



Remember that you must use examples from legitimate sources in the real presentation: you should show these to your teacher and make a record of the exact website address, and the date you accessed it, before preparing your presentation.

If you can answer these questions to your – and your teacher’s – satisfaction then you are well on the way to giving a fascinating and perhaps even ground-breaking presentation. It is not a conventional option, but it could be one well worth taking: indeed, it could lead you into a field of technical and imaginative creativity that you may well want to develop an interest in beyond your Diploma studies.

### Unit 4.5 The ‘literature and film’ option

We all love watching films, and many students are attracted to this option for that reason alone. But there are some important things to remember before you decide:

- 1 You should see yourself as a proactive critic of film, just as you are a serious student of literature. You will not do well in this option if the passive viewing habits that many of us adopt when we relax to watch a film are applied in your preparation for this presentation.
- 2 Secondly: as with each of the four options available it is important to remember that the focus for your presentation must remain with the *literary* element of the work, or works, you have researched. If there is a printed work available which you can use to help your understanding of the film then this will be acceptable.

The following activities will help you to understand the kinds of questions you will have to address before you begin to focus on a particular task. Although general in nature, these questions are important, and you should hope to address them – in relation to the films you are presenting on – in your final presentation.

#### Activity 4.17

Answer the following general questions about film; you could do this with a classmate, or in a group. These should act as preliminary notes for your presentation.

- 1 What is the function of film? Is it to:
  - entertain?
  - teach and educate?
  - represent reality?
  - create art?
  - make money?

For each answer you should be able to say more than ‘yes’ or ‘no’: support your answers with evidence from films you know. In preparing for a presentation on literature and film it would benefit you to write notes on each one as it is very likely that questions of this nature will arise after your presentation. It pays to research now.

- 2 What is the function of a literary adaptation? Is it to:
  - attract new audiences to the original text?
  - remain absolutely faithful to the original text?
  - modernise and make more accessible the original text?
  - make something entirely new from the original text?

Again, try to go beyond simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers: if you feel that these questions are too difficult it may well be worth considering doing a



TOK

Remember that film occupies a very different space within society from literature: it is often more highly visible and available in a number of different ways (DVD, download, Internet, television, as well as cinema). You should be aware of this position, as well as the social responsibility a film maker may have within society.

Does the film maker have any ethical responsibility? Do they ever change?

presentation from one of the other options offered. Having said that, take time to consider them, and to reflect on what you have learned so far; it may also benefit you to talk to a classmate about these questions.

- 3 Who made this film? Why? What does this film tell us about the film maker's agenda?
- 4 Who did the film maker make the film for? How would you characterise its audience?
- 5 What outside influences are there? Does the company who made it impose its identity on it? Are there social, historical, political and cultural influences to be discerned in the film?
- 6 What tradition is it from? Just as you might find it essential to understand the conventions governing a certain literary text you are studying, you will also find it constructive to understand what tradition of film making your chosen film can be placed in (film noir? thriller? Bollywood? Ealing comedy?).

### How do you bring the subject into focus?

In this option it would be tempting to give a presentation on a favourite film, or the work of a favourite film director, but this could be misguided. For example, one student was particularly interested in the films of the British film director David Lean. Originally he wanted the title of his presentation to be entitled 'Intercultural perceptions: the film making of David Lean'. In itself this sounds like a fascinating subject: Lean made classic 'British' films such as *Great Expectations* and *In Which We Serve*, but he also made films which were very international in perspective, such as *Lawrence of Arabia* and *A Passage to India*. However, even these films involve a very pronounced British perspective, and looking at this would be fascinating. The student's teacher, however, advised him against this for several reasons:

- Above anything else it is not literary enough: the focus has to be on how a film maker translates a book to the screen.
- It is not focused enough: the subject itself needs to be more clearly defined.
- It is too broad: Lean was a prolific film maker and there would be too much to pack in to the time allocated: which specific films would be referenced?

The student listened to the teacher's advice and returned with a different idea for a presentation on David Lean: '*Great Expectations*: from page to screen.' The student's teacher thought this was much better: there was a clear literary focus and, in restricting himself to a comparative analysis between one text and one film there seemed a much better chance of making an intelligent use of the allocated time for the presentation. It was not too ambitious, but it had enough depth to merit serious research.

However, the student submitted a third version of his title to his teacher: 'From page to screen: an analysis of David Lean's adaptation of Dickens's *Great Expectations*'. Because there have been so many film adaptations of Dickens's novel it was felt appropriate to clarify exactly which one was being assessed. The title also announces itself as an analysis, and although it may sound unnecessary by including the name of the author and the book the student makes the point very clearly that the presentation will be essentially literary in its emphasis.

Analysing a novel can be daunting enough, but analysing a complex film adaptation of that book as well might seem even more challenging, and then trying to squeeze everything into a short presentation might seem impossible. There are some things to keep in mind:

- You will not be able to cover everything, so keep your subject focused.
- You will be assessed using criteria that are matched to the task: it is understood that it is only possible to cover a certain amount of material in the time you have.
- You are capable of scoring very highly in this option, and, indeed, it could be a task that you enjoy doing and from which you gain a great deal.

### How do you plan a presentation on literature and film?

**Know and understand the book** (and understand how it is different from the film adaptation): this may seem obvious, but it goes beyond simply knowing what happens and to whom. You should have a clear understanding of the following. The list is by no means exhaustive, but you should be able to decide, after reading it, whether you are suited to this sort of presentation. Many students are – and in fact it is one of the most popular options – so think carefully about each piece of advice.

- The plot: this means that you know the story and also the order of events. You should also be able to distinguish what happens in the book from what happens in the film – and when. Often they are not the same.
- The setting: you should not only know where the book is set geographically, but also its historical and social setting, and you should be able to talk about how the setting affects the development of the plot, the characters, and the main themes. Film makers often update the setting to make it more relevant to a modern audience, but how does this affect our interpretation of other elements of the book?
- The characters: you should have a very strong understanding of how the characters are represented in the book: in what ways has the writer developed a character? Remember, a writer can describe a character in a way that a film maker simply cannot so how does a film maker compensate for this?
- The themes: what are the most important themes in the book and are they developed or diluted by the film maker? How? Does the film maker sacrifice key themes for certain reasons? What factors might have influenced these changes?
- The technique: you have to understand the writer's technique before you can comfortably present a comparative analysis of the film adaptation. For instance, the writer's voice may be very distinctive in the text but this could be lost on the screen; if this is the case, what other elements are lost? Does the film maker attempt to compensate for this in another way, for example, by using a **voiceover**?



Key  
term

**Voiceover** The overplaying of a narrative voice in a film, often used to express a character's thoughts, or to summarise plot development.

You should also ask yourself the following questions before you begin to research a comparative analysis: **Why is this book considered suitable for adaptation? What cinematic qualities does it have?** In answering these you may wish to consider several factors:

- Have the themes the text explores retained their universality and accessibility?
- Has the text remained popular and does it still appeal to a wide audience?
- Is the plot interesting and will it keep people watching?

- Are the characters strong and will they engage the audience?
- Is the setting suited to the cinema?

Making a film, unlike writing a novel (even a hypertext narrative) involves a lot of people and a significant amount of money, and any company that is looking to invest in adapting a text will have to be convinced that there is an audience for the film; of course, if the text has been popular then there is less of a risk than if the text has been relatively obscure.

When we analyse a text we are used to looking for certain elements which deepen our understanding and appreciation of the writer's aims: we explore the language, looking at the use of figurative language (including symbols, metaphors and similes), but this essentially linguistic process is denied us in film. However, if we think of film as another text – like a hypertext narrative or a graphic novel – we can begin to read it, albeit in a different way. We can, using different words and criteria, draw out meaning from frames and sequences.

**TOK**



To what extent does film instruct, educate and entertain? Should film be censored when literature is not? Why is it acceptable for novels to be uncategorised but for films to be classified in many societies according to the age of the viewer? Is a film as much a 'translation' as a text translated from another language?

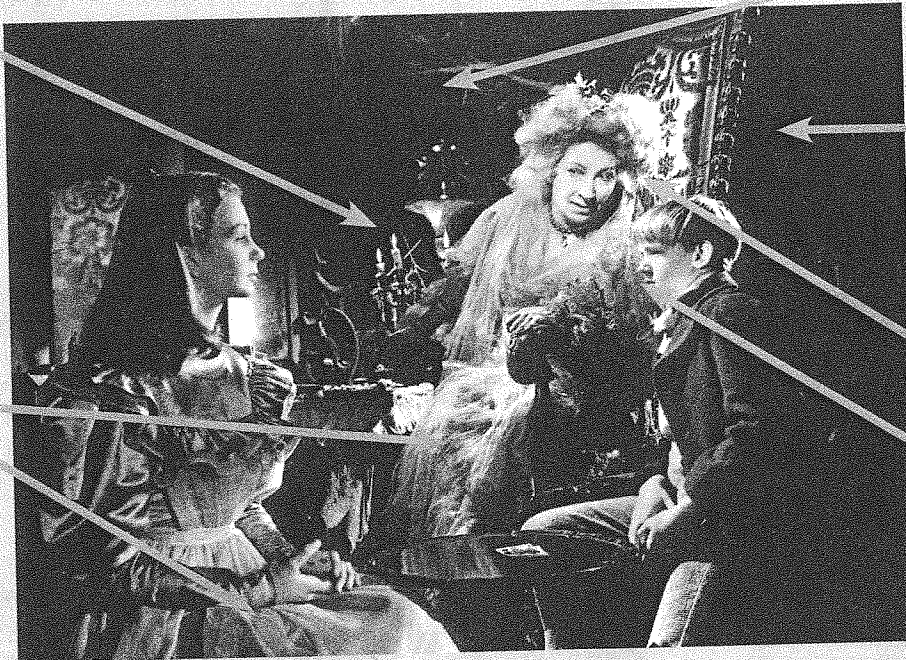
### Activity 4.18

#### Preliminary research

Look at the following frame taken from David Lean's adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*:

Symbolism of candles? Life and death? Transience?

Symbolism of cobwebs? Death? Being entrapped?



Light and darkness interplay here: is this symbolic?

Formal dress: what does this convey? Is it significant?

Use of facial expressions; position of figures: what does this tell us about their relationships?

**Figure 4.10** A scene from David Lean's film *Great Expectations* (1946).

What do you think the film maker is conveying? We have to put this into context: this scene only lasts a matter of minutes, and this shot a couple of seconds, but, even so, it can be analysed as much as a written text can.

Some general questions to apply to single frames:

- 1 Why is it composed like this? Is there any significance to how the characters are positioned?

In this shot the adult – Miss Havisham – is at the centre of the frame and both she and the young boy (Pip) are observing the other character (Estella) who is on the margins of the shot. Look at the positioning of Miss Havisham's and Pip's heads: they clearly seem to be talking about Estella, and Estella in turn seems unperturbed by this: she meets their gaze. The centrality of Miss Havisham suggests that she is at the heart of the narrative.

- 2 Why is the camera placed in this way?

All the characters are included, but so, too, are other elements in the scene: the cobwebs, the candles, the furniture. The camera is placed not only to focus on the characters and their relationships, but also to establish their relationship within their setting.

- 3 Is symbolism used?

Dress is very important and if you know the text you will know why the characters are dressed in this way (Miss Havisham's dress is very significant of course, but status is also conveyed in Pip's and Estella's dress); but even if you do not know Dickens's novel you should be able to see that the film maker has included symbols of life and death and entrapment (the candles and the cobwebs); the film was made before colour was extensively used but, even so, this is a scene that has a strong interplay between light and dark, and this further emphasises the conflict between life and death.

### What questions should you ask about films?

By analysing literature we draw out an author's meaning, but the way in which this meaning can be conveyed by the author can be endlessly rich, ambiguous and open to different interpretations. A film maker loses the subtlety of expression that is available to a writer and one of the biggest challenges to anyone who has to adapt a text to the screen is how to retain the meaning. The scriptwriter will play a part in this, of course, as will set designers, cameramen, sound and light technicians, and other members of the team. But the director will have the ultimate say in which shots best convey the film main themes.

### Activity 4.19

#### Further research

Find an important episode in the text you are studying for Part 4 of the course; now find a film adaptation of that scene (ideally lasting about 5 minutes). Read the extract in the text twice. Now look at the film adaptation. Play it through three times: in the first viewing simply watch it with the sound turned off; in the second viewing just listen to it (close your eyes, or turn the brightness down); in the third viewing watch it with sound and vision restored. Now answer the following questions (spend about 5 minutes on this):

- What is the writer's intention in this scene and how is it conveyed?
- What is the film maker's intention in this scene and how is it conveyed?
- What role does the soundtrack play in this scene?
- What role do the camera angles play in this scene?



Film makers use key shots to create meaning. Here is a list of key shots: read them through and then look again at your chosen scene and write notes on how the film maker has conveyed meaning using specific shots.

Shot	Effect
Extreme long shot	Used for views of landscapes, buildings, seascapes. It may also be a point of view shot by a particular character.
Long shot	A character is shown in the distance; the effect is to place that character into context, and for the surroundings to dominate our perception of that character.
Medium shot	The character is shown from the waist up: the audience will be able to see facial expressions, but also the background.
Close-up	Head and shoulders shot. Little background visible here: the audience focuses on the character's emotional response.
Extreme close-up	Used to show an important detail, moment or gesture.
High-angle shot	Used to convey the impression that a character is being watched; sometimes used to make the character appear less important.
Low-angle shot	Used to exaggerate the size of someone: for example, it may be employed as a point-of-view shot from a child looking up to a parent.

In addition, consider whether the camera is fixed or handheld. The latter technique has become increasingly popular with film makers and is often used to convey a certain character's point of view: for example, horror film fans are very used to seeing a victim being stalked from the attacker's point of view – the camera is shaky and mimics the attacker's perspective.

Each of these camera angles can convey meaning, but it is important to understand that just as these are conventions, a film maker can also subvert our expectations. The important point here is to think about each camera angle. Always ask yourself: 'Why is this happening?' Remember: don't be a passive viewer; instead, engage with the film critically, just as you would with a great work of literature.

There are many resources available online and in books, magazines and DVDs, and they will provide you with specific information on the making of certain films. But there are general considerations beyond framing and camera angles to keep in mind as you begin your preliminary research on this topic:

- 1 **Editing:** are there any transitional points which stand out? Has the film maker cut sharply from scene to scene, or do the scenes dissolve into each other? What's the difference? What effect does the one have over the other? How long is each shot held on screen? Some modern films have shots which last no longer than four seconds, whereas others may last considerably longer than this: why? How does this affect our interpretation of what we see? If appropriate, does it depart a great deal from the chapter breaks in the original text?



TOK

Consider some of these questions in relation to the films you are presenting on:

- What moral responsibilities does a film maker have to his or her audience?
- What is the function of film?

- 2 **Lighting:** is there anything significant about the lighting? How does the lighting affect the mood? Does a protracted use of shade create a gloomy atmosphere? Does much of the film take place in sunlight or artificial light?
- 3 **Dialogue:** look beyond what the characters say (although of course this is very important) and think about *how* they say it. Think about the clarity of their enunciation, the use of accent, colloquial or slang expressions. Do the characters ever talk directly to the audience (usually as a voiceover)? To themselves? To only one character?
- 4 **Sound effects:** we usually think of these as accompanying spectacular moments in the film, but they can also be subtle (a child crying, footsteps outside, rain falling). How do they affect your perception of a scene?
- 5 **Visual effects:** as with sound effects. We tend to think of spectacular effects, or CGI effects. But look for more subtle visual effects here, and ask how they enhance a scene.
- 6 **Music:** this is one of the chief ways a film maker can manipulate our emotions. Think carefully about the use of music in any film adaptation you are working with: what mood is the film maker trying to create with the music being used? How does this correspond with – or depart from – the original intentions of the writer?
- 7 **Setting:** how does this influence your understanding of the film? Does it remain faithful to the writer's own setting? How does it differ? What is lost as a result?
- 8 **Costume:** how does the way the characters are dressed influence our reaction to them? Is it period dress (in other words in keeping with the historical setting)? How is status conveyed through costume?

### Activity 4.20

#### The presentation

Using the notes you have assembled from the previous activities in this unit, write a presentation on one of the following subjects. Because of the range of texts and films available these titles are generic, and can be adapted to your own choices.

Remember these five important points:

- 1 The literary text is the primary focus for your presentation.
- 2 The film adaptation is the secondary focus for your presentation.
- 3 You have to be comparative in your analysis: explain how the film maker has adapted the text for the screen.
- 4 Always support your points with evidence from the text and the film.
- 5 Remember to keep asking yourself: 'How do I know this to be true?' Explain yourself clearly.

Suggested titles for presentations:

- Purity and dilution: how film making lessens the impact of all literary texts.
- Popularising the message: how film making widens the understanding of literary texts through adaptation.
- The lost voice: authorial absence in film making.
- Bringing new meaning to old texts: how film introduces new ideas to familiar texts.
- The importance of setting in texts and films.
- The creation of melancholy in texts and films.