MEMORY

Let's Get Real

By **Media What**

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Lesson Overview_

This lesson will explore documentary conventions and representations of realism in moving image products. This will allow students to learn the necessary visual language needed to tell a story within this form, but will also enable them to understand the selection process involved in telling a story, even if it is based on real events or people.

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Lesson Objectives_

- To understand how media messages are constructed using media language
- To think critically about the construction of media messages in realist media forms
- To analyze the codes and conventions of documentaries
- To use this knowledge to develop their own documentary pitches

Learning Outcomes_

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
- Understand how we read images (still / moving) using semiotics
- Evaluate narrative construction of realist media forms e.g. news segments, documentaries
- Recognize codes and conventions of documentaries
- Apply their knowledge to think, develop and pitch their own idea for a documentary
- Explain their idea to someone else and peer-critique other documentary pitches

Key Vocabulary_

Genre = types of classifications. For instance film genres include romantic comedy, horror etc., while TV genres include sitcoms, soap operas etc.

Mediation= the process of selection of what goes into a media text

Semiotics = the study of signs to understanding how visual meaning is constructed in media products

Mise-en-scène= combination of the elements seen on the screen, which might include the setting, props, costume and lighting

Codes and conventions = media products are constructed using a number of specific characteristics, including technical codes, according to genre expectations

Lesson Outline

SLIDES	Lesson Plan Instructions	Duration
	BEGIN by going over what this lesson will cover. Each section is broken down so students have a mental map of the goals of the lesson.	
	What's imagination and what's "real"? [Duration: 25']	
#4	**Activity** **ASK** students to consider how they would categorize each of the different genres. This can be done individually, by asking students to write these down in the form of a table, or if you would like a livelier activity, this can be done as a discussion. TIP Students will argue that some genres don't have a clear distinction, or they may disagree for how each might be categorized. Encourage students to explain their reasoning, and to support their opinions.	15'
#5	**CHALLENGE** the binary use of real vs imagination and reference examples students may have mentioned that underline the difficulty of seeing the two as two easily distinct entities.	
#6	**ASK** students to think about what they did yesterday and share this synopsis with the rest of the class. The aim of this activity is to point out that we select what parts we think are more important in shaping the kind of story – in this case, what we did yesterday – we want to tell. **VOCABULARY** This is called **mediation.**	10'
#7	**ASK** What's the story here? Who are these two men? How does it make you feel towards Boris Johnson / Emmanuel Macron? If students are having difficulty recognizing the two political figures, point to visual cues that can help them understand their position: the furniture, the flags, the dress code of the men. Once they understand that the two are politicians, prompt them to consider how they read their body language, and how that influences how we evaluate each.	
#8	**REFLECT** Consider the headlines that stemmed from the image on Slide 6, and link to how it might reinforce some of the statements	

	that students have mentioned. Then click on the link to watch the entire video segment, to see the whole clip of that moment.	
How do we "read" moving images? [Duration: 35']		
#10	**INVITE** students to draw a tree – this can be done privately on a whiteboard. You can call on more than one student to illustrate that not everyone refers to the same sign of a tree.	10'
#11-13	**EXPLAIN** The what semiotics is, and how it can help us read visual language. Go over the two stages of deconstruction: **denotation** (what we see) vs **connotation** (what it means). We can apply this to the example of the tree, where we see the leaves and the bark, but a tree can also mean shade, nature or even a home (for birds, for instance). **VOCABULARY** Explain that **semiotics** is the study of signs and it's the theory used to deconstruct visual media images.	10'
#14-15	**APPLY** this to the image of the two girls from photo. First encourage them to point out what they see: e.g. girls, ice cream, sunglasses, crowd / people etc. Then ask them to point out what it means, for example: - the two girls are facing each other. This suggests that they are talking. - Their smiles suggest that they are having a good time, or that they are friends. - They are eating ice cream which suggests that it's summer, or hot. We can also assume this, based on their colorful short-sleeved shirts - The positioning of the rest of the crowd suggests that they are on a bus	15'
#16 & 17	**APPLY** this to a moving image, which might be more challenging for students because there are a lot of things going on at the same time. Before playing the Save the Children PSA, ask them to think, as they are watching it: 1. What do they see? (Indicative answers: girl, cake, candle, car, dust, tent etc.) 2. What's the story and how do we understand it? (Indicative answers: A conflict situation in the UK, forces a young girl and her family to flee their home and to become refugees. We understand this because of the sound of explosions, shaky camera movement when she's running, sound of sirens, the girl no longer smiles by the end of the clip etc.) 3. How it makes us feel? (sad, afraid, upset, empathetic) **CONNECT** this to the **mise-en-scène**, the additional things we pay attention to when we deconstruct moving images: body language, props, dress code, setting, lighting & color.	

What are documentary conventions? [Duration: 40']		
#19	**POINT OUT** that at the heart of any documentary is the telling of a story and that narrative and structure are important. There are many different ways to tell a story that is based on a real event, person or experience. **CHECK** if students are aware of any types of documentaries, by asking them to briefly talk about documentaries they have watched, or they are aware of. This can be a good starter activity to exploring students' understanding the **codes and conventions** of documentaries.	10'
#20	The following slides (slides 20-23) present four different types of documentaries, according to Nichols' documentary modes. However, there is overlap over the different modes, since there is increased hybridization of genres. But these are a good way to get students thinking about the different ways in which reality is constructed and conveyed in the form of a story. Teachers can replace these documentaries with any others that they see fit for the purposes of their class. **PLAY** the trailer for the documentary *The Distant Barking of Dogs* and ask students to pay attention to different elements in the mise-en-scène that clearly suggest that this is a documentary. **ELICIT** students' responses as to the codes and conventions used in this documentary. For example, the following apply: contains improvisation; focus on a subject; includes shadowing a subject; no voiceover narration; movement of the camera, focuses on a specific location.	30'
#22	**PLAY** the clip of the cheetahs for the documentary *Our Planet* and ask students to pay attention to different elements in the mise-en-scène that clearly suggest that this is a documentary. **ELICIT** students' responses as to the codes and conventions used in this documentary. For example, the following apply: the use voiceover narration, the narrator is like a god-like, all-knowing being; the narrator may also be an expert; the use of music to create the atmosphere; pace of editing to create drama or suspense e.g. the use of slow motion for the chase.	
#24	**PLAY** the trailer for the documentary *The Change Makers* and ask students to pay attention to different elements in the mise-en-scène that clearly suggest that this is a documentary. **ELICIT** students' responses as to the codes and conventions used in this documentary. For example, the following apply: the use of the first-person pronoun; seeing the documentary maker; the clear agenda of the documentary; the use of emotional language; the focus on a journey of discovery.	

#26	**PLAY** the clip from the documentary *Faces, Places* and ask students to pay attention to different elements in the mise-en-scène that clearly suggest that this is a documentary. **ELICIT** students' responses as to the codes and conventions used in this documentary. For example, the following apply: the use of voiceover narration by the filmmakers to bridge scenes; the use of natural or unscripted conversation; visible camera people; focus on spontaneity and reactions of people to filmmakers' interventions.	
#28	**DISCUSS** the selected films and how simply choosing a topic to focus is part of **mediation** – choosing where to focus your camera, and how to tell that story is still part of the selection process.	
Your Turn: What story would you tell? [Duration: 15']		
#29	**CREATE** a pitch for a documentary. Ask students to think of a story they would like to tell using the documentary genre by considering how they got the idea, who the story will focus on, what the story might be, and how they might tell that story using the different codes and conventions they have learned in this lesson. **PRESENT** their pitches in class or to smaller groups and get feedback on their ideas, based on feasibility, originality and relevance to what has been covered in the lesson.	15'

Additional Reading_

Nichols, B. (1991). *Representing reality: Issues and concepts in documentary*. Indiana University Press.

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