



Martin Sheen in Apocalypse Now





# Welcome to Film Studies

There's been a real growth in the subject nationally and we're delighted to offer it again at A-Level.

This is just a quick booklet to give you a few pointers as to what we'll be doing on the A-Level, how it's laid out as a course and what you can do to prepare for starting the in September. There are activities designed to cover six weeks worth of time, but can be completed sooner if you were to combine them or do them in large chunks together. **Note that the films included in this booklet are here for guidance and not necessarily the films that you will be studying.** To help do the work, you will find a PowerPoint document which contains the clips and activity explanations you will need, as well as activities you can complete in the PowerPoint itself, or on paper if you prefer.

If you're still not sure about whether you want to do the course then please, have a read of this booklet.



# Component 1

The course is broken down below. You can see how you are introduced to how studying a film actually works and then the bulk of the examined work is covered. We study three paired sets of films and at the end of the year we introduce the coursework element of making a short film.

Please note: the films included in this booklet are **here for guidance** and not necessarily the films that you will be studying.

## Introducing Film

- An introduction to film - a breakdown of how to study film that covers every aspect of textual analysis that will be used in every text we study.

## Hollywood 1930-1990

- *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958)
- *Apocalypse Now* (Scott, 1979)
- Focus on: Auteur theory

## American Film Since 2005

- *La La Land* -Chazelle (2017)
- *Captain Fantastic* -Ross (2016)
- Focus on: Spectatorship and Ideology

## British Film Since 1995

- *Trainspotting* (Boyle, 1996)
- *This is England* (Meadows, 2007)
- Focus on: Narrative and Ideology



*Captain Fantastic*



*Alfred Hitchcock*



*La La Land*



# Component 2

The second Component of the course covers a series of smaller topics and more individual film texts that are studied on their own but introduced as a part of a wider *movement*. These are the headings below. As before, the films included in this booklet are here for guidance and not necessarily the films that you will be studying.

## Global Film

- *Taxi Tehran* Panahi, 2015)
- *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Schnabel, 2008)
- *or City of God* (Mereilles, 2002)
- Focus on: Core Areas

## Documentary Film

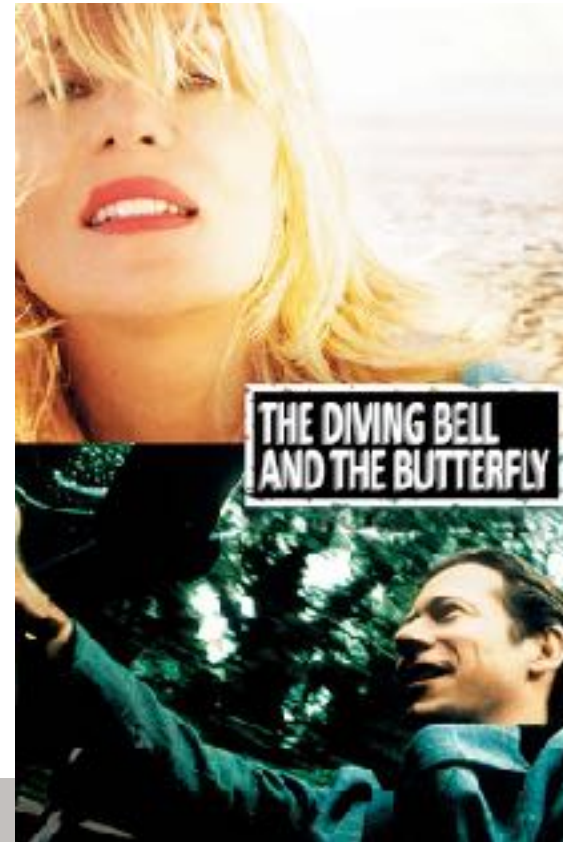
- *Amy* (Kapadia 2015)
- *Or Stories We Tell* (Polley, 2012)
- Focus on: Digital vs Film Debate/Filmmaker's Theory

## Silent Film

- *One Week/The Scarecrow/The High Sign/Cops* (Keaton, 1920-22)
- Focus on: Realism vs Expressionism Debate & American silent comedy.

## Experimental Film

- *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994)
- Focus on: Auteur and Narrative



Jaraf Panahi



Cops - Buster Keaton

# The Short Film

Throughout the duration of the first year we will also study a range of short films in addition to the main texts. These short films will then form the inspiration for the short films that *you* have to make.

You will begin by writing a screenplay and then make a short film between 4-5 minutes in length. You will take influences from the short films that we've studied as well as any other cinematic influences you have taken on.

Below are some of the short films that it is possible to watch; simply click on the name of the film to watch online and feel free to watch them in preparation for the course. (*Stutterer* requires a small payment to 'own' on YouTube)

## The Prescribed Short Films

- [\*Pitch Black Heist\*](#) (Maclean, UK, 2012) - 13'
- [\*Wasp\*](#) (Arnold, UK, 2003) - 24'
- [\*About a Girl\*](#) (Percival, UK, 2001) - 09'
- [\*Stutterer\*](#) (Cleary, UK, 2015) - 12' (pay to watch)
- [\*High Maintenance\*](#) (Van, Germany, 2006) - 09'
- [\*Connect\*](#) (Abrahams, UK, 2010) - 05'



*The Gunfighter*



*About a Girl*



*Pitch Black Heist*



# What can you do to be ready?

WEEK 1



Watch a range of films-not just ones you have already seen. Then, create a diary to track your reaction to each film.

WEEK 2



Watch analysis videos on YouTube. It's also suggested that you set up a YouTube account and create a playlist of your favourites.

WEEK 3



Watch some clips of films. Complete the attached worksheet. Identify some shots and aim to explain why you feel some of those shots were used.

WEEK 4



Developing the skills from Week 3, choose a clip from a film of your choice and analyse the use of cinematography to explain why specific cinematography been used.

WEEK 5



Using your chosen clip from last week, now approach the analysis this time using a theoretical framework of your choice from the PPT.

WEEK 6



Use knowledge gained so far to try to create own short film using your mobile phone. Variety of shots here crucial. Recommendations for software is included in the PPT.



*Stories We Tell*



# Week One

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## How to watch a film

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# How to watch a film

## OUTCOMES:

- 1 Watch some films;
- 2 Apply relevant strategies to watch in an effective way and
- 3 Evaluate their reaction on you as a viewer

Your first activity is to get used to watching films.

Much like how in Literature you read books in order to study them, the same obviously goes for film. However, you need to get used to watching films in a manner that suits studying and analysing them.

Over this first week you need to watch a few different films. You should choose the films and ideally choose a mix of films that you want to see, films that you **wouldn't usually choose** and films that are recommended to you. Avoid the most obvious mainstream blockbusters (e.g. Not Marvel films!).

There's a suggestions list at the end of this booklet – 'Week 1. Suggestions of films to watch'

When watching, aim to do the following things so that your attention is focused solely on the film:

- watch in a dark room;
- aim to watch on the biggest screen you can;
- do NOT have your phone nearby;
- try to watch the whole film in one go;
- avoid snacking and
- definitely no talking to someone else.

These might not be how you usually watch a film, but these will prepare you for how we watch films in an academic manner. These are also strategies to help you remain *focused* on the film.

Each time you watch a film, make a note of the **film title**, the **director**, **year of release** and a few sentences on your **general reaction** to it. You can do this in the PowerPoint, on **paper** or by setting up a [letterboxd](#) account which is a highly recommended way of tracking your viewing habits. Click the link above to go to the site.



*Selma*



*The Lady from Shanghai*



*Carol*



A young girl with short dark hair, wearing a white dress, stands in a forest. She is looking up at a large, gnarled tree trunk. The scene is dimly lit, with sunlight filtering through the trees in the background. The image is split vertically: the left side shows the girl and the tree in a natural, slightly desaturated color, while the right side is a solid teal color with white text.

# Week Two

## How to criticise film

Ivana Baquero in *Pan's Labyrinth*



# How to criticise film

## OUTCOMES:

- 1 Watch how others criticise film;
- 2 Appreciate how critical analysis can alter the effect of a film and;
- 3 Evaluate how film criticism has different aspects.

For the second week, you're going to spend some time watching some videos on YouTube. It's a superb resource for Film Studies and you should get used to finding, referring to, and using the myriad channels that offer help and advice in the subject. Perhaps most interesting however, are the channels which create '*visual essays*', which, as the name suggest, critically analyse film in a visual medium, rather than by using the written word.

There are many great channels which regularly create visual essays, and some of them can be found in the PowerPoint.

Watch at least 3 videos and then afterwards make a note of the essay title, the name of the channel and a few sentences about your reaction to the video/what you learned.

You can do this on the PowerPoint, on paper, or even better, set up a YouTube account, create your own playlist of the videos watched and use the comments section of each video to explain what you thought about the video.



Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction*





# Week Three

## How to analyse film: Part 1

Josh Brolin in *No Country for Old Men*



# How to analyse film: Part 1

## OUTCOMES:

- 1 Watch some clips from films;
- 2 Learn some key shot types and
- 3 Apply the shot types to the clips to explain how the clips created a reaction in you

In the PowerPoint are the 3 clips you will need for this week. Begin by watching each a few times in order to complete the tasks.

After watching for the first time, begin to establish how the clips make you feel or what you learn from each.

Then, complete the table in the PowerPoint and complete the worksheet on shot sizes and camera angles.

Finally, apply your new-found knowledge and apply to the clips in order to explain how the use of camera angles and shot sizes have created your reaction in the clips.



*Ex Machina*



*Whiplash*



*Knives Out*





# Week Four

## How to analyse film: Part 2



# How to analyse film:

## Part 2

### OUTCOMES:

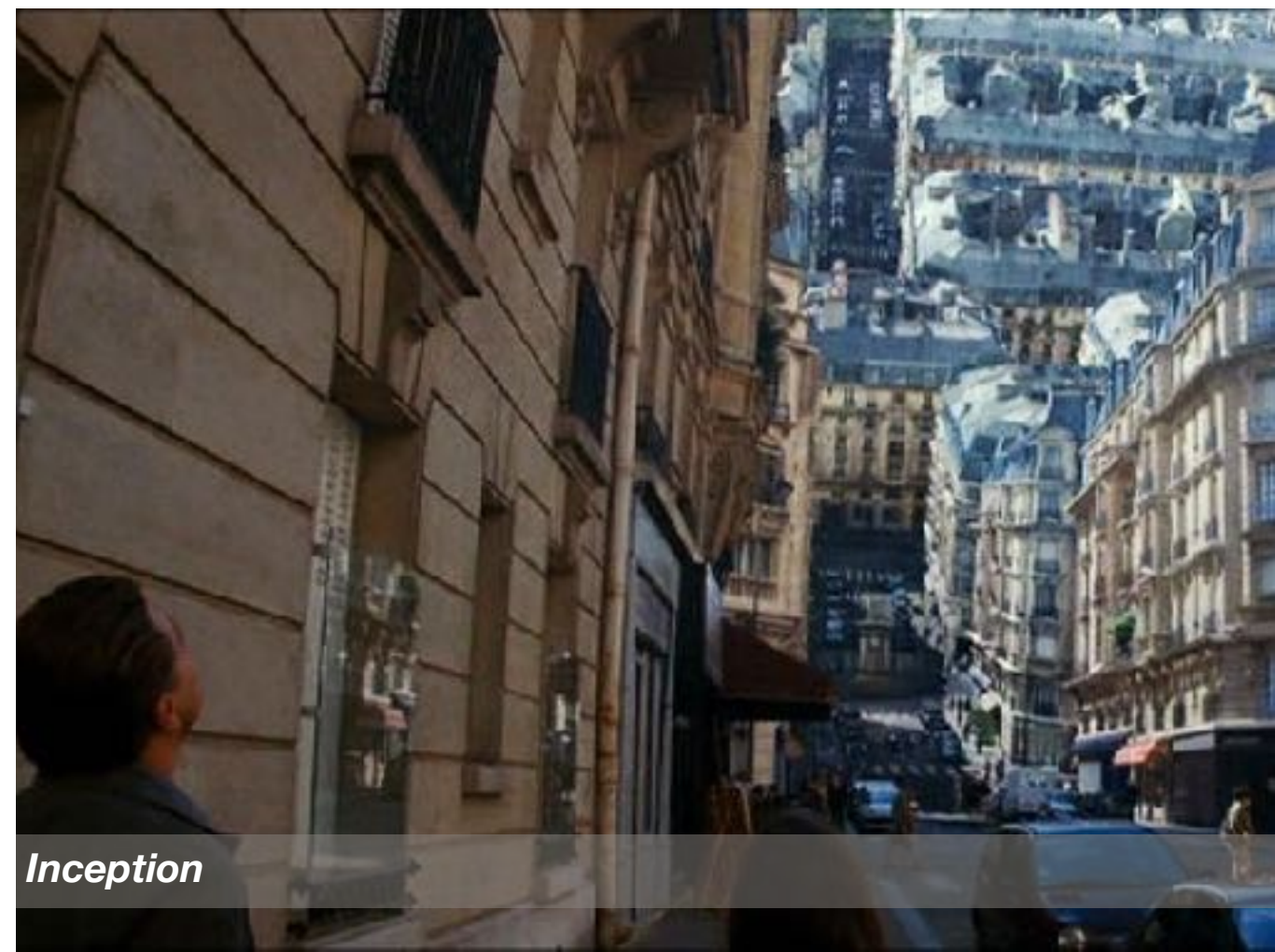
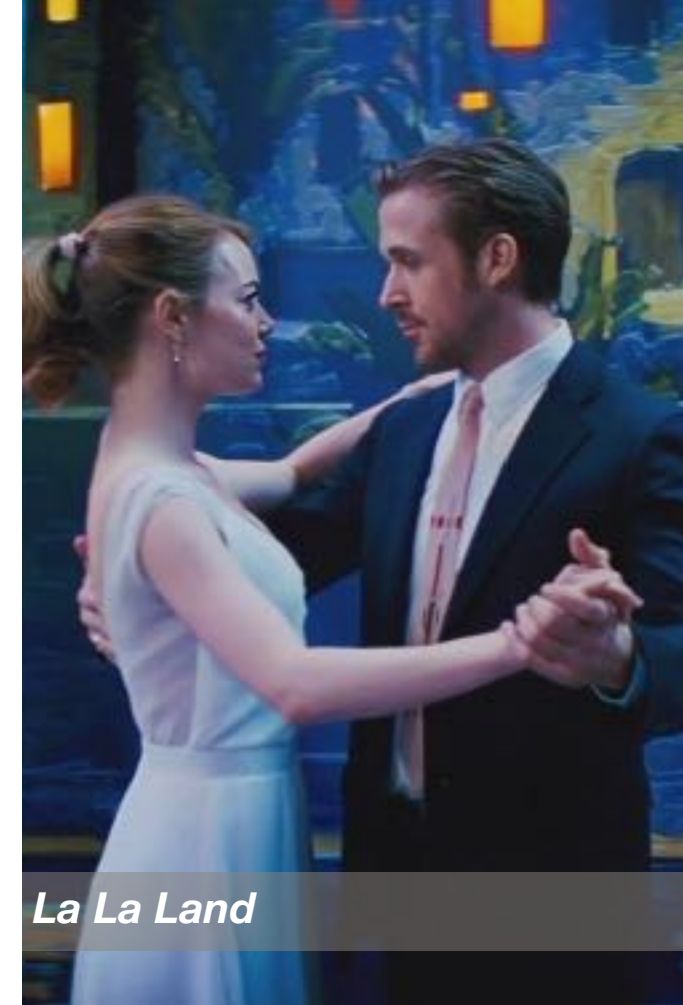
- 1 Watch at least one film;
- 2 Analyse the film and choose a relevant and useful clip from it and then
- 3 Evaluate how the shot types used in the clip create a particular emotion or how you learn something in the scene

Developing the skills from Week 3, now watch at least one more film. The more you watch, the better the selection of clips you'll have to choose from, so it is advised that you watch a few if possible.

As a minimum, choose one clip from one of the films. It should be around 3 minutes long, not just be a scene with lots of action or talking and ideally clearly communicate an idea or feeling. In this respect, scenes from near the beginning and end of films usually work best.

Using the guidance in the PowerPoint, evaluate how shot sizes and camera angles help to communicate the ideas or emotions in the scene.

As an extension, also consider how other aspects of cinematography may help to communicate ideas, for example, how colour and light helps to make the audience react in a specific way. Video essays may help with this. Add these ideas to either the table in the PowerPoint or the paper/place you're keeping your work.





# How to analyse film: Part 2

## OUTCOMES:

- 1 Watch at least one film;
- 2 Analyse the film and choose a relevant and useful clip from it and then
- 3 Evaluate how the shot types used in the clip create a particular emotion or how you learn something in the scene

## Week Five

### How to apply critical theory to a film



# How to apply critical theory to a film

## OUTCOMES:

- 1 Understand what a critical theory is;
- 2 Show an understanding of a critical theory

## Extension:

Evaluate how a film of your choice can be analysed and 'explained' through application of a critical theory of your choice.

A critical theory is the use of applying a social science to an aspect of culture. In this case then, it's essentially being able to watch a film and explain a 'deeper meaning' or idea behind the film using a theory or idea from an area of social science, for example Psychology, Sociology or History.

To help complete the learning for this week, the next page and the attached PowerPoint provide the outline of some key theories. Research auteur theory and then use the bullet point guidance to make notes which demonstrate your learning. You will need to conduct research and use introductory guides to the theories that you may find online so that you can showing your understanding of what the theory means.

Finally, choosing a director whose work you know well and try to apply auteur theory to their work by using the questions on the slide to guide what you write.



*Apocalypse Now*



*Frances Ha!*



*Captain Fantastic*



# Theories

There are a number of theories that you have to come to grips with during the A-Level course. For each one of these theories, in order to prepare for the course, you should try looking up any introductory guides and trying to write down your understanding of what the theory means and how you can apply it to your favourite film.

## Auteur

This is the film theory, the one most associated with Film Studies. This is the theory of the director as the author. It is an incredibly popular theory and has given rise to the cult of the director.

Your Preparation: Look out for films by a particular director - Bigelow, Fincher etc and watch some films by them. What are the similarities?

## **Theories for extension research tasks:**

## Spectatorship

The theory of the audience and their relationship with the film. Exploring how messages/meanings are received.

Your Preparation: look up Active and Passive readings. How do they work?

## Narrative Theory

A film's creation of the story/narrative can be explored through these theories.

Your Preparation: Explore how Todorov, Propp, Barthes and Levi-Strauss crafted narrative theories to explain stories.

## Marxist

The theories of Karl Marx can be applied to films to explore how commerce and commodification are represented and in conflict.

Your Preparation: What are commodification, alienation, universal equivalent and any other terms you find

## Feminist Approaches

From the 1970s onwards feminist approaches to film have provided a powerful way of deconstructing a male dominated art form.

Your Preparation: Look up Laura Mulvey's theory of the 'male gaze'. What does it mean? How does it work?





A close-up, low-angle shot of a young man with dark skin and short hair, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is holding a vintage-style camera with a large lens and a flash attachment. The background is a textured, light-colored wall with some faint, dark markings. The lighting is warm and slightly grainy, giving it a cinematic feel.

## Week Six

How to make  
your own short  
film



# How to make your own short film

## OUTCOMES:

- 1 Understand how to make a short film;
- 2 Plan a short film and
- 3 Shoot and edit a short film.

This is your final set of tasks but has the least amount of specific details that you must follow. The reason for this is that it is not easy to easily learn how to do this but what is most beneficial to you as a film student, is to begin by having fun and learning by making mistakes and trying new things.

In terms of how to make a film, you simply need a mobile phone. In the PowerPoint there are some recommendations for the software you could use, but this is entirely up to you. The only 'rule' you must follow is that the film **MUST** be under 4 minutes long. The other ideas below are simply guidance for you that it is suggested you follow, but do not need to.

- ▶ Avoid having people acting who are not comfortable with it.
- ▶ Try to avoid having dialogue.
- ▶ Creating the opening to a film is relatively easy to do as you are establishing location or character.
- ▶ Keep camera movement to a minimum and instead use lots of relatively short moments that use a variety of camera angles and shot sizes.
- ▶ When editing the film together, don't be afraid to reshoot footage or change your mind as to what you thought the film will be about-the editing process will reveal a LOT about what you actually shot.
- ▶ Finally, apply what you have learned: choose camera angles and shot sizes that represent specific ideas, consider what the lighting of each shot reveals, use ideas, tricks and shots from the films you've watched.



*Shaun of the Dead*



*We Need to Talk About Kevin*



*Beasts of the Southern Wild*



# Further watching and reading

Finally, please have fun with these tasks. Film Studies is **not an easy subject** but you will learn an *enormous* amount whilst on the course. The **more** you can do **now**, the **better** for you. This mini-course has been designed to cover a range of different skills but it is not exhaustive; there is a *lot* more to learn. Some other useful resources to watch, read and listen include (click the title to go to the resource):

[Mark Kermode's Secret of Cinema series on iPlayer](#)

[Mark Cousins' 40 Days to Learn Film on Vimeo](#)

[The Art of Cinematography on YouTube](#)

[The Cutting Edge: A Documentary on YouTube](#)

[Anything written by David Bordwell](#)

[Film Studies For Free](#)

[Girls on Film Podcast](#)

[DVD on Amazon: The Story of Film: An Odyssey](#)

Happy Watching!



*Vertigo*

*Fallen Angels*



# Week 1 Suggestions of films to watch

**The Godfather**

**Casablanca**

**Citizen Kane**

**Goodfellas**

**Raging Bull**

**Rocky**

**Seven Samurai**

**Gone with the Wind**

**On the Waterfront**

**Jaws**

**Wild Strawberries**

**The 400 Blows**

**Psycho**

**Toy Story**

**Monty Python and the Holy Grail**

**Die Hard**

**Chinatown**

**Rear Window**

**North by Northwest**

**12 Angry Men**

**Jurassic Park**

**Alien**

**Amélie**

**Fantasia**



**Fight Club**

**One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**

**The Matrix**

**Life is Beautiful**

**Amadeus**

**Full Metal Jacket**

**La Dolce Vita**

**Bowling for Columbine**

**Lawrence of Arabia**

**2001: A Space Odyssey**

**Memento**

**Dr. Strangelove**

**A Clockwork Orange**

**Blade Runner**

**L'Avventura**

**City of God**

