

Key Aspects of Film Analysis

Film is a genre which shares some common features of other literary texts (e.g. a novel) and theatrical features of other performing arts (e.g. a drama), while having unique cinematic features of its own.

Literary aspects (as in a novel/short story)	Dramatic/theatrical aspects (as in a play/drama)	Cinematic aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Plot (the story-line, development of events, narrative sequences and techniques, e.g. foreshadowing, flashback) ➤ Characters (protagonists, villains and heroes, round and flat characters) ➤ Point of view (e.g. narrative voice and perspective) ➤ Setting (time and place where the story happens) ➤ Theme (the subject and ideas explored) ➤ Sub-genre (comedy, tragedy, science fiction, horror, suspense, romance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Visualisation of action (movement of the characters, stage combat) and setting (stage design) ➤ Acting (actors' facial expressions, actions and speeches) ➤ Costumes (clothing of the characters) ➤ Make-up and hairdo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Framing/mise-en-scène ➤ Camera angles (high angle, straight-on/ eye-level angle or low angle shots) ➤ Camera position and distance (close-up, medium and long shots) ➤ Camera movements (panning, tilting, rolling) ➤ Editing (continuity editing, montage editing, cuts, fades)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lighting ➤ Visual effects ➤ Use of sound effects and music 	

As film shares many features with other literary genres covered in the Literature in English curriculum (e.g. prose fiction, drama), you should start analysing a film by bringing in your previous knowledge of textual studies and skills for literary

appreciation and critical analysis. It is important to realise the parallel features between film and the other literary genres while understanding how film appeals to the audience's sense of sound and sight more directly.

A. Guiding Questions for Film Study

The following guiding questions may help you examine the core elements of a film and form a basic understanding of the film you are viewing:

Literary aspects: questions to consider

1. Who are the main characters in the film?
2. When and where is the film set?
3. What are the main plot elements?
4. Which is the most striking or exciting part in the film?
5. From whose point of view is the story told?
6. What is the theme or main message of the film?
7. What is the mood of the film?
8. What symbols are used in the film?
9. Does the film belong to a particular genre?

Dramatic aspects: questions to consider

1. Do the actors perform so well that you think the story is real?
2. How important are the costumes and make-up to the success of the film?
3. Are there any scenes particularly difficult to act?
4. How do the actors use their voice, speech/dialogue, body movement and facial expression to achieve the desired effects?
5. Do the actors establish their characters more through speech/dialogue or through body movement and facial expression?
6. Is there anything about the acting, set or costumes that you particularly like or dislike?
7. Do you recognise any particular style of the director?
8. How does the film compare to other films by the same director or other films of the same genre?

Cinematic aspects: questions to consider

1. What visual images impress you the most? What do the images make you feel or think about?
2. Are there any scenes which use colours and lighting effectively to create the

desired effect?

3. What sound or music does the film use? What do they make you feel or think about?
4. Which part of the film has special or unusual editing? What impact does the editing have on the overall effectiveness of the film?
5. Are there other technical or special effects used in the film? Do they add to the overall effectiveness of the film?

B. Learning Activity – Writing about a Short Film

Watch Ferdinand Dimadura’s short film “Chicken a la Carte”, which was awarded The Most Popular Short Film in the Short Film Competition on the theme FOOD, TASTE & HUNGER at the 56th Berlin International Film Festival in February 2006. The short film can be accessed at the URL below:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Ferdinand+Dimadura%E2%80%99s+%E2%80%9CChicken+a+la+Carte%E2%80%9D+

As you are watching, note down what happens in the film, as well as the audio-visual effects in the template provided. Some examples have been provided for your reference:

What happens	Audio-visual effects
Signboards of KFC, McDonald’s, Jollibee and Chow King are shown before the film title appears.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close-up to clearly show the brands of the fast food chains• Mysterious and mystical music
Two girls walk into the restaurant, look at the menu, place their orders and wait for the food to be brought by the dumbwaiter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tense drum sound
The two girls chat and giggle, while other customers line up to place orders. The girls eat little, leaving the restaurant with a lot of leftovers on their plates.	
A man travels on the road on a tricycle with a rubbish bin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mysterious and mythical music again
The man checks the leftovers in the rubbish bin and picks out some meaty pieces of chicken.	

Choose one of the following aspects of the film to focus on:

- Literary aspects
- Dramatic aspects
- Cinematic aspects

Watch the short film a second time and focus on the aspect you will work on.
Enrich your notes.

Form groups of three, with each student focusing on a different aspect. Share your general observations of the film with your classmates.

Individually, write a few paragraphs on the chosen aspect of the film. You should explain and elaborate on your points and offer personal responses with supporting details from the film.

A. Key Aspects of Film Analysis

Similarities and differences between printed and non-print texts.

Similarities	Printed texts (e.g. a novel, a short story)	Non-print texts (e.g. a film, a drama performance)
Common features/elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Subject matter/theme ➤ Plot 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Characters ➤ Point of view ➤ Setting ➤ Sub-genre 	
Differences	Printed texts (e.g. a novel, a short story)	Non-print texts (e.g. a film, a drama performance)
Mode of presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Written words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Speeches ➤ Written words ➤ Actions ➤ Images ➤ Music and sounds

Interaction with the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More subtle and indirect appeal to the reader, involving their imagination ➤ More room for free interpretation ➤ Readers can adjust the reading speed and pace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More direct appeal to the audience's sense of sound and sight with the use of technical effects ➤ Less narrative subtlety and room for imagination ➤ Spectators cannot adjust the viewing speed and pace of the film in the cinema (can rewind, fast-forward and re-watch with films on DVDs or the Internet)
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Look at the shot showing a skinny girl with dishevelled hair eating a drumstick (around 3:26 in the film) as an example. Below are three descriptions of the same image with different levels of detail:

1. A girl is eating a drumstick.
2. A skinny, hungry girl is munching on a drumstick and sucking every bit of meat from it.
3. In the close-up shot, a skinny, hungry girl is sucking every bit of a drumstick hungrily. She looks straight at us with her pleading eyes as if she was asking for more.

A progression from factual to descriptive and then interpretative can be seen from the three versions. Describe a few powerful shots from "Chicken a la Carte" using only the third version.

Structure

Two important terms and concepts to describe and analyse a filmic image in detail and heighten awareness of how a film-maker selects details to include in a scene to convey meaning:

(1) Mise-en-scène

It is a French term that literally means "put in the scene". It refers to everything that goes into a film before the shot is taken. It is generally made up of the following six elements:

- Setting and props
- Costumes, hairdo and make-up
- Facial expressions and body language
- Lighting and colour
- Sound

Blocking/positioning of characters and objects

(2) Framing

Framing refers to how the camera sets the bounds of the image (usually a rectangle) to select the part of the scene to feature to audience. Camera movements lead to reframing of the image. Framing works with mise-en-scène to determine the overall composition of the image and define the relationship of people and objects in the shot. This works the same in still photography as it does in films.

What happens in the clip	Audio-visual effects
Signboards of KFC, McDonald's, Jollibee and Chow King are shown before the film title appears.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close-up to clearly show the brands of the fast food chains • Mysterious and mystical music
Two girls walk into the restaurant, look at the menu, place their orders and wait for the food to be brought by the dumbwaiter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tense drum sound
The two girls chat and giggle, while other customers line up to place orders. The girls eat little, leaving the restaurant with a lot of leftovers on their plates.	
A man travels on the road on a tricycle with a rubbish bin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mysterious and mystical music again • Dollying/tracking is used to follow the tricycle's movement from behind
He checks the leftovers in the rubbish bin and handpicks some meaty pieces of chicken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mysterious, mystical and spiritual music goes on • Close-up of the hands selecting the chicken
The man travels on the road in the dark to return home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking shot is used to follow the movement of the bicycle from the back.

The tricycle enters the suburb. Kids flock to the tricycle, opening the trash bin eagerly to dig out the food, munching on them contentedly and excitedly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast between the dark road and the bright countryside. • A soulful song “Let Me Tell Their Story” is played, arousing sad emotions.
The man returns to his dimly-lit house. The pregnant wife lays the table. The children are waiting eagerly and excitedly for the father to deal out the chicken and spaghetti.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The song “Let Me Tell Their Story” goes on, with lyrics slowly shown.
The daughter wants to have a quick bite but the father stops her, reminding her to say a prayer to thank God for the food before eating.	
Words on the screen show 25,000 people die of hunger every day.	
Happy faces of children opening the garbage bin excitedly to get the food are shown again along the closing credits.	

Basic Film Terms

Term	Meaning	Example from the short film
Close-up	A type of shot that is taken from very near and displays the most detail. It tightly frames a person or an object and does not include the broader scene. Moving in from a longer and wider shot to a close-up is a common type of zooming.	The camera zooms in for a close-up of the KFC signboard (00.01-00.02)
Dolly/tracking shot	A continuous shot in which the camera moves alongside or parallel to its subject, often used to follow a subject while it is in motion(e.g. a walking person or a moving vehicle)	The camera follows the movement of the man on a tricycle from his back (2:49-2:52)
Diegetic sound	Actual sound made by characters and objects in the story (e.g. characters talking)	The background noise in the restaurant

Non-diegetic sound	Sound which comes from a source outside the story space (e.g. mood music, narrator's commentary, sounds added for dramatic effects) and plays a key role in creating the atmosphere and mood of the film	The song "Let Me Tell Their Story", which arouses the viewers' sympathy
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Three Aspects of the Film – Literary/Dramatic/Cinematic

Aspects	Points/Observations
Literary Aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="448 320 1319 734">➤ The story is set in two polar worlds (the affluent city and the impoverished rural areas) of the Philippines. A sharp contrast is created between lives of people in the city and the rural areas. The beginning scenes are set in the fast food restaurant to show city dwellers' abundance and wastage of food, while the final scenes are set in the decaying slum area to show the underprivileged families' shortage of food and how they relish and treasure every bit of the leftover by the city dwellers. <li data-bbox="448 752 1319 1070">➤ The laughter and excitement of the slum children in some scenes present an irony (i.e. incongruity and contradiction between what is expected and what actually occurs). The children are overjoyed to see the leftover and dash to the trash. The family even say a prayer to thank God for such treats. Their gratitude for food is a stark contrast to the city dwellers' disregard for food. <li data-bbox="448 1088 1319 1451">➤ The key characters in this film are the underprivileged family. The man who brings refuse food home from the fast food restaurant in the city is the character that takes the audience into the filmic space (i.e. to travel between the two worlds with him). The man supports kids in his village and his family with leftover food from the garbage bins of fast food restaurants. He brings home the leftover, which is the treasure and source of joy to all the children. <li data-bbox="448 1469 1319 1597">➤ The spectators enter the narrative following the movement of the two girl characters at the beginning and then switch to the man when he enters the story. <li data-bbox="448 1615 1319 1787">➤ The film draws our attention to the magnitude of hunger and poverty in the world (25,000 of people die every day due to hunger and malnutrition.), as well as the plight of a forgotten portion of society - people who live on the refuse to survive. <li data-bbox="448 1805 1319 2020">➤ The mood of the film is both sad and hopeful. The song "Let Me Tell Their Story" arouses our sympathy for the underprivileged people, but the smiles and joy on the children's faces remind us of the hope, positivity and spirituality that never leave these people. The film is

	<p>therefore heart-rending, touching and inspiring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The film adopts a very realist and documentary style.
Dramatic Aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The way the characters dress (e.g. the trendy clothes of the girls in the city and the shabby worn-out clothes of the kids in the rural areas) shows their different socio-economic backgrounds and reflects the wealth gap between people in the city and the rural areas. ➤ In the film, very limited speeches and dialogue are used to tell the story, except in the opening restaurant scenes where the young girls place order for the food. ➤ The rest of the film relies on the body movements and facial expressions of the characters. The absence of speech and reliance on facial expressions and actions enhance the emotional appeal of the film, making it all the more heart-rending and poignant. The shots showing the overjoyed faces of the kids and how they dive excitedly into the bin for the leftover are emotionally gripping and overwhelming. Their contented look with the undesirable food is an irony, as described in the lyrics of the theme song “Let Me Tell Their Story” – “How can someone’s laughter bring me close to tears”.
Cinematic Aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The film is very realist in style. The camera movement is unsteady, similar to how a documentary is filmed with a handheld camera, making the spectators feel they are with the characters. Spectators seem to be shown the actual daily life of the people in poverty and the characters do not look like they are acting. ➤ The film uses the contrast of night and day, darkness and light to show the differences between the two worlds (e.g. the affluent city and the poverty-stricken countryside). ➤ The close-up of the neon signboards and the dazzling light of the restaurant in the beginning scenes show the sensational bombardment of city life and the proliferation of chained fast food restaurants. ➤ Music is effectively used to contrast the two worlds. The fast-paced drumming sound is used when featuring the city girls in the fast food restaurants, mystical and spiritual music is used when the man enters the scene to pick out leftover at



the back kitchen. The soundtrack “Let Me Tell Their Story” played in the later part of the film when the man takes the leftover to his home village is moving and sad, which enhances the mood of the film created by the camera work all along.

- The song “Let Me Tell Their Story” also serves as a voice-over from a narrator/onlooker/observer. The lyrics seem to suggest that the singer observes the sad stories of the poor repeating every day but people do not care or learn any lessons about the poverty and hunger problem. The singer, who acts almost like a witness of the sufferers, expresses pity and endless sadness towards the situation.

Part 2

“My Shoes” by Nima Raoofi

Viewing and Note-taking

 <p>“My Shoes”</p>  <p>https://goo.gl/ymM3U</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Scan the QR Code on the left with a mobile device or access Nima Raoofi’s short film “My Shoes” online with the URL provided.2. Watch the short film once to understand its message and main ideas.3. Watch the short film again focusing on the set of questions (Question Set 1 or 2) as assigned by your teacher. Answer the questions by jotting down some points and your observations.
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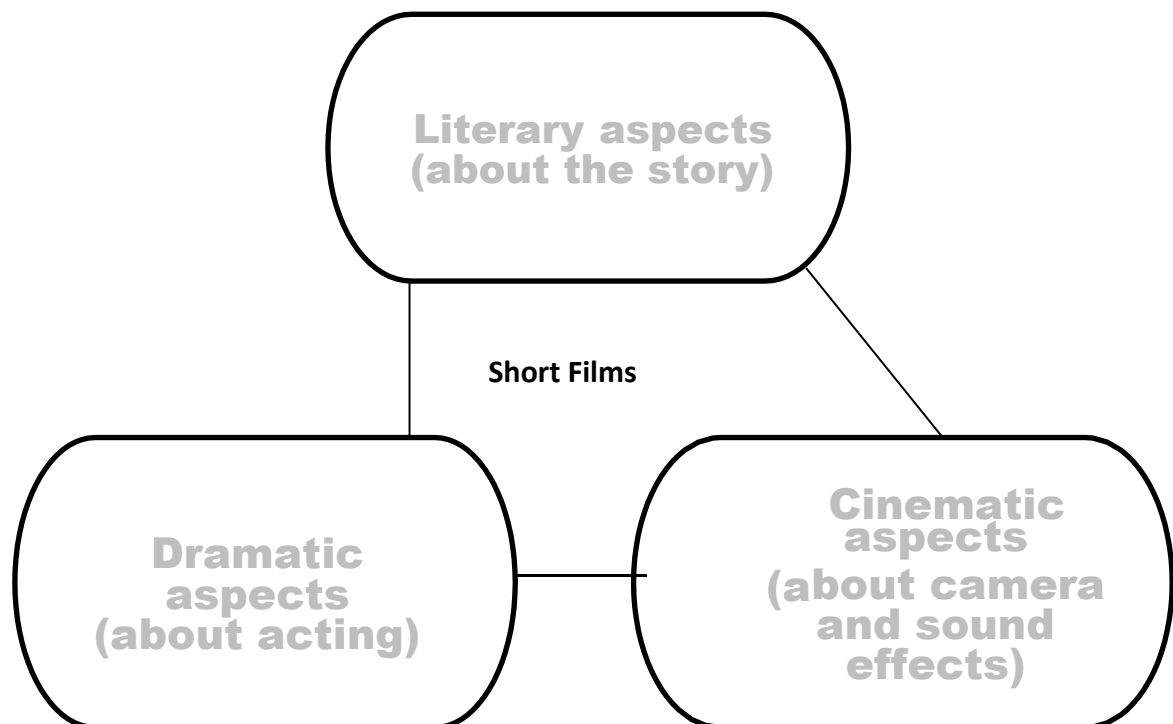
Set 1	
1. When and where is this short film set?	
2. Who are the main characters in this short film? Briefly describe them.	
3. What do you notice about the costumes and make-up of the characters?	
4. Comment on the ending of the short film.	

<p>5. Choose two memorable shots from the short film and identify the position of the camera in them (i.e. Is the camera put far away/near/high up/down below?).</p>	
<p>6. Does the film tell the story and appeal to your emotions effectively? What makes the 3-minute short film powerful?</p>	

Set 2	
<p>7. What is the main plot of the film?</p>	
<p>8. What is the theme or main message of the short film?</p>	
<p>9. Are there any objects/images with a symbolic meaning in this short film?</p>	
<p>10. Which is the most striking part in this short film?</p>	
<p>11. Identify the sounds you hear in the film.</p>	
<p>12. Explain how music is used to create the mood and effect with two examples from the film.</p>	

B. Discussion and Information Exchange

Review the questions above, which can be grouped under the three different aspects of film analysis. Work together with your partner to classify the questions into the respective categories. Some examples have been provided.




Close Analysis of Selected Aspects and Scenes

Dramatic Aspects: Costumes and Acting

The way the characters look (e.g. appearance, make-up and hairdo) and dress (i.e. **costumes**) reflects their **personalities, socio-economic status**, as well as **cultural and historical backgrounds** (particularly in period drama). Characters also express themselves through facial expressions, body movements, speeches/dialogues, which are all parts of the **acting**.

1. Look at two shots from “My Shoes” below. Describe the two characters’ costumes and acting. Share your answers with your classmates.

	Describe his appearance and costumes
	e.g. fluffy/floppy hair
	What do these features tell you about his socio-economic/family background?
	What is he doing in this shot? Who is he speaking to and what is his speech about?
	What does his speech tell you about his personality and feelings?

Describe his **facial expressions**

e.g. eyes gazing far away



What do his facial expressions tell you
about his personality and feelings?

Cinematic Aspects: Music and Sound Effects

Sounds in film can be classified into two categories:

- ✧ **Diegetic sounds** refer to the actual sounds from what is happening in the film. They include :
 - voices of characters
 - sounds made by objects or actions in the story
 - music represented as coming from instruments in the story space
- ✧ **Non-diegetic sounds** refer to sounds coming from a source outside the storyspace. It includes:
 - the narrator's commentary or voice-over
 - sound effects added for dramatic effects
 - mood music (e.g. film scores and sound tracks)

Non-diegetic and diegetic sounds are equally important in a film, since diegetic sounds are about what the characters hear and non-diegetic sounds are about what the audience should feel. The interplay between the diegetic and non-diegetic sounds can advance the story and create different moods and effects (e.g. ambiguity in horror films, surprise in comedies).

Of all the non-diegetic sounds, music plays an important role in creating dramatic moments in a film. Music can perform various functions, including:

- ✧ Arousing the audience's emotions (e.g. fear, shock, pity)
- ✧ Establishing the setting (e.g. using jazz music to provide the aural backdrop for a film set in the 20th century America)
- ✧ Building up the mood and setting the tone of the story (e.g. slapstick humour in physical comedies with comic violence, horror in thrillers, romance in romantic comedies)
- ✧ Influencing the audience's perception of time (e.g. altering the tempo of music to make a 30 second waiting scene painfully long) and space (e.g. using full orchestra music to suggest spatial largeness)
- ✧ Facilitating editing (e.g. cutting the scenes according to the rhythm of music) and connecting scenes together (e.g. softening harsh scene changes with music)
- ✧ Creating contradictions and parodies (e.g. unexpected music in a romantic scene to show the instability beneath the surface)
- ✧ Enhancing plot relationship and linking up the plot (e.g. assigning a leitmotif

to main character with the music recurring in all scenes involving him)

- ✧ The following are some adjectives that help you describe the music and sound effects in films:

Aspects	Adjectives
Genre	classical (e.g. Baroque, Romantic), avant-garde, experimental, contemporary (e.g. Jazz, Rock), popular, folk/country
Instrumentation	orchestra, solo, piano, violin, percussion, guitar, acoustic, electronic
Melody	lyrical, lilting, melodious, repetitive, catchy/memorable, disjointed/fragmented, constantly changing, soft, muted, subdued, ghostly, delicate, loud, intense, powerful, thundering, dramatic, sentimental, relaxed, tense, suspenseful, light-hearted, serious, religious, sad, reflective
Tone	dark, light, warm, resonant, velvety, harsh, rough, shrill, piercing, ethereal, breathy, crackling, noisy
Tempo	fast, quick, lively, spirited, hurried, rapid, speedy, frantic, moderate, steady, relaxed, slow
Harmony	clashing, harmonic, harmonious, discordant, dissonant, cacophonous
Mood	epic, tragic, romantic, comical, triumphant, foreboding, ominous, eerie, scary

Changes in rhythm and dynamics of music in films can be expressed with the following verbs:

List the diegetic and non-diegetic sounds you hear in the film “My Shoes”.

Diegetic sounds	
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- ✧ The music accelerates/speeds up/gathers momentum/hastens (gets fast) when ...
- ✧ The music decelerates/slows down/loses momentum/slackens (gets slow) when ...
- ✧ The music fades in/fades out (gets increasingly loud/soft) when...
- ✧ The music softens/wanes/recedes/decreases in volume (gets soft) when ...
- ✧ The music surges/increases in volume/is amplified (gets loud) when ...

Non-Diegetic sounds	
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Select two memorable excerpts from the film. Describe how music is used in the selected scenes and explain the functions and effects.

Brief descriptions of the chosen footage	What and how music is used	Functions and effects