably best considered across a whole film. In terms of topics within which to apply Film Language the following is suggested:

- ✓ The Superhero movie Codes and Conventions
- ✓ Themes
- ✓ Iconography
- ✓ Narrative and Plot
- ✓ Style
- ✓ Characters and stars
- ✓ Ideologies

These topics will be studied as standalone components or applied jointly to a specific film. Specific approaches could take the form of studying one film, sequences, contrasting a selection from the 1970's & 1990's, comparing original and remake, or different films about the same Superhero. Whatever approach chosen you should build up clear ideas of what each of these topics means in terms of the Superhero Movie.

Film Organisations

The potentially 'driver' of the two themes should have at least two study components – research and creativity. You will grasp what is meant by the film industry and its various components. Discussion of the relative importance of production, distribution and exhibition will be part of this, in particular the role of marketing within this process. You build up your own research base regarding these topics you are encouraged to 'look behind the curtain' and research the industry responsible for the films they are studying. This can take whatever form deemed appropriate focus on an element (production, distribution, exhibition and marketing). The creative aspect of this is linked to the coursework when you are asked to design your own 'products' using what you have learned.

In researching the business background to any film it should reveal the 'nuts and bolts' of box office receipts. This is a link into considering audience as the amount of revenue a film generates will at least describe the size of its audience. This can then lead into the specific considerations of audience outline in the specification. Any study of audience at this level should emphasis that the important people to mainstream cinema going are the students, 15-25's, rather than the teachers who may fall outside of this age bracket.

Exploring Film outside Hollywood (1 hour) 20%

The second exam will require you to focus upon <u>at least</u> one film made outside Hollywood. You will have an hour in which to answer three compulsory questions.

Section 1 of the paper will require to describe and discuss the kinds of characters, narratives, themes and issues that have been explored in their chosen film.

In **Section 2** you must focus carefully on an important sequence from the close study film and describe in detail the ways in which key themes and issues are represented. Here again, the work you have already done in the first part of your coursework, for example on mise-en-scene, camera movement and framing, editing and sound, will help to inform their responses. The Genre study will also help in terms of the knowledge and understanding of how narratives are structured, the identification of specific character types, and repeated ideas.

Section 3 is designed to give you the chance to respond in a creative way to the film and to show an understanding of a range of the ways in which films are marketed and reviewed. You may, for example, be asked to write a review of their chosen film for a specific target audience, publication, or media platform. Although this question invites you to think carefully about producers and audiences, their personal response to the themes, issues and performances within the film is really important.

Films outside Hollywood

This unit is designed to expand your knowledge and understanding of films that feature people, cultures and settings that may be outside their direct experience of life. However, the films chosen all contain universal themes and have young people at the heart of their narratives.

Students will study Bend it Like Beckham in depth.

You will explore in depth the following areas:

- The differences and similarities between films made in mainstream Hollywood and those made in other parts of the world.
- The social and historical context of a selection of the close study films.

- The characters, narratives, themes and issues raised within the non Hollywood close study films.
- The ways in which people, places, events and issues are represented.
- The organisations which produce the films and the audiences who respond to them.
- Their own response to the film and the forms in which this critical response may be expressed.

How to Approach the Focus Film

When studying films made outside Hollywood think about what you expect from a Hollywood film and a consideration of the ways in which other forms of cinema may either be similar or differ from this. Whilst the concept of 'world cinema' may be problematic because of the sheer diversity of film-making in other countries, other cultures, students will already have a set of expectations that you bring with them when watching a British film.

Perhaps the desire to see one of your favourite 'A List' Hollywood stars appeals to you much more than watching actors you have never seen before. Audiences don't want to be disappointed so they pick familiar films of a specific genre, containing their favourite stars, or director. Invariably these will be the main bill of fare at your local multiplex.

Think about the set of expectations you have when watching films and the fact that many of the films they have studied for this course will have been made in Hollywood. Often when you think cinema, you automatically think Hollywood and then we compare other kinds of cinema to it.

- What is a typical week's programme at your nearest multiplex cinema?
- How many films are American? How many are from other countries?
- How do we identify, for example, a French Film? Is it because all or most of the money to make the film came from France? Is it because the principal actors were French? Is t because it was set in France? Is it because it tells us more about French history or culture?

When we talk about 'British Cinema' or 'French Cinema' or 'Australian Cinema' we perhaps assume that the films made in these countries are somehow quite different to Hollywood Cinema. This is not necessarily true and although you will identify several differences in terms of style, or settings, between their chosen focus film and a typical Hollywood film, there may also be striking similarities.

The focus film has been chosen because it is both challenging and enjoyable. Invariably it contains interesting performances by actors that you might've seen before – sometimes these actors have had very similar life experiences to the characters they play. The issues dealt with are worthy of thoughtful, reflective exploration and can be responded to on a number of different levels.

Some of the settings may be unfamiliar to you but the problems or situations which face the characters may not. The focus film provides both the opportunity for you to learn more about the people and places featured within the film's world, and the chance to engage, understand and respond to the film's issues.

Creative Responses to Films made outside Hollywood.

The final question in the examination is designed to allow you to creatively apply your knowledge and understanding of the ways in which your focus film communicates all the issues, ideas that have been explored and discussed in class.

You may, for example, be asked to write a review for a specific target audience, create a poster, design a page for a website, or produce a 'blog'. Any of the tasks set will require a consideration of the following areas:

- The issues raised by the focus film
- Characters, performance and narrative
- The representation of people and places and how film language contributes to those representations.
- A personal response to the film.
- An understanding of how different film related media products are formatted and designed to appeal to a specific target audience.

All of these areas will have been covered in other areas of the course and approach creativity by exploring different ways of demonstrating knowledge and understanding (e.g. designing a web site, or creating a poster for a specific Disaster Movie during their Genre study)

As with any examination practice is important, here are some activities which may help you to prepare for a film review task.

- Buy and read a selection of Film magazines, discuss style and format in class, and carry out some research on the target audience for these publications.

- Visit www.imdb.com and go to the relevant page for your film. Along the right hand side of the page you will find a column which contains 'external reviews'. These reviews have been written by film critics or journalists with specific audiences in mind. Read through some of these reviews, and note which publication or platform they were written for. Print off two that you find interesting.

- Go back to the home page for your film, just under the main credits you should find a heading called 'user reviews, click on this and read through some of the comments that 'ordinary' viewers have posted onto the web site. Print off two interesting or challenging examples. Are these reviews different to the external reviews you have looked at? If so why?

- Look through your 4 reviews carefully and make notes on what the writers have included. You should end up with a list like this: language, themes and issues raised performance, music, narrative, cinematography, awards won and critics' personal responses.

- Decide where you want your review to go. If you choose Empire or Total Film look carefully at the style and language used in these publications. If you decide on a user review why not post it directly onto the imdb web site?