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A LEVEL

Delivery Guide

FILM STUDIES

H410

For first teaching in 2017

Component 2: Section C Ideology

Version 1

A LEVEL FILM STUDIES

This guide outlines approaches and ideas, including learner activities for the Section C of Component 2: Ideology.

Delivery guides are designed to represent a body of knowledge about teaching a particular topic and contain:

- **Content:** A clear outline of the content covered by the delivery guide;
- **Thinking Conceptually:** Expert guidance on the key concepts involved, common difficulties students may have, approaches to teaching that can help students understand these concepts and how this topic links conceptually to other areas of the subject;
- **Thinking Contextually:** A range of suggested teaching activities using a variety of themes so that different activities can be selected which best suit particular classes, learning styles or teaching approaches.

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Introduction

2

Curriculum Content

3

Thinking Conceptually

4

Thinking Contextually

6

Learner Resources – Activities

7

Image: District 9, Blomkamp, Neill (2009)



Ideology

The **Ideology** component is designed to engage learners in the study of the ways in which film shapes and is shaped by ideology. Ideology in this context is understood to be a system of ideas, beliefs and values that form the basis of social, cultural and political theories or systems.

In order to evaluate the validity of ideology as a critical approach in film, learners are required to study a diverse range of set films from different cultural backgrounds and national cinemas. Learners will also need to develop the skills to compare how ideological messages and values in film are shaped by, and also shape the social, cultural, political and historical contexts in which they were made.

This section is synoptic and learners will build upon all their previous learning from Components 1 and 2 and, in addition, **must** study:

- How the micro-elements of film form are used to **align**¹ the spectator and how that **alignment** relates to spectator interpretation of narrative.
- How the micro-elements of film form contribute to the ideologies conveyed by film, including through narrative, representations and messages and values.
- How narrative construction is used to align the spectator and how that alignment encourages the adoption of a particular spectator point of view.
- The **ideological implications**² of narrative construction and narrative structure and representations of different societies and cultures.
- How the construction of narrative contributes to the shaping of ideologies and values in film, including how narrative structure can function as an ideological framework³.

Learners will be required to study and compare three set films which tackle challenging issues. The set films for this section have been arranged into three thematic categories:

- Family and Home
- Outsiders
- Conflict.

Thematic categories have been created to help facilitate a contextual and coherent comparison of ideological approaches between set films.

Learners must select one thematic category, e.g. Outsiders, and study three set films within that category. Within a chosen theme one set film must be studied from each of the following categories:

- US Independent
- English Language (Non-US)
- Non-European Non-English Language.

¹ **align, alignment**: terms used in film studies to indicate the way in which film, particularly through cinematography and narrative construction, encourages spectators to adopt the position and outlook of particular characters. Spectators are thus encouraged to 'align' their responses, as well as in general their points of view, with particular characters and issues.

² **ideological implications**: the points of view implied by the way a narrative is constructed and the representations it incorporates and the way those points of view can convey sets of values, attitudes and beliefs.

³ **how narrative can function as an ideological framework**: how, for example, the overall structure of a narrative can affect the points of view, attitudes, values and beliefs being conveyed about its subject matter.

Approaches to teaching the content

General approaches

As a critical approach to studying cinema, ideology is essentially archaeological in its methodology, seeking to unearth 'messages' within the film texts it mines for evidence.

At its most basic, the notion that films can convey social, cultural and political meaning can be looked at on at least **three** levels that progressively serve to either support or subvert the meanings and values expressed by the preceding strata:

1. What characters say (dialogue)

For example, it is possible to begin by looking at the explicit pronouncements made by specific characters (*e.g. 'There's no place like home'*) and to see how these characters fare within the overall narrative construction of the film to identify how narrative can function as an ideological framework - how it provides an imaginary resolution to social and economic conflicts and anxieties.

2. What happens in the story (narrative)

We can also indicate the way in which, particularly through cinematography and narrative construction, spectators are encouraged to adopt the position and outlook of particular characters over others, thereby 'aligning' their responses with those of privileged characters and the points of view they represent.

3. What the film sounds and looks like (style/form)

Ultimately by comparing and contrasting the narrative structure of a film with the visual strategies of its formal aesthetics we can elaborate upon the ideological implications, i.e. the sets of values, attitudes and beliefs, that we as audiences are encouraged to rely on to make sense of the whole repertoire of representations incorporated within the film.

It is at this third level of textual critique where instructive contradictions between the film's form and its content can emerge, the gap between what the film **says** and what the film **does**, that reveals the functioning of ideology most clearly.

Common misconceptions or difficulties learners may have

As a critical approach, ideology requires learners to be able to identify and engage with the assumptions and value judgements they themselves bring to a film text, and which may well be either tacitly unacknowledged or explicitly conceived of as 'common sense'. The deconstructing of such beliefs, ideas and attitudes as being inherently ideologically constructed is something that some learners may struggle with as is the often held view that commercial cinema is 'purely entertainment' and therefore should not be read as freighted with ideological motivation. Both these positions stem from a similar notion that there can be a discursive position that exists outside of ideology and that ideology is a thing that some texts possess and others are free from. The critique of ideology, therefore, is about figuring out what film can teach us about those things we have already unknowingly learned to accept.

Conceptual links to other areas of the specification – useful ways to approach this topic to set learners up for topics later in the course

The study of Ideology is synoptic, drawing upon learning from the whole course and will include, but not be limited to: an understanding of the micro-elements of film form (cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, sound, performance); the significance of the aesthetic dimension in film including the potential conflict between spectacle and the drive towards narrative resolution in film; the significance of narrative structures which are alternative to and/or in opposition to conventional narrative structures; and theories of spectatorship including how the spectator has been conceived both as 'passive' and active in the act of film viewing.

Approaches to teaching the content

Ideology set film list

	Learners must select one of the thematic categories below		
	Family and Home	Outsiders	Conflict
US Independent	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Moonrise Kingdom (2012). Directed by Wes Anderson. USA, 12 2. The Tree of Life (2011). Directed by Terrence Malick. USA, 12 	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night (2014). Directed by Ana Lily Amirpour. USA, 15 2. Elephant (2003). Directed by Gus Van Sant. USA, 15 	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Hurt Locker (2008). Directed by Kathryn Bigelow. USA, 15 2. Whiplash (2015). Directed by Damien Chazelle. USA, 15
English Language (Non-US)	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Room (2015). Directed by Lenny Abrahamson. Canadian/Irish, 15 2. Animal Kingdom (2010). Directed by David Michod. Australia, 15 	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Babadook (2014). Directed by Jennifer Kent. Australia, 15 2. The Piano (1993). Directed by Jane Campion. New Zealand, 15 	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. District 9 (2009). Directed by Neil Blomkamp. South Africa 2009, 15 2. Mad Max (1979). Directed by George Miller. Australia, 15
Non-European (Non-English Language) (World)	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Separation (2011). Directed by Asghar Farhadi. Iran, PG 2. Our Little Sister (2016). Directed by Hirokazu Koreeda. Japan, PG 	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yojimbo (The Bodyguard) (1961). Directed by Akira Kurosawa, Japan, PG 2. Y Tu Mama Tambien (2001). Directed by Alfonso Cuaron. Mexico, 18 	<p>Learners must study one from a choice of two set films</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Battle of Algiers (1965). Directed by Gilo Pontecorvo. Algeria, 15 2. The Grandmaster (2013). Directed by Wong Kar-Wai. China, 15

Approaches to teaching the content

Approaches to teaching the content

This delivery guide provides a range of learning opportunities that encourage a variety of approaches to the study of ideological messages and values which can be applied to any of the set films from the three set themes of Home, Outsiders and Conflict.

These are illustrated in the learner activities suggested in this guide. The activities range from practising textual analysis of how ideological messages and values have been constructed in key scenes from the chosen set films as well as from promotional material such as trailers and wider contextual viewing, to considering the broader socio-historical contexts of particular films through engaging with secondary literature such as journalistic reviews and academic scholarship, to creative exercises that allow students to interrogate the messages and values of film through imaginative 'thought experiments'.

In addition to the learner activities, the following ideas can also act as the building blocks to approach teaching of Ideology.

- Explore with students the contextual background to the term 'ideology' and how the term is applied in relation to film criticism and analysis. A good example for this can be found in the entry for 'ideological criticism' in *The Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies*, Kuhn and Westwell, 2012.
- Explore and research the contextual backgrounds (social, cultural, political and historical) in which the chosen set films were made so that students can develop the ability to make connections between how these contexts might have influenced, shaped or are reflected in the ideologies conveyed by their chosen set films.
- Close study of the films themselves – applying the various micro-elements to extract possible meanings from the film, including analysis of:
 - how the micro-elements of film form are used to align the spectator and how that alignment relates to spectator interpretation of narrative
 - how the micro-elements of film form contribute to the ideologies conveyed by film (for example in relation to the themes of 'Family and Home', 'Outsiders' and 'Conflict'), including through narrative, representations and messages and values
 - how narrative construction is used to align the spectator and how that alignment encourages the adoption of a particular spectator point of view
 - the ideological implications of narrative construction and narrative structure and representations of different societies and cultures
 - how the construction of narrative contributes to the shaping of ideologies and values in film, including how narrative structure can function as an ideological framework.

- Encourage learners to explore similarities and differences in approaches between the three chosen set films. Use [Worksheet 1](#) to help enable learners to develop their abilities to draw comparisons between the films studied for the component.
- Use the specimen paper to test learners' knowledge and understanding.
- Use the subject content to get learners' to frame their own examination questions and use these as tools for assessment.

Image: Shichinin No Samurai, Seven Samurai, Kurosawa, Akira (1954)



Activities

Learner Activity 1

Trailer comparison

UK trailer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsG0GrEMImw>

US Trailer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uC5amKLgnFU>

Trailers create an horizon of expectations, suggesting themes, seeding plot points and signalling generic pleasures that will colour audiences' anticipated viewings and establish a dominant reading that viewers take with them into the cinema.

By comparing the US and UK trailers for Wong Kar-Wai's *The Grandmaster* it is possible to see how the film was promoted in different ways to two separate markets through the choice and editing of extracts used, as well as changes in terms of musical score and expository voiceover narration.

Before their first screening of *The Grandmaster*, students can attempt to describe the movie based solely on each of the two trailers and then after having seen the film, consider to what extent the expectations generated by each trailer were fulfilled or disappointed.

Learner Activity 2

Textual analysis and contextual critique

Aliens as Apartheid Metaphor in *District 9*

<http://www.villagevoice.com/2009/08/11/aliens-as-apartheid-metaphor-in-district-9/>

The Shallow World of *District 9*

<http://brightlightsfilm.com/the-shallow-world-of-district-9/#.WSH08sm1so8>

The analysis of micro-elements of film form can reveal how the messages and values presented can often be conflicting. *District 9* can be analysed both as a commentary on racist power structures through its use of sci-fi metaphors while also being challenged for its adoption of the kind of racist and nationalist stereotypes it critiques.

The two articles from *The Village Voice* and *Bright Lights Film Journal* situate *District 9* within the context of post-Apartheid South African cultural politics and illuminate the interesting ways in which the film uses visual elements of mise-en-scène, cinematography and editing to construct its allegorical engagement with the nation's divisive history.

The articles also suggest a critique of the film in terms of its racist depiction of immigrant Nigerians as criminal, superstitious and bestial.

Students should develop a presentation seeking to make visual connections between the arguments advanced in the articles and still images from the film, demonstrating to what extent they see *District 9* as being progressive or regressive in its ideological position.

Learner Activity 3**Hero switching**

Reconsidering the narrative construction of a film as it would be experienced from the position of secondary or marginal characters can often reveal the assumptions and limitations implicit in particular subject positions.

Thought experiments are a useful tool for highlighting the issues raised by the adoption of privileged points of view.

For example, students could first chart the narrative trajectory of *The Babadook* by focusing on the key scenes for the developing of Amelia's character in terms of her relationships with her son, friends and colleagues and her shifting sense of mental instability and physical peril. Having done so, an illustrative thought experiment would be to re-imagine how the film's narrative would be different if shown primarily from the point of view of Amelia's son, Sam. How would the film be transformed by this shift of point of view? What elements would now become significant that were, previously shown to be less important?

Learner Activity 4**Gender swapping**

Another useful thought experiment is to imagine how the film would be different if the gender of the protagonist's was switched. How does the construction of gender roles in society change how we perceive the ways in which characters are narratively constructed and how we as audiences are encouraged to align our responses with them?

Students could produce a 'pitch deck' (a short slide show outlining their treatment) for a proposed remake of the film *Whiplash*, but this time with two female leads. Who would they cast and why? How would the nature of the conflict between the two main characters be transformed by switching their genders? How might the narrative be reconfigured to alter how the spectator is aligned to these new characters?

Students should reflect on what issues have been raised by their 'hypothetical' and how these might inform their understanding of the ideological functioning of the narrative proper.

Learner Activity 5**Hollywood remakes**

Why Hollywood can't get enough Akira Kurosawa remakes:

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/sep/01/akira-kurosawa-remakes>

Remake Rematch: Yojimbo vs Fistful of Dollars vs Last Man Standing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCcXVaI9VJI>

Hollywood studios have often looked to international and independent films for material to remake within a mainstream popular cinema context. How might the requirements of commercial Hollywood filmmaking change the three films being studied?

In this third, 'hypothetical', students should produce three 'Production Memos', imagined communications from Hollywood studio heads demanding changes be made to the original source material of their chosen case study films. The 'memos' should outline in what ways the narrative could be altered to better fit with the values of contemporary US society as illustrated by other successful popular Hollywood films that the fictional producers should cite to support their suggestions.

Learner Activity 6**Ideological 're-mades'**

In both *Goodbye, Lenin!* and *Life is Beautiful*, the protagonists adopt a series of fictional ruses and playful re-imaginings in an attempt to keep a loved one oblivious to the harsh reality of a situation that would otherwise be too shocking to bear. Moments of dramatic conflict and narrative incident are re-cast as light-hearted scenes of comedy and nostalgia through the protagonists attempts to 'remake' reality into something more ideologically and emotionally palatable.

In a similar way, students will remake a central dramatic scene from one of their chosen texts. Taking a moment in which a key narrative turning point occurs, students will think about how to flip the original narrative impact of the scene on its head by changing it in some significant ways that change the ideological meaning of the events depicted.

This 'remade' version can then be analysed through a director's commentary style presentation in which the students show how they have re-worked the scene to make it better fit the alternative meanings and values.



Image: *Life is Beautiful*, Roberto Benigni (1997)



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