

INTRODUCTION

About This Guide

Since 1971, with the debut of *The First Churchills*, introduced by Alistair Cooke, MASTERPIECE has been captivating audiences with works of the finest classic and contemporary writers. From the beginning, teachers have been enthusiastic viewers of—and an important audience for—MASTERPIECE, the longest-running, most-honored drama series on primetime television. In fact, you may already be using MASTERPIECE films in your classroom, to introduce students to literature or to enhance their understanding of what they are reading.

In 2011, with the wealth of new MASTERPIECE productions and the explosion of new technologies and literacies, it seemed the right time to update and revise the original *Film in the Classroom: A Guide For Teachers*, which was published in 2004. Using 25 outstanding MASTERPIECE films, all currently available on DVD, this revised guide offers fresh ideas and innovative activities for teaching film in today's digital environment. Although film is no longer a new tool for teaching language arts, understanding how to use it effectively is now more important than ever. Because many of the questions and activities in this guide can be used across disciplines, they are ideal for team teaching with a history, music, or art teacher.



COURTESY OF MASTERPIECE

ALISTAIR COOKE

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In addition to the wide range of activities in each section, two graphic organizers (Storyboard and Viewing Log), as well as general After-Viewing Questions and a Film Scavenger Hunt help you further integrate the use of any film in the classroom. If you are teaching a particular title, the About the Films section provides production information and links to additional resources on the MASTERPIECE site.

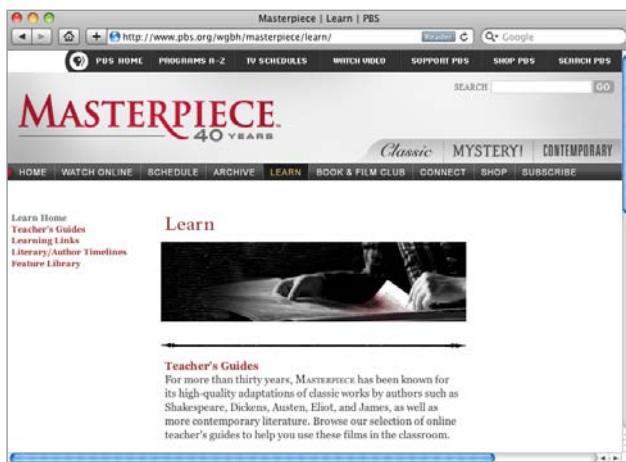
Please Note: Some MASTERPIECE films contain mature themes, images, and language. Be sure to preview any film before showing it in your classroom.

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The MASTERPIECE Website

Although *Film in the Classroom* is a general guide that can be used no matter what film or text you are teaching, the MASTERPIECE website contains a rich collection of teacher's guides and other educational materials. The [Learn](#) section of the site offers 30 in-depth guides to classics such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Our Town*, and *Henry V*, as well as comprehensive author guides such as *The Complete Guide to Teaching Jane Austen* and *Teaching Dickens*. In addition, there are over 25 [Book & Film Club](#) guides. Aimed at libraries, but easily adaptable for the classroom or afterschool book groups, the Book & Film Club materials offer brief background information, thought-provoking discussion questions, and, in some cases, games, activities, and recipes.

In addition to educator resources in the [Learn](#) section, each film that airs on MASTERPIECE is streamed on the site following the broadcast. Background information, interactive features, interviews, and behind-the-scenes peeks are just some of the other multimedia resources you may find useful.



PBS.ORG/MASTERPIECE/LEARN

Why Study Film in the Classroom?

Anyone who has ever watched a movie with a classroom full of middle- and high-school students knows that young people are comfortable with film and understand its power. By high school, students have watched thousands of movies, television shows, and videos, and they unconsciously understand the basic tools and conventions of the medium. Most have even tried their hand at being filmmakers themselves, whether formally through a class assignment or informally by taking videos of their friends and families and posting them to social media sites.

Although they may still treat it chiefly as passive entertainment, students can be sophisticated interpreters of the interplay of sound and image. They know—often without knowing they know—that a close-up of an actor's face signifies something different emotionally from a long shot of an actor across a distance, or that certain kinds of music indicate that a dramatic event is about to happen. In fact, students may know how to interpret film better than they know how to interpret literature, especially the classics. Some teachers feel this is the very reason not to use film in the classroom. Isn't showing movies a waste of time when students have such a reading deficit already? Yes—but only if students watch film passively.

Film is not a guilty pleasure or the “reward” at the end of reading a book, but a legitimate means to enhance literacy. Contemporary thinkers on media literacy (see Resources) have argued that the same habits that a good reader brings to a written text are those that a critical viewer brings to a visual text: enhancing one effortlessly enhances the other. In both, a critical thinker predicts, makes connections, infers, asks questions, and interprets. In both, meaning is made through the details of character, theme, plot, mood, and symbolism. For both, we must guide students to be active interpreters.

Using Film to Interpret Literature

As written texts, the classics are often inaccessible to students. For many, the settings and historical contexts are foreign to them, the complex language hinders fluent reading, and the epic scale of some of the books can seem intimidating. While they will likely feel a sense of foreboding when they view the filmed shot of the stilled mill in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, they might miss the same foreshadowing when they read the novel. Where the camerawork might make the romantic interest between a man and woman in a film version of a Jane Austen novel clear, students might miss their flirtation as encoded in Regency-era dialogue in the text. Even more contemporary texts, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, can prove challenging, particularly for reluctant readers. And yet, we want them to understand these works because they have something important and enduring to say. Using film is a way to help them do this, whether with the filmed version of the same story,

in whole or in part, or as a companion text that complements the themes, characters, setting, or conflicts of that story. (For more about companion texts, see Theme/Plot Elements.)

ACTIVITY

Film teacher John Golden, who wrote the Foreword to this guide, suggests beginning to think critically about film by starting with a personal film inventory of one's own viewing history. First, have students make a list of 10 films they have loved. (You might want to make a master list of all the "best picks" when the class has finished.) Then have students choose a partner and take turns talking about one film, telling each other a little about the characters, plots, settings, points of view, themes, and moods that made these films so effective. Compare and contrast the selections students made. What are the most memorable scenes from their films? Why?




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ANNE FRANK (ELLIE KENDRICK) AND HER PARENTS EDITH (TAMSIN GREIG) AND OTTO (IAIN GLEN) ON THEIR WAY TO THE SECRET ANNEX.

TEACHER TIPS

Consider these ideas, suggested by teachers, for new and different ways to use film. See also Wrap Up for concluding activities.

1. Consider showing the film version of a literary work first, rather than last, or begin your reading with short scenes from the film version. Because students are so visually oriented already, having them first analyze character, look for themes, make predictions, and make observations about the film can help them see these elements more easily when they turn to the literature.
2. Use film as a mini-lesson to highlight a skill or literary element you want your students to practice. For example, let them make predictions from the opening scenes of a film, then ask them to practice predicting while reading.
3. Don't feel you have to show an entire movie; clips of key scenes can be enough. Be sure to prepare well in advance when showing clips. You may want to show just one (from two to ten minutes long) or make a compilation of clips that show a range of film techniques or plot and character development.
4. Instead of showing the film version of a work of literature you are reading, consider choosing a companion film. This can be a work with similar themes, protagonists, characters, or settings; a film of the same genre; or a film version of another work by the same author. See Theme/Plot Elements for more ideas.
5. Begin class the day after viewing a film by having students write about or discuss which images, scenes, or lines of dialogue stayed with them most strongly. Help students to continually ask themselves: "How did I feel during that scene, and how did the filmmaker make me feel that way?"
6. If you are showing an entire film, use pre-reading strategies beforehand. Having students do a simple K/W/L exercise works as well with film as it does with literature for "activating schema," or prior knowledge, and for setting expectations.
7. Try assigning small groups or individuals in the class just one cinematic or literary technique to track as they watch a film. For instance, one group might observe a particular actor, another might watch for camera angles or lighting, and a third might track the editing of a scene.
8. Have students write before, during, and after viewing a long film. They can do this with a Viewing Log by using sentence starters such as, "I wondered.../felt.../thought..." or by writing to a prompt specific to that film. 

VIEWING LOG (SEE PAGE 37)