

Chapter 17

Film

NCEA Level 3 English material covered in this chapter includes material for Achievement Standard 90723 (English 3.4) 'Respond critically to oral or visual text studied', through understanding:

- Key tools at a director's disposal – cinematography, soundtrack, mise-en-scène, editing, narrative structure.
- Anatomy of a film – the opening sequence, theme, characterisation, setting and context (social, political, historical), a key scene, conventions of a genre.
- Film Case Study – *In My Father's Den*.

To answer a film question in the Achievement Standard 90723 (English 3.4) exam, you should have viewed a film in its entirety at least *three* times, and, in addition, have completed a detailed analysis of *three* key scenes.

Conventions in film making

Knowledge of the technical and artistic aspects of film making is required. Discussion of these techniques and how they reveal/enhance aspects of theme, character or setting, will form the basis of your critical response.

The key tools at a director's disposal are Cinematography, Soundtrack, Mise-en-scène, Editing and Narrative structure.

Cinematography

The director's deliberate choice of camera angles and types of shots is not neutral, but communicates a viewpoint and manipulates the audience to consider the issues in a certain light.

Cinematography means everything associated with the camera. It includes:

- Framing – close-ups, wide shots, etc.
- Camera movement – panning, tracking, zoom in/out, dolly, handheld, etc.
- Use of angles – high, low, flat.
- Use of filters – colours, tints, bright, over-exposed or washed-out.
- Depth of field – a narrow depth of field means only part of a frame is in focus (eg the foreground is in focus but the background is not); a wide depth of field means most/all of a frame is in focus.
- Film stock – fast film stock gives high resolution, slow film stock gives grainy texture. (Similar effects can be done using digital recording of images.)
- Lighting – high-key lighting gives little contrast, low-key lighting gives high contrast and shadow. The key light in a shot is the brightest, and the back light provides depth to a shot by counteracting the key light. Coloured filters may be put over the lens to convey a mood (eg a pink or yellow filter will convey warmth; a blue filter will offer a colder, more clinical feeling).
- Subject-to-camera distance – the further from a subject the camera is, the more information is available to understand what is actually happening. The closer the camera is to the subject, the more important the subject is.

The Opening Sequence

This is always a vital sequence to view closely and to analyse. The whole film is set up here – characters, themes, settings, method of narration, symbolism, mood are all introduced. It is recommended that you hire the video/DVD of your film for study to analyse this scene carefully.

Example

The Constant Gardener opening sequence

The opening sequence of eight scenes all take place in the first 13 minutes of the film.

This opening sequence establishes:

- The characters of Tessa and Justin.
- The settings of Kenya and London.
- The storyline, with a mystery hanging over Tessa's death.
- The director Fernando Meirelles' style, with his jigsaw approach to the story, his juxtaposition of scenes of Africa and London, his symbolic use of colour and interesting frame composition and cinematography.

Scene 1

Justin is farewelling Tessa and Arnold at an airport. "See you in a couple of days." The two main characters are viewed in silhouette, with a third shadowy character in the background, slightly behind Justin as though ready to take his place. In the next shot he does just that and walks with Tessa to the plane leaving Justin on his own. This opening scene foreshadows much that is to come.



**SAMPLE
REVISION
NOTES**

**SAMPLE
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NO**

Scene 2

Deserted salt flats with a jeep on its side with a wide-angle shot. The horizon is tilted, which conveys a sense of unease and the truck wheel in the foreground is out of focus. There is a sense of desolation, with the wide-open spaces behind the truck and a sense of destruction with the overturned, rusty vehicle.

**Scene 3**

Justin arrives at work at the British High Commission in Kenya and tends his pot plants, then colleague Sandy Woodrow arrives and breaks the news that a white woman has been murdered and they think it is Tessa. Near the start of this scene, a wide shot sets Justin in his work context, a dull grey building, with Justin not working at his desk, but watering his pot plants. This gives the impression that his job is not demanding and he himself is dull and uninteresting.



Scene 4

Justin in London reading a lecture on diplomacy that was to have been delivered by Sir Bernard Pellegrin. Tessa was at the lecture and argued passionately with Justin about British involvement in Iraq. This scene is the first meeting between the two main characters, and clearly reveals both their characters.



Scene 5

After the lecture, Tessa and Justin are seen in Tessa's apartment in London. Here Tessa looks vulnerable and is looking up at Justin as if he could protect her.



Activity 17L: Scene summary

Fill in the gaps in the following sentences, which represent the _____ order of the film. (The film has huge numbers of flashbacks – this explains the disjointed chronology of the sentences.)

1. Paul returns for his father's funeral, but can't attend it. He visits _____ and Penny after the funeral. He returns to the house.
2. Andrew visits Paul after the will reading, revealing a third of the estate goes to '_____'.
SAMPLE REVISION NOTES
3. Paul goes to the house, cleans it out and has a bonfire. He rescues the painting of _____, then discovers _____ in the den.
4. Paul goes into town, meets Ms Seagar and is seen through the butcher's window by _____. He speaks at school about war.
5. Celia and Mouse talk about boys in Celia's room, while Ms Seagar asks _____ to stay.
SAMPLE REVISION NOTES

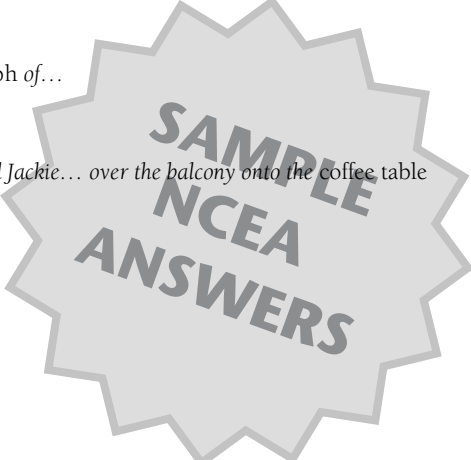
6. _____ goes to his hiding place in the van and spies on Celia and her friends.
7. Paul and Jackie have a catch-up and talk about old times. Afterwards, Paul returns home, gets the photo of Celia out of the _____ and sees Jackie's bracelet. Celia goes to Paul's to interview him.
8. Paul confronts Jackie about Celia, then gets Celia's birth _____ and returns home to the den. Later, Paul picks up a Scottish woman at the pub and tries to have sex with her. Afterwards, he sits in a bath.
9. Andrew and Penny try to have sex but Andrew can't. Penny cries in the shrine. The next morning, Penny discovers the photos of Celia amongst a pile of overdue _____ when a vase overturns.
10. Out-of-control teenage party. The next morning, Celia walks to Paul's and he dresses the cut on her _____.
11. Four months pass. It is winter, and Ms Seagar introduces Detective Dunleavy, who asks if anyone's seen Celia. He talks to Paul who lies about seeing Celia. Paul then lies in the bath and remembers his birthday picnic in the _____, and talking to Celia about travel.
12. In flashback, Jeff walks in on Paul and _____ having sex.
13. Paul discovers Celia's bruises and goes to the house to confront _____. They fight.
14. Paul goes to the police station to come clean about seeing Celia. Jackie and Gareth join him, and Paul tells Jackie about _____'s behaviour with Celia. Montage of people doing various things as the search for Celia goes on.
15. Detective Farnon arrives to interview Paul. Paul is driven to the _____ and interrogated.
16. Flashback – Paul tells Celia by the river that Jackie doesn't want them to see each other any more. Celia tells him she's entered the competition. She questions him about his relationship with Jackie, but he refuses to tell her anything. They have a mud fight in the _____ paddock. They arrive home and Andrew and Jonathon are there.
17. Penny tries to call the Police, but Andrew stops her. Paul goes to see his brother at the council meeting; they argue and cause a scene. He is beaten up by Gareth and some of Gareth's friends as Paul gets into his _____.
18. Flashback – as Paul and Celia drive, Celia learns she is _____ in the short story competition. Celia discovers the _____ of herself in Paul's wallet and takes it.
19. Celia goes home and confronts her mother about her father. Celia goes to the orchard and confronts Paul about who her _____ is. They argue.
20. Paul goes to Andrew's to see if he can stay there. _____ won't open the door, but Paul sees Jonathon, who shows him Celia's backpack in the worm farm.
21. Andrew goes to the Prior house to find a note on the door telling him to go down to the river. Paul confronts Andrew with a gun and Andrew confesses he told Celia everything. (Flashbacks – Paul seeing _____ (his father) and Jackie having sex; Paul's mother killing herself in the river; Penny thinks Andrew and Celia are having an affair and pushes Celia over the balcony onto the _____ below.)
22. Paul returns to the house with the books Celia borrowed from him, breaks down and cries. The phone rings and it's _____, asking if Paul can come over.
23. Andrew is arrested and taken away. Penny goes into Jonathon's room and comforts him. _____ reveals he rang the police.
24. Celia's body is removed from the _____. Her funeral is held.
25. Paul sets fire to the _____. Outside the burning building, Jackie falls into Paul's arms.

26. Coda – the day Celia’s story is published, she goes to see Paul. He gives her a _____ and the atlas. Celia leaves and walks down the road.

Chapter 17: Film

Activity 17L: Scene summary

1. Andrew
2. ‘a charity’
3. Hope, then discovers Celia in the den.
4. Jackie
5. Paul
6. Jonathon
7. atlas
8. certificate
9. bills
10. knee
11. orchard
12. Jackie
13. Gareth
14. Gareth
15. Police station
16. horse
17. car
18. ...is runner-up in ...discovers the photograph of...
19. father
20. Penny
21. (Flashbacks – Paul seeing Jeff (his father) and Jackie... over the balcony onto the coffee table below.
22. Jonathon
23. Jonathon
24. river
25. den
26. ticket



**SAMPLE
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ANSWERS**