

STUDY GUIDES

The **Chicago Humanities Festival** is committed to creating and fostering interest in the humanities. To this end, the Festival provides study guides to help teachers to bring the humanities into the classroom. Every year, the CHF brings an amazing array of authors, thinkers, and artists to Chicago. We hope you will seize the opportunity to bring the excitement of their works and knowledge to your students.

The lesson plans for teaching *Citizen Kane* and *Beauty and the Beast* on the following pages were prepared for the 2002 Chicago Humanities Festival: *Brains & Beauty*.

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Brains & Beauty and Film in the Classroom

Film is an art form in which technology, aesthetics, and storytelling interact in complex ways. The lessons on the following pages can be used to watch and “read” films with students. The two authors pose distinct strategies for teaching film (and teaching with film). Ralph J. Amelio shows how detailed analysis of a particular shot can open up a film, whereas Mary T. Christel takes a more thematic, literary approach. Both strategies are effective, and each works its way toward the other. Though the authors have focused on particular films—*Citizen Kane*, directed by Orson Welles, and *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Jean Cocteau—the concepts and approaches explored here open doors to other films as well.

Bring the *chf* into the Classroom!

Citizen Kane: A Lesson Plan

By Ralph J. Amelio

The integral relationship between form and content is the basis of a work of art—filmic or otherwise. Analyzing the formal elements of film can provide students with the necessary tools and skills to understand and appreciate filmic art.

It is difficult to appreciate fully a film's beauty without understanding its brains—that is, its composition, camera placement, editing, and so on. The techniques of storytelling on film are so familiar that we fail to them. Learning to be conscious of those techniques uncovers the aesthetic and narrative strategies hidden in plain sight. The lesson on the following pages shows a strategy of analyzing a film, using static and moving images.

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"Citizen Kane: A Lesson Plan" was written for the Chicago Humanities Festival's "Brains & Beauty" preview study guide. This lesson plan • by Ralph J. Amelio 2002.

About the Film

Citizen Kane

1941

119 minutes

Black and white

Directed by Orson Welles

Written by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles

Cinematography by Gregg Toland

Film editing by Robert Wise

Original music by Bernard Herrmann

Starring Dorothy Comingore, Joseph Cotten, Everett Sloane, Orson Welles

Questions to Ask a Film

Asking questions is the first step in understanding a director's intent, technique, and aesthetic. Here are some simple but important questions to ask:

- Composition
How are elements arranged within the shot? Is this composition formal or informal? Are there lines, forms, movements?
- Placement of Characters
Where are they in the frame? High, low, left, right, center?
- Center of Interest
Where does your eye go? What is the center of interest?
- Camera Placement
What is the camera's point of view? From above, at eye level, or from below? What is the camera focused on? Something near or something far?
- Framing of Subject
How is the subject framed? Think about texture, perspective, and light source.
- Camera Lens
What sort of lens is being used? Are you aware of width or depth?
- Lighting
Describe the lighting. Is it intense, low-key, or somewhere in-between?
- Sets
How and where are the objects and characters arranged on the set?

- Costumes
What do the costumes reveal about the time period, the characters, and their social status?
- Props
Where are objects placed and why are they placed there? Do they have symbolic value?
- Camera Movement
How does camera movement communicate information?
- Subject Movement
Is the subject moving toward or away from the camera? What impression does this create?
- Editing
How do transitions communicate? Does a particular cut bridge time? space?

Some Terms to Know

Here is a list of terms that are useful when discussing **camera movement** and **editing**, with examples from the film.

- Pan: the tripod remains in place, but the camera rotates from left to right. A very fast pan is called a swish pan. (The “breakfast” sequence.)
- Tilt (Vertical Pan): the tripod remains in place, but the camera pivots up and down. (Kane in the newspaper office with Leland after the gubernatorial loss.)
- Boom: the camera dips toward the subject from an angle—usually, a high angle. (The news team looks over the objects in Kane’s collection.)
- Travel (Tracking): the camera moves parallel to a moving object. (Susan enters the stage in her opera performance.)
- Cut: an instantaneous transfer from one shot to the next.
- Jump Cut: a transfer that bridges two different times and/or places. (A jump cut bridges eighteen years, from Kane’s childhood to Thatcher listing his possessions upon reaching age 25.)
- Dissolve: a gradual merging of the end of one shot into the beginning of another. (Kane’s first sled dissolved by snow.)
- Fade-in: the gradual emergence of a shot out of darkness. (Kane on his deathbed.)

- Fade-out: the shot gradually disappears into darkness. (The final shot of the gate and castle.)
- Wipe: a line appears to pass across the screen, pushing off the first shot and revealing the next. (The bizarre collection of objects at Xanadu.)

Example of Analysis

The following analysis considers two formal elements in particular:

1. Composition: the arrangement of elements within the shot or scene to create a certain effect based on a variety of principles and conventions, such as balance, color, focal point, proportion, scale, symmetry, and depth.
2. Depth photography: a camera technique in which characters or objects are set in the foreground, middle ground, and background and shown in sharp, equal clarity.

The setting is Colorado in the winter of 1871. We see the interior of the cabin of Mr. and Mrs. Kane, the parents of the main character, Charles Foster Kane.



In this shot, Mary Kane (Agnes Moorehead) sits at a table with Walter Parks Thatcher (George Coulouris) while Kane's father (Harry Shannon) stands in the mid-ground, and young Kane (Buddy Swan), age 8, plays outside in the snow in the far background. Each character is

sharply focused and arranged within the frame, putting an aesthetic task on the viewer's eye: which character is most important? Actually, all are. Through the director's skills, the framing communicates an enormous amount of information: Mrs. Kane is signing a document giving Mr. Thatcher and his company rights to a potentially abundant silver mine, making him the boy's legal guardian. Young Kane, playing outside, is innocent yet helpless and doomed to accompany the cold-hearted New York banker. The boy is neatly framed and symbolically imprisoned by the window as his fate is sealed.

The one most affected is placed farthest from the viewer and the main action of the scene, yet Young Kane captures our attention. Generally speaking, the lightest toned object will automatically draw the viewer's attention first, regardless of position. Here, though the boy is the smallest figure in the frame, through lighting he shares focus with the light-toned faces of the adults.

Verticals usually suggest strength or power. Though Kane's father is standing, he is reduced both in stature and importance by his placement. Not only is he in the mid-ground and left of the action, he is shortened by the perfect positioning of Thatcher's hat—another way of suggesting that Thatcher is a surrogate of Kane's parents. In addition, the father's protestations against the wife's decision to send the boy away are clumsy. (The father has no legal authority in the document because a defaulting boarder on their land left the unrealized valuable land in a deed in the mother's name). Later, in the next shot outdoors with all four characters, we discover that a possible reason for her decision to send the boy away lies in the father's physical abuse of the boy.

This is the earliest scene in which Charles Foster Kane is viewed as a child, and one recalls poet T.S. Eliot's comment: "Our beginnings inform our endings." This shot is one of the most crucial not only because it tries to come to terms with the puzzling identity of Citizen Kane, but because the interrelationships of these four characters—spatial, familial, psychological—foreshadow the film's themes of love, power, and egotism.

Questions to Ask *Citizen Kane*

After having seen the entire film, this shot is most helpful in offering multiple interpretations if not answers to questions such as:

- What is the significance of "rosebud"?
- Why does Kane repeat "rosebud" twice: once on his deathbed and once when Susan leaves him?
- What is the significance of the snow in the shot discussed above, and the snow in the glass paperweight?
- What is young Kane's conclusion (then and later) about his parents "abandoning" him?
- Why is young Kane so angry with the second sled from Thatcher?
- Why is Kane obsessed with collecting things and controlling people?
- Why does he marry Emily Monroe Norton (the President's niece) and Susan Alexander (salesgirl and "singer")?

- Why do these marriages fail?

More Shots and Scenes to Analyze

Viewers can develop a deeper appreciation for *Citizen Kane* by closely analyzing other shots and scenes. Close to fifty percent of the film involved special effects, an indication of the meticulous concern for melding form to content.

- Shot through broken glass paperweight with nurse in background when Kane dies
- Kane taking the helm at the *New York Inquirer*
- Newspaper party by Bernstein and Leland for Kane
- Kane running as gubernatorial candidate in Madison Square Garden
- Kane, Gettys, Susan, and Emily in Susan's apartment
- Susan's attempted suicide (she lies in bed in mid-ground; the medicine is in the foreground)
- Kane and Leland in news office after the election
- Kane typing the review of Susan's performance after firing Leland
- Susan and Kane in huge, empty Xanadu
- Kane wrecking Susan's room
- News team looking at myriad collection of Kane at Xanadu

As one develops the habits of formal analysis, one can appreciate the artistry not only of *Citizen Kane*, but of other films as well.

Bring the *chf* into the Classroom!

Beauty and the Beast: A Lesson Plan

By Mary T. Christel

In April 2003, a Classics in Context colloquium at DePaul University will consider the Walt Disney adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*. It is instructive to contrast the Disney version to Jean Cocteau's classic 1946 film: every adaptation is an interpretation. One Belle is spunky, the other serene. One film puts on a show; the other draws the viewer into a dream. In overt and subtle ways, each is an artifact of a time and culture.

Cocteau's telling of the fairy tale, though it progresses toward an inevitable happy ending, has a strangely melancholic feel. Fairy tales are at once kid stuff, and something more adult, couching dread and desire. Cocteau's somber and dreamy vision poetically mimics the fabric of such stories.

The lesson that follows delineates a strategy for teaching Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*.



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About the Film

Beauty and the Beast (Original title: *La Belle et la bête*)

1946

93 minutes

Black and white

In French with English subtitles

Written and directed by Jean Cocteau

Based on story by Mme. Leprince de Beaumont

Cinematography by Henri Alekan

Original music by Georges Auric

Design concepts by Christian Bérard

Starring Jean Marais, Josette Day, Marcel André, Mila Parély, Nane Germon, Michel Auclair

Pre-viewing Questions

- How are standards of beauty established in a particular society, in a particular time period?
- How are those standards articulated to the culture at large?
- What are the standards of beauty that females and males are held to today? How are those standards different based on gender? age? race?
- To what extent is intelligence a component of “beauty”? How have certain stereotypes reinforced or challenged the notion that someone who is beautiful is not necessarily intelligent? What puts intelligence at odds with being beautiful?
- What are common stereotypes present in fairy tales that deal with degrees of beauty, ugliness, and intelligence? What are the virtues associated with beauty? Are there ever any vices associated with this trait? What are the virtues and/or vices associated with ugliness? Under what circumstances can beauty be transformed into ugliness and vice versa?
- If students are very familiar with the Disney version of *Beauty and the Beast*, it might be helpful to have them recall the elements of the story and its treatment that they recall. It also would be helpful to have them consider how familiarity with that version might enhance or interfere with their experience of viewing and enjoying Cocteau’s version.

Viewing Questions

If students are unaccustomed to taking notes while viewing a film, it is advisable to give small groups of students one category (or part of a larger category) to focus on.

Characterization

- How are the following characters first presented? How do they regard themselves in the country world they inhabit and the world of the court?

Belle's brother, Ludovic
Ludovic's friend, Avenant
Belle's sisters, Felicity and Adelaide

How is Belle presented to contrast her siblings?

- To what extent is Belle's father similar in nature to her or to her siblings? How are these similarities or differences made clear?
- To what extent are any of the characters who inhabit the world apart from the Beast's castle presented in an aggressive or animalistic manner? What provokes this behavior in them?
- How is Belle's initial reaction to the Beast typical of fairy tale heroines?
- How do Belle's conversations with the Beast reveal contradictions in his nature?
- How do the sequences focusing on Belle exploring the castle and its grounds suggest that she is more than a "damsel in distress"? What does she come to understand about the Beast based on these explorations? What does she do with this knowledge?
- In addition to the Beast's appearance, what makes his manner inhuman? What behavior makes the Beast increasingly sympathetic in Belle's eyes?
- When Belle returns home, how does she articulate her understanding of the Beast to her father? What does she see as the key to her happiness with the Beast when she returns to him?
- Based on her previous behavior, why is her return to the Beast assured?
- Why is Belle so easily exploited by her siblings and her supposed beau? Why doesn't she recognize their potential for treachery?
- To what extent is Belle herself responsible for the Beast's transformation into the prince?
- Why did the director use the same actor to portray the Beast and Avenant?

Motifs

- Find examples of the following motifs and how they develop character, plot, and theme:

roses
mirrors (or reflections in mirrors)
key
horse

Select moments in the film where these motifs are presented as powerful visual images.

Setting

- How does the director and designer differentiate the worlds of Belle's country home and the Beast's forest and castle using the following techniques:

elements of setting
costuming
lighting
shadows
camera position and movement
special effects or trick photography
sound elements: music, sound effects, silence

- What changes in lighting, music, and setting mark Belle's father's entry into the Beast's world?
- How does Belle's journey into the forest and her arrival at the Beast's castle contrast or compare to her father's arrival?
- Which elements make the Beast's world both fantastic and grotesque?
- To what extent is the Beast's appearance incongruous?
- How does the director create a simple yet effective way to have Belle be "transformed" from a common country beauty into a princess?

Post-Viewing Discussion

Exploring Themes

- To what extent is Belle's story similar to Cinderella's? What are important differences?

- To what extent is Belle's beauty an asset or liability to her life at home with her family?
- To what extent does she share a special bond with her father? What then creates that bond?
- How does Belle's interaction with Avenant help prepare the viewer with her interactions with the Beast?
- How is Belle able to exert control over the Beast at various points in the narrative? Is this control derived from her beauty or her perceptiveness? To what extent does Belle have control over herself and her situation at home either before or after she has come in contact with the Beast?
- How is the transformation of the Beast into a prince a bittersweet change for Belle? What has she come to expect in that relationship upon her return to the castle? To what extent is the Beast transformed emotionally and psychologically by his interactions with Belle even before the physical transformation occurs?

Making Comparisons

- To what extent does the Disney version of the story maintain some of the narrative elements of Cocteau's version (based on the literary version of the French fairy tale)?
- Which elements changed or eliminated? Why do you think those elements were changed?
- How is the relationship between Belle and the Beast simplified in the Disney version?
- What makes the Cocteau version a more adult treatment of the fairy tale?

ILLINOIS LEARNING GOALS

These learning goals apply to both film lesson plans.

2.B.4a Critique ideas and impressions generated by oral, visual, written and electronic materials.

18.A.2 Explain ways in which language, stories, folk tales, music, media and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture.

25.A.5 Analyze and evaluate student and professional works for how aesthetic qualities are used to convey intent, expressive ideas and/or meaning.

25.B.2 Understand how elements and principles combine within an art form to express ideas.

25.B.5 Understand how different art forms combine to create an interdisciplinary work (e.g., musical theatre, opera or cinematography).

27.B.1 Know how images, sounds and movement convey stories about people, places and times.

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