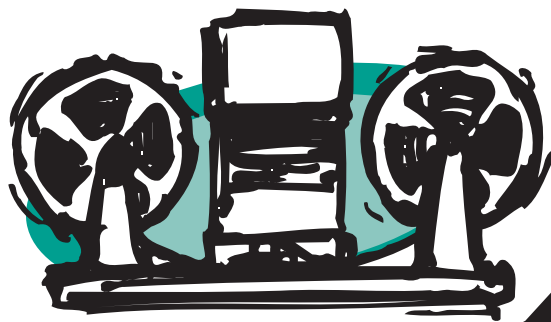# FILM EDITING:

MANIPULATING TIME *and* SPACE

Teacher's Resource Guide

2001 NOMINEES

Dear Educator:

Youth Media International, in cooperation with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, is proud to present the third in a series of study guides that focus on the different branches of the Academy. In this guide, students will learn about film editing—one of the many craft areas involved in creating a motion picture. The kit has been designed for students in secondary school English, language arts, visual arts and communications courses. The activities have been developed to capitalize on students' natural interest in current films and the excitement generated by the Academy Awards® to teach valuable lessons in critical thinking and to develop visual literacy skills.

The Academy, organized in 1927, is a professional honorary organization composed of more than 6,000 motion picture craftsmen and women. Its purposes include advancing the art and science of motion pictures; encouraging cooperation among creative leaders for cultural, educational and technological progress; recognizing outstanding achievements; and fostering educational activities between the professional community and the public at large. Academy members are the people who create movies—the cream of the industry's actors, animators, art directors, cinematographers, costume designers, directors, documentarians, film editors, make-up artists, composers, producers, studio and marketing executives, sound and visual effects experts, and writers.

Please share this material with other teachers in your school. Although the material is copyrighted, you may make as many photocopies as necessary to meet your students' needs.

To ensure that you receive future mailings, please fill out and return the enclosed reply card. Also, feel free to e-mail us at schoolroom@aol.com to comment about the program at any time. We welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Roberta Nusim

Roberta Nusim
Publisher

> This is the third in a series of guides that focuses on different branches of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. If you would like to receive future kits from the Academy about its various branches, please be sure to fill out and return the enclosed reply card.

Program Components
1. This instructional guide
2. Four student activity masters
3. A wall poster for classroom display
4. A response card for teacher comments

Target Audience
This program has been designed for students in secondary school English, language arts, visual arts and communications courses.

Program Objectives
1. To encourage students to use critical thinking as they learn how film editing contributes to the meaning of a film.
2. To engage students in an exploration of film as a medium of communication.
3. To help students become more visually literate.
4. To enhance student interest in and knowledge about motion picture development, the production process and its history.

Introduction
The first Academy Awards were handed out on May 16, 1929, just after the advent of "talkies." By 1930, enthusiasm was so great that a Los Angeles radio station did a live, one-hour broadcast, and the Awards have enjoyed broadcast coverage ever since.

The number and types of awards have grown and changed over the years to keep up with the development of the motion picture industry. Since 1981, Awards of Merit—Oscars®—have been presented in each of the following categories or their sub-divisions: acting, art direction, cinematography, costume design, directing, feature and short documentary film, film editing, foreign language film, make-up, music, best picture, best animated and best live-action short film, sound, sound-effects editing, visual effects and writing. This year, the very first award for animated feature will be presented. In an age when awards shows are commonplace, the Academy Awards are unique because the judges—Academy members—are top filmmakers from around the world. The question, "Who gets the Oscar?" is decided by a true jury of peers.

With the exception of Best Picture, which is decided by the entire Academy, and the foreign language film and feature animation categories, which are selected by special viewing committees, nominations are determined by a secret ballot of Academy members representing each craft. All active Academy members vote to select the final winners in every category.

The awards nomination and selection process provides a wonderful opportunity to teach your students

about the many craft areas—and the many communications techniques—that play a part in creating a motion picture. Filmmaking is by nature a collaborative process, with each craft area supporting and being supported by others. Because our space is limited, this kit focuses on just one of those areas—film editing.

Selecting Films for Student Viewing

Students may select the films they wish to view for the following activities, or you may wish to suggest films that are appropriate.

The following films have won Academy Awards for film editing, are available on videotape, and may be appropriate for your students: *Titanic* (1997), *Apollo 13* (1995), *The Last Emperor* (1987), *Star Wars* (1977), *Forrest Gump* (1994), and *Schindler's List* (1993). Other classic films that won for editing include *Dances With Wolves* (1990), *The Right Stuff* (1983), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Rocky* (1976), *The Sound of Music* (1965), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *West Side Story* (1961), and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957).
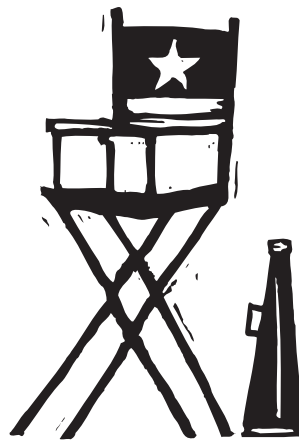
Activity One
The ORIGINS *of* MOVIE "MAGIC"

The very first films in the late 1800s, made by the Lumiere Bros. and Thomas Edison among others, were single-shot actualities: a train pulling into a station, people leaving a factory, ladies walking down the street. The camera was locked in place. It recorded, in its entirety, the "event" taking place. It was the magic of capturing movement that captivated audiences. Editing was originally called "cutting," as it actually was the cutting together of two pieces of film. "Cutters" held the strips of film up to the light and cut them with scissors, cementing the two pieces together at the desired point.

It was no coincidence that several early filmmakers performed as magicians. The *jump cut*, a deliberate mismatching of two scenes, evolved into the first "special effect" of movies and was probably discovered by accident. Within the same scene, an actor could be made to "disappear" by stopping the camera, removing the actor, and resuming the scene without moving the camera. George Méliès, a Parisian magician, produced dozens of elaborate "trick" films using this effect as one of his primary marvels.

Stage-bound presentations, which had actors performing in the proscenium-like frame of the film without moving the camera, soon gave way to bold *close-ups*, *medium shots*, and *tracking shots* under the direction of film pioneers Alice Guy Blache of France and Edwin S. Porter and D.W. Griffith of the U.S., among others. The storytelling concepts used in magic-lantern slide shows (and later comic books) were used to create a language of film. Cutting from a long shot of an actor standing by a tree to a similar shot of just his face near the tree created a sense of continuous action, even though the shots may have been filmed on different days. Cutting evolved into "editing," the manipulation of time and space. The ability to manipulate time and space also allows the filmmaker to change our emotional and intellectual responses to what we see on the screen.

Review the editing terms listed on the activity master. You might complete the viewing activity as a class, using one of the films suggested below, or students might make their own selections and complete the activity at home in preparation for a class discussion. Films with sequences that have no edits at all include the opening sequence of Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*, the shot on top of the train or the shot walking through the camp in *Bound for Glory*, and the shot from the dressing room to the ring in *Raging Bull*. Good examples of rapid cutting can be found in the film-within-a-film sequence of Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.*, the Odessa Steps sequence in *The Battleship Potemkin*, the ambush scene in *Bonnie and Clyde,* the shower scene in *Psycho* and the phone booth attack scene in *The Birds*.

Add-on Activity: Ask your students to take a short scene from a film and discuss the effect that re-arranging the placement of the sounds or dialogue would have. Ask students to consider what happens when we hear one thing and see another instead of just seeing the sound and picture from one source.

Activity Two
WRITING *with* IMAGES

Editing is one of the most creative aspects of filmmaking. The film editor, in conjunction with the director, establishes the pace and structure of a film by connecting various shots to create scenes and sequences that form the final movie. The shots the editor chooses and the ways they are combined set the mood, develop the action, create the rhythm, establish the film's time and space, and guide the viewers' attention. For a typical feature-length film, the editor begins with hundreds of thousands of feet of film and must reduce it to less than 10,000 feet.

Part A. Film editor Carol Littleton describes editing a film as being a lot like writing: "You become a writer, but you're writing with images…" Ask your students to think about how visual images differ from those created by the written word. For example, have them write a paragraph describing a disagreement between an official and two runners about the outcome of a race. Then ask them to draw a series of pictures (stick figures are fine) that depict a similar scene. Ask them to analyze how the written description differs from the visual images they used and how this difference may affect the way films are made. While the written version may describe very specific thought processes, the pictures probably illustrate specific actions. People say, "A picture is worth a thousand words" and "Actions speak louder than words." Have students consider in what ways these sayings are true in regard to motion pictures and in what ways they neglect the difficulties of communicating with images. In what ways do the interactions of characters in a written story differ from the interactions of characters in a traditional narrative film?

Part B. In the 1920s, Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov conducted a series of experiments designed to demonstrate that when two separate shots are projected in succession, the viewer assumes a connection between them. In one experiment, Kuleshov spliced together a series of shots that had been taken in different places and at different times. The shots were of a waiting man, a walking woman, a gate, a staircase and a mansion. Kuleshov's viewers—who interpreted the sequence as a man and a woman meeting at the gate in front of the

mansion—had, in essence, inferred a whole narrative on the basis of seeing only portions of it. This effect allows filmmakers to use exteriors and interiors miles apart and imply that they are in the same place, to have people filmed on different days appear to be talking to each other, to have actors seemingly facing dangerous situations, or to imply that what actors are thinking about is represented by a subsequent cutaway image.

To illustrate the Kuleshov effect, show your students drawings or photographs (as described above) that are not necessarily related, but which, when viewed together, can be mentally connected in time and space to create a brief scene.

Part C. The Kuleshov effect is an editing technique that illustrates how the human brain tries to find connections between objects when viewed together. Other editing techniques rely on how the human eye works. For example, there usually must be an appropriate change in distance for a shot not to seem like a mistake or "jump" cut.

The direction in which things move across the screen is also an editorial concern. A car that exits the screen on the right is expected in a subsequent shot to reappear on the left—otherwise the car could be perceived as a different car coming from the opposite direction. Scenes featuring characters in opposition to each other (a hero and villain, for example) usually feature one character continually facing one direction with the other character continually facing the other direction. This keeps the two "sides" clear.

Have your students prepare a "shot list" (see example below) listing the shots from a sequence of a film they've watched. The list should outline the details of direction, position, distance, continuity, or relationship that is communicated with each cut between shots. Have them explain why they feel the edit does or does not work. If they desire, they can use arrows or symbols as shorthand to describe what is happening in each shot. Here is an example of a shot list for the comic strip illustrated in Activity Three.

1. LS – Exterior of house. Day.
2. LS – Mom to boy. Boy facing right, Mom facing left. "You should call your Grandma."
3. MS – Overhead. Boy staring at phone facing right. Phone on right side of screen.
4. CU – Mom's face. Mom facing left. "You should call your Grandma."
5. ECU – Boy picking up phone. Hand enters from left side of screen.
6. CU – Boy on phone. Phone on left side of screen. Boy's right ear. "Hello, Grandma."
7. CU – Grandma on phone. Grandma facing left. "Why don't you call more often?"
8. CU – Boy staring at phone. Phone on left side of screen.
9. ECU – Phone. Boy's hand on left side.
10. CU – Boy hanging up phone. Phone on left side of screen. Boy looking at phone.

Add-on Activity: If your students have access to video cameras, ask them to replicate the Kuleshov effect. This can also be done using digital or still photographs, drawings, or pictures cut from magazines.

Activity Three
CREATING MEANING

In the editing process, the editor does not usually attempt to create an exact record of what happened as viewed through the eyes of one character. Rather, the editor—in collaboration with the director and in keeping with the vision of the writer—must "translate" the events of each scene into the most effective images, placing each one in the order and length most appropriate to telling the story. Timing is indeed everything for the editor.

One approach to editing is *continuity*. Continuity editing generally presents the action in a logical, chronological sequence. Even though the time and space of a sequence may be manipulated, it has the appearance of "real" time to the viewer. A long shot of a person sitting down is "matched" to a close-up of the person sitting down into the frame. In essence, the editor is focusing in on the scene in much the same manner as the human eye—jumping from place to place, far-

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Shot #1

Shot #2
Mom: "You should call your Grandma."

Shot #3

Shot #4
Mom: "You should call your Grandma."

Shot #5

Shot #6
Boy: "Hello Grandma."

Shot #7
Grandma: "Why don't you call more often?"

Shot #8

Shot #9

Shot #10

Artwork By: Tom S

ther or closer. In actuality, the action appears more natural if two or three frames of film are deleted by the editor at the splice.

Part A. Because comic book artists use many of the techniques used by film editors, the comic book is a good medium for analyzing editing techniques. Ask your students to study the comic strip shown in this activity master and discuss how changes using various film editing techniques alter the story. Then ask them to "edit" the strip to create a new, final product. You may want to give them more than one copy of the sheet.

What happens if, instead of the current sequence, the panels are placed in a different order?

Example #1—1, 7, 6, 9, 10, 2 ,3, 4, 5, 8 (Grandma has called the boy from her house and, after hanging up, the boy is told to call his Grandma by his Mom.)

Example #2—5, 8,1, 7, 6, 9, 10, 2, 3, 4 (The boy calls Grandma, she admonishes him, the Mom says to call Grandma, and after he doesn't respond, reminds him again.)

Example #3—1, 3, 7, 5, 6, 9,10, 2, 4, 8 (The boy thinks about calling his Grandma, imagines what she would say, calls her, hangs up, and is told to call her by the Mom.)

Part B. There are many ways to put the panels together, especially if panels are eliminated or repeated. Adding the sound effect of a phone ringing over the exterior of the house in Example #2 would make it clearer that the boy is calling Grandma and that the phone is ringing at her house. The frustrations of being limited to these panels, of course, are the frustrations of an editor. The editor can only work with what the director has shot. Creative ways of stretching time by cutting back and forth, or compressing time by eliminating footage are just some of the ways in which an editor is more than just a film splicer. Examining the various ways your students have "edited" the footage will illustrate the many possibilities. Some of the combinations will tell a very clear story, and some of them will be confusing. Creativity is acceptable, however, only when it enables the scene to tell the story in keeping with the rest of the film.

Add-on Activity: If you have access to a DVD or VHS deck with slow-motion or still-frame capability, use this function to examine with your students the transitional frames from one shot to another. Examine how action continuing from one shot to another is "matched." Study the direction that objects move across the screen from one shot to another. What impact does that have on the viewer's impression of whether it is the same object or character or an opposing object or character? Note the position of key props from one shot to the next. Note the transitional devices used to connect scenes like fades and dissolves. Note how the edits affect the impression of time being lengthened, or shortened, or creating the impression of "real" time.

Activity Four
LEARNING *from the* BEST

Film editing can have its own unique logic as well, functioning in much the same manner as the brain with seemingly jumbled thoughts and images creating their own individual meaning. The groundwork for many of these techniques, later used by Alfred Hitchcock and others, was laid by a group of Soviet filmmakers—most notably Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin—who, in the early 1920s, began to experiment with film style and technique and especially with *montage*. Montage, or collision editing, is done by splicing together a rapid sequence of carefully selected shots to evoke a specific emotional or intellectual response. The Russians' premise was that each shot derived meaning from the context in which it was placed. If the context changed, the meaning of the shot and the sequence also changed. For example, Eisenstein once combined shots of a poor woman and her undernourished child seated at an empty table with shots of an affluent, overweight man seated at a table filled with food. His intent in combining those shots was to evoke images of the oppression of the poor by the wealthy. Had Eisenstein shown one series of shots without the other, the meaning would have been quite different. Montage, in the modern sense of the word, often refers to sequences where several shots have been edited together to compress a series of events that happen over time (e.g., sequences of young couples falling in love, scenes with flying calendar pages, etc.).

Part A. The Odessa Steps sequence in Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin,* available on home video, is the classic example of montage. If possible, show this to your students. In this sequence, the Czar's army is quashing an uprising. Eisenstein uses editing to show the fear of the people, their escalating panic, the tragedy of innocent bystanders as a baby in a carriage careens helplessly down the steps, and the intensifying threat of the soldiers, their guns and artillery. You may

want to contrast this sequence with the steps sequence from *The Untouchables* (1987).

In *Psycho*, also available on home video, Alfred Hitchcock's famous shower scene uses a rapid series of extreme close-ups to build suspense and heighten the sense of panic. Many viewers believe they have seen a very brutal stabbing, even though the knife is never shown piercing the body of the victim.

Have your students look for examples of montage, or collision editing, in the films they view. Ask them to make notes about the images, the ways in which they were combined, and the effects they created. Can they identify examples of jump cuts, reaction shots, places where time has been compressed through editing, or places where space has been manipulated through editing?

Part B. Each year, the film industry produces an array of outstanding new releases. Some are especially appropriate for families, some are appealing to teens, and some are geared toward adult audiences. If you or the parents of your students feel that some, or even all of this year's nominated films might be inappropriate for viewing by young people, you can modify this activity in several ways.

Students can view Academy Award-nominated and winning films from past years to complete the exercises. A list of films that won Academy Awards for editing appears at the beginning of this teacher's guide.

Additional Resources

*Film Art: An Introduction (*Fifth Edition), by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. McGraw-Hill, 1997.

First Cut: Conversations with Film Editors, by Gabriella Oldham. University of California Press, 1995.

In the Blink of An Eye (Revised Second Edition), by Walter Murch and Francis Ford Coppola. Silman-James Press, 2001.

Key Concepts in Cinema Studies, by Susan Hayward. Routledge, 1996.

The Film Editing Room Handbook: How to Manage the Near Chaos of the Cutting Room (Third Edition), by Norman Hollyn. Lone Eagle Publishing Co., 1998.

The Technique of Film Editing (Second Edition), by Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar. Focal Press, 1994.

When the Shooting Stops, the Cutting Begins: A Film Editor's Story, by Ralph Rosenblum and Robert Karen, Ph.D. De Capo Press, 1988.

www.gen.umn.edu/faculty_staff/yahnke/filmteach/ x-naturl.htm for a detailed lesson plan on editing in the closing scene of *The Natural* (1984)

www.oscars.org or www.oscars.com for more information about the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Some of the terminology that a film editor uses includes:

Close-up (CU): A shot showing a detail only (ex., face only or hands only).

Cross-cutting: Cutting back and forth between two or more events or actions that are taking place at the same time but in different places. Cross-cutting is used to build suspense or to show how different pieces of the action are related.

Cut: An abrupt transition from one shot to another.

Cutaways: A cut away from the primary subject to something the filmmaker has decided is equally or more relevant at that time. Often cutaways consist of shots showing the reaction of one character to another. This is often used to compress time in what appears to be a seamless manner.

Dissolve: An overlapping transition between scenes where one image fades out as another fades in. Editors often use this to indicate a change in time and/or location.

Establishing Shot: A shot, usually taken from a distance, which establishes for the viewer where the action is to occur and the spatial relationship of the characters and their setting.

Extreme Close-Up (ECU): A detail of a close-up (eyes or mouth only, etc.).

Fade In: A shot that starts in darkness and gradually lightens to full exposure.

Fade Out: A shot that starts at full exposure and gradually fades to black.

Freeze-Frame: At a chosen point in a scene, a particular frame is printed repeatedly, given the effect of halting or "freezing" the action.

Jump Cut: A cut where two spliced shots do not match in terms of time or place. A jump cut gives the effect that the camera is literally jumping around.

Long Shot (LS): A shot taken at a considerable distance from the subject. A long shot of a person is one in which the entire body is in frame.

Medium Shot (MS): A shot framing a subject at a medium range, usually a shot from the waist up.

Reverse cutting: A technique alternating over-the-shoulder shots showing different characters speaking. This is generally used in conversation scenes.

Sequence Shot: An entire scene or sequence that is one continuous camera shot. Ther
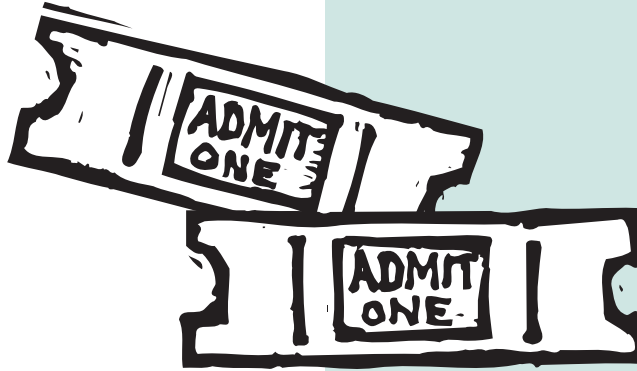
The ORIGINS *of* MOVIE "MAGIC"

Most films produced before 1902 were only a few minutes in length. In those films, editing was nothing more than splicing the loose ends of the film together to put the shots in order. With the introduction of George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), films began to be longer and more complex. Filmmaking continued to mature over the next several decades as represented by such films as D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), F.W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) and Sergei M. Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Films such as these helped establish the concept of film as an art form rather than as a novelty or recorded reality.

Porter and Griffith, both American filmmakers, used editing to enhance the emotional impact of a film on its audience. Griffith developed the use of the close-up and experimented with cutting together scenes that were widely separated in physical space to show what was taking place in different locations at the same time.

The film editor is responsible for transforming massive amounts of film into the story seen on the screen. It's not unusual for the editor to begin with hundreds of hours of film. To make things even more complicated, the director may film each scene several times from four or five different camera positions. The scenes are also not shot in the same sequence as the film's story. All the scenes in one location or using a particular actor will be shot together to minimize the cost of the production.

The editor sorts through this rough footage and gradually assembles the film, scene by scene. Working closely with the director, the editor must choose the best acting performances and the most effective camera angles and lighting for each scene to achieve the desired impact. The editor must then decide just how to join together all those segments of film to create the final, finished story.

Some of the terminology that a film editor uses includes:

CLOSE-UP (CU): A shot showing a detail only (ex., face only or hands only).

CROSS-CUTTING: Cutting back and forth between two or more events or actions that are taking place at the same time but in different places.

CUT: An abrupt transition from one shot to another.

CUTAWAYS: A cut away from the primary subject to something the filmmaker has decided is equally or more relevant at that time.

DISSOLVE: An overlapping transition between scenes where one image fades out as another fades in. Editors often use this to indicate a change in time and/or location.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: A shot, taken from a distance, establishing for the viewer where the action is to occur and the spatial relationship of the characters and their setting.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP (ECU): A detail of a close-up (eyes or mouth only, etc.).

FADE IN: A shot that starts in darkness and gradually lightens to full exposure.

FADE OUT: A shot that starts at full exposure and gradually fades to black.

JUMP CUT: A cut where two spliced shots do not match in terms of time or place. A jump cut gives the effect that the camera is literally jumping around.

LONG SHOT (LS): A shot taken at a considerable distance from the subject. A long shot of a person is one in which the entire body is in frame.

MEDIUM SHOT (MS): A shot framing a subject at a medium range, usually a shot from the waist up.

REVERSE CUTTING: A technique alternating over-the-shoulder shots showing different characters speaking. This is generally used in conversation scenes.

SEQUENCE SHOT: An entire scene or sequence that is one continuous camera shot. There is no editing.

View the Death Star battle sequence in *Star Wars* (1977), the rolling boulder sequence from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), the training sequence from *The Matrix* (2000) or another sequence your teacher has chosen. As you watch the scene, try to identify the rhythm the editor established in making cuts. Tap a pencil each time there is a cut. (This will be easier to do if you watch the scene a second time with the sound off.) For example, if all the shots are about the same length, a steady, metrical beat results. Shortening each shot in a sequence results in an accelerating rhythm.

Title of film: _____

Description of the scene you watched: _____

_____

What was your emotional response? _____
What was your intellectual response? _____
How many cuts could you count? _____

Now, view the scene again. Try to identify the specific shots or effects the editor used. Why do you think the editor chose to transition from one shot to the next at each point? What information do the shots communicate? For example: Is the cut to a close-up merely to show us who is speaking or is it an important reaction?

Information the shot communicates

1._____

2._____

3._____

Type of shot

1._____

2._____

3._____

WRITING *with* IMAGES

Film editor Carol Littleton describes film editing as being a lot like writing: "You become a writer, but you're writing with images…" Editing allows the filmmaker to utilize the tools of the novelist—flashback, cross-cutting, and the like—to guide the viewer's attention.

PART A. On a separate sheet of paper, write a scenario about something that commonly occurs at school.

Then, draw stick figures within a series of boxes depicting the same scenario, this time emphasizing the visual portions of the scene you think require attention at that particular time.

In what ways are writing and editing similar? What differences do you notice in communicating with words and communicating with pictures?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

PART B. The 1920s Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov discovered that when he combined different shots of unrelated objects without allowing viewers to see the entire context (the establishing shot), viewers assumed a connection among the shots and created their own context.

In his most famous experiment, Kuleshov took one shot of an actor's expressionless face and intercut it with several different images, including a bowl of soup, a dead woman in a coffin, and a little girl. When audiences viewed the segment, they mentally connected the images and perceived the actor's face as responding to the appropriate emotion for each image—hunger for the soup, sorrow for the dead woman and affection for the child—even though, in each case, the facial expression never changed. Viewers also assumed the actor was in the same physical space as the other images. This phenomenon is known as the Kuleshov effect. Can you identify ways in which the Kuleshov effect worked in the scene you viewed for Activity One?

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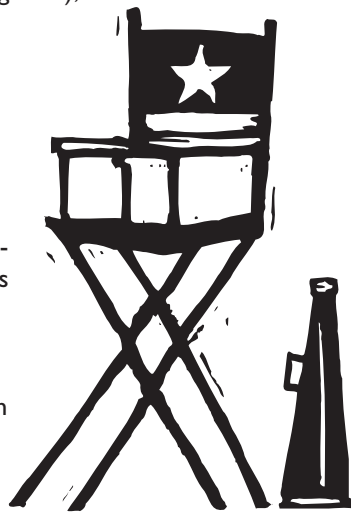
PART C. Editors know that viewers will assume connections between intercut pictures; however, when the images *move,* a new set of rules comes into play. A long shot of a man sitting down that cuts to a close-up of the man sitting probably has a few frames of that action missing in order to make the action appear smooth or "match." There usually must also be an appropriate change in distance for the shot not to seem like a mistake or "jump" cut.

The direction in which things move across the screen is also an editorial concern. A car that exits the screen on the right is expected in a subsequent shot to reappear on the left, otherwise the car could be perceived as a different car coming from the opposite direction. Scenes featuring characters in opposition to each other (a hero and villain, for example) usually feature one character continually facing one direction with the other character continually facing the other direction in order to keep the two "sides" clear. This becomes particularly crucial when various characters or locations are being intercut.

Examine a scene between two or more characters, or perhaps a chase scene from one of your favorite films, or the scene you viewed for Activity One. Write a "shot list" or outline that examines how the editor has constructed the sequence to make the location, characters, or two simultaneously occurring events clearly understood. Describe the details of direction, position, distance, continuity, or relationship that is communicated with each cut between shots. Feel free to illustrate your outline with small drawings or directional arrows. Perhaps you'll find an example of a clever editor who has broken the "rules" and still has the action clearly understood, or has broken the rules to deliberately confuse. Describe why each edit works or why it is confusing.

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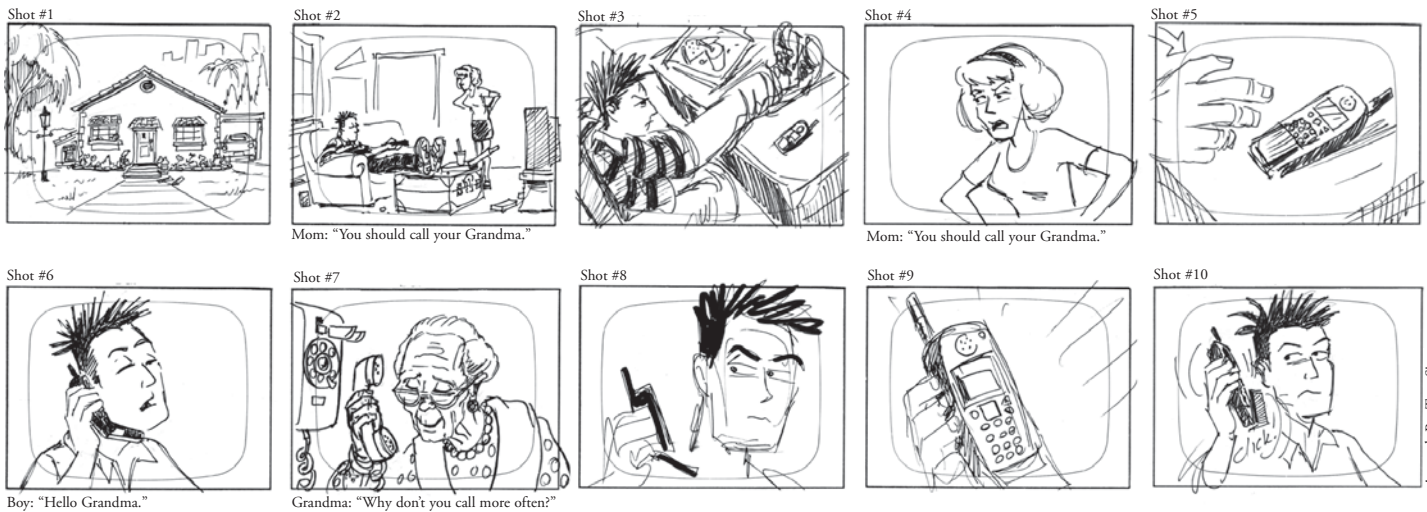_____
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CREATING MEANING

Unlike most television situation comedies—shot in sequence with several cameras running simultaneously—most films are shot with only one camera. (The exception is in scenes where spectacular or unrepeatable action occurs, such as an explosion.) Because the shots are taken out of sequence, at different times and places, and on different days, the editor then must piece the shots together. Most filmmakers have a good idea how different shots will fit together in the final product.

Shots can be edited in a logical, chronological order to create continuity. The editor can choose to link shots that are graphical-ly similar. Elements that might be linked include colors, shapes, directional movements and the overall composition of the shots. In most films, the center of interest is in roughly the same position in each shot, the lighting is at about the same level, and strong changes in colors from shot to shot are avoided. That said, the editor can choose to emphasize the collision, or discontinuity between shots to create a sense of discord. Rather than having a clear relationship between shots, the editor can disorient viewers, requiring them to figure out the relationship. This technique is often used to create heightened emotional impact.

PART A. The artists who draw the panels you see in newspapers and comic books use many techniques that are similar to those used by film editors. Here is an example of a comic strip:

Shot #1

Shot #2
Mom: "You should call your Grandma."

Shot #3

Shot #4
Mom: "You should call your Grandma."

Shot #5

Shot #6
Boy: "Hello Grandma."

Shot #7
Grandma: "Why don't you call more often?"

Shot #8

Shot #9

Shot #10

Artwork By: Tom Sito

1. Editing shots together can create meaning that is not implicit in the individual shots themselves (as illustrated by the Kuleshov effect). What assumption do we make when shown the exterior of the house followed by the Mom and boy inside the room? _____

_____

2. What happens when the exterior of the house is placed in front of the shot of the Grandma on the phone? Whose house do we assume it is then? _____

3. Shots number two and four each have the Mom saying, "You'd better call your Grandma." What effect does this repetition have?_____

_____

4. What shots can be removed to make it appear that the boy is remembering something his Grandma said previously rather than actually talking to her?_____

5. Because the Mom is on the right of the screen and the boy is on the left, it creates the effect of them talking to each other as we intercut. Why can't the shots be edited together to make it appear that the Mom is talking to the Grandma? _____

6. What would the effect be of cutting back and forth between the extreme close-up of the phone and the close-up of the boy looking at the phone? _____

_____

7. What effect would eliminating shots 3 and 4 have?

_____

PART B. Cut out and rearrange or "edit" the panels into a different order that changes the story being told. On the back of this sheet describe the effect of the editing. How has the meaning, rhythm, or point of view changed?

Find another comic strip or comic book sequence for which you could "edit" the panels, fitting the "shots" together in a different order to create a new final product. On the back of this page, cut out and reorder the frames to show how your comic would change. In this exercise, you are editing a strip that someone else has "directed."

Or you can draw your own comic strip or *storyboard* (a series of drawings, sketches or photographs that illustrate the narrative progression of each shot.) In what ways can you alter the sequence of drawings to have them say different things?

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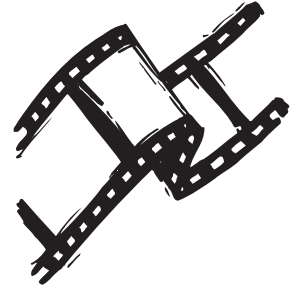
Most films contain some sequences that are *not* designed to create a sense of continuous action. Film editing can have its own unique logic as well, functioning in much the same manner as the brain, with seemingly jumbled thoughts and images creating their own individual meaning.

PART A. Exciting strides in early film editing took place in the Soviet Union, where Sergei Eisenstein developed his theory of *montage*. Eisenstein discovered that by combining many short and often conflicting images in quick succession, he could create a dynamic rhythm in a scene. In *The Battleship Potemkin*, for example, he combined hundreds of shots—some no more than a second or two in length—to depict the slaughter of a group of citizens by Cossack troops. Since that time, *montage* has been used to heighten the dramatic impact of many highly charged scenes. As you view the scene your teacher has chosen, try to count the number of shots that were included.

Title of the film: _____

_____

What happened in the scene?

_____

_____

_____

How did the rapid change from shot to shot make you feel? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What are the differences between this style of montage editing and continuity editing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

PART B. In the previous activities, we learned that the film editor's job is to take hundreds of hours of raw footage and turn it into a finished film. Now it's time to look at the films that were nominated for editing this year and in previous years. Go to www.oscars.org to find a complete list of winners since 1934. Write down some of the titles you find.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Pick one film that you would like to see from the list of nominated films or another film that was recognized for achievement in editing in a previous year. As you watch the film, consider some of the guidelines that members of the Academy follow when making their award selections:

• Is the storytelling clear and focused?

• Have the performances been shown to their best advantage?

• Is the film well paced?

• Are the emotional beats allowed sufficient time to be affecting?

• Do the pauses themselves create an effective moment?

After viewing the film, and on the back of this sheet, describe why you think the film won the award or was nominated. Put yourself in the shoes of an Academy member. Using what you know about each of this year's nominated films—either from seeing them or reading about them—predict how the professional filmmakers in the Academy will vote. In addition, view a film honored early in the Academy's history and compare the editing techniques with a film that won more recently. On the other side of this sheet describe the developments that you perceived.

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