

Educational material

Friendship Between Beings / The Tell-Tale Heart



CLASS DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: 3rd grade
TEACHING AREA: Culture and media
TEACHING UNIT: *Friendship Between Beings / The Tell-Tale Heart*
CLASS TYPE: Analysis of short animated films
DURATION OF A TEACHING UNIT: 45 minutes

FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN BEINGS

Center for Lifelong Education and Culture, Bjelovar, 2022

MOTIVATION

Conversation with the students

1. What is the most unusual or unexpected friendship you've ever made? Can animals become our friends, for example? Can you give an example of a friendship with an animal?
2. Do you have a garden in your house or plants in your apartment/on your balcony? Who takes care of them? Do you care for them and does it give you any satisfaction?
3. What if we have to face a difficult choice between two equally important options? How to make the best decision?

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FILM

You will watch a short animated film *Friendship Between Beings*, produced by the Center for Lifelong Education and Culture Bjelovar, as part of the Little School of Animated Film 2022. The film was inspired by the popular American picture book *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein from 1964.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WATCHING

1. Different animation/visual styles appear in the film. Think about what this stylistic diversity was intended to achieve.
2. Pay attention to the sound in the film. Which elements does it contain and which ones does it not? How does the sound contribute to the film's atmosphere?
3. Pay attention to the depiction of the passage of time. Which cinematic means of expression were used to suggest this?

WATCHING THE FILM

EXPRESSION OF STUDENT IMPRESSIONS

Did you like this film? Why?

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FILM

1. How does the film start?

With a stylized shot of a boy in green surrounded by apples, but it's not yet entirely clear that he is standing under a tree. This is followed by the opening credits with an apple branch growing, then an extreme close-up of a worm in an apple, and then the boy under the tree, which is the main situation in the film.

2. What is the sound like?

Pleasant, light music (acoustic guitar) appears at the beginning and the end of the film, right over the opening and end credits. It also appears in the scene in which the character is happy and imagines that apples are flying around him. The entire film is permeated by a background of noises, sounds of nature: birds chirping, wind, rain. The noises include a saw, cutting a tree with a knife, an apple falling, the sound of an oven, the hammering of a nail, a child running around and many others, as well as some stylized noises such as the sound of a typewriter when the character is drawing. There is no dialogue in the film, but at certain moments there are sounds that match the character's reactions, some resembling voices, and some resembling noises such as head movements in the scene where he is with the girl for the first time, when they hold hands and shake hands.

3. What animation techniques are used in the film? What styles are used?

The film was created with drawings, combining two techniques - watercolour/tempera and a distinct drawing that could have been done by hand, but also by computer, which is not entirely clear from the film. The backgrounds were designed with watercolour/tempera, and the characters were drawn. The outlines of the characters are black. Stylistically, the scenes are very different - from bright, almost fluorescent colours, to darker colours, and a black and white scene of the young man preparing to cut down the tree.

4. How was the passing of time shown?

It's shown in the character design, because it is clearly visible that he is growing up, but also in the plot. At the beginning he is playing, later he meets a girl, they build a house, they have a child. Also, the changes in weather conditions and colours suggest the changing of the seasons. At the camera level, the general feeling of time passing is achieved by the background moving in a certain number of shots, as if it is "floating" from right to left.

5. What are the camera movements like? Static or dynamic?

The camera is mostly static. There are a few tracking shots, such as the first shot (from the top downwards) or when the boy hugs the tree (from the bottom upwards). In some shots, as mentioned previously, the background moves in a motion that resembles tracking, but the camera is still static because the foreground where the characters are is static. When the house is built, the camera moves backwards (which looks like a zoom out), and then there's a zoom in on the young man coming in from the right.

6. What kinds of shots are used?

Mostly full shots and wide shots are used. The extreme wide shot, i.e. the widest shot, appears in black-and-white just before the tree is cut down. There are also close-ups, medium close-ups, and medium shots of the characters, as well as several extreme close-ups such as the apple with a worm in it, the tree being cut down, the swing of an axe, carved initials, etc.

7. Which editing transitions are used?

They are mostly cuts, with a few exceptions. There is a fade out/fade in at the very beginning of the film, between the first shot and the opening credits, then at the apple picking, before they start falling into the bucket, and after

the last shot and before the end credits, but also at the very end, after the closing credits. Besides that, there is a dissolve after the camera moves up the tree, before we see the main character as a young man, which suggests a time jump. Finally, there is a wipe from left to right when he eats a full bucket of apples and burps, before the swing, over the leaf falling, before the black tree and the building of a house of leaves.

8. How is the young man portrayed in the scenes before the tree being cut down?

In two shots he is completely stylized as a black silhouette. Just before the tree is cut down, we see him in a close-up, suggesting an inner conflict, an emotional charge over what he's about to do.

9. Do any scenes stand out from the chronological order?

In the last scene, the main character seems young again, but this is not a time jump but an indication that he's remembering his youth and the moments he shared with the tree.

10. What does the scene of eating an apple with a pink background (about a third of the way into the film, just before the musical scene in which apples fly around the character's head) remind you of?

It is reminiscent of the 1980s video game aesthetic, the popular Pac-Man. It suggests that the main character is still young and playful.

11. How does the film end?

Optimistically, because a new branch of green leaves sprouts from the stump and the tree will obviously grow again, thus continuing the great circle of life. However, the background is black and gray and a sense of longing and nostalgia is suggested, because the past can never be relived.

12. What does the apple symbolize?

The red apple is a symbol of love. The apple is also a symbol of knowledge and wisdom, and this is connected to the fact that the main character has to make a difficult, but a rational and wise decision.

13. What does the name of the film refer to?

The film's name obviously refers to the friendship between the young man and the tree, but the relationship between the boy and the girl is stronger, and because of that he has to make a very difficult decision.

14. Have you read the picture book that the film is based on? If so, compare the film to the picture book.

Students answer freely.

THE TELL-TALE HEART

Max Hendrickson, Secondary School IRL, Ireland, 2023

MOTIVATION

Conversation with the students

1. Do you like film adaptations of literary works? Which is better, watching a film or reading the book first?
2. Do you think that all literary genres and types (novels, short stories, poetry, epics, etc.) can be equally faithfully adapted into films?
3. What are your favorite film genres? Films often belong to and contain characteristics of more than one genre. What genre combinations are most interesting to you?
4. Can you remember the name of a literary character who suffers severe psychological consequences because of something they did?

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FILM

You will watch a short Irish animated film *The Tell-Tale Heart* from 2023. The author is Max Hendrickson, a high school student from Dublin, who won numerous awards at festivals around the world with this film.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WATCHING

1. Notice the different angles in the film. How emphasized are they and what is their function in the story?
2. How do the production design, costume design and cinematography contribute to the atmosphere of the film?
3. Pay attention to the sound design. At what moments are certain elements of sound muffled or amplified?
4. Pay attention to the animation technique and think about how it contributes to the atmosphere and genre of the film.
5. Pay attention to how the film's end credits are designed. What do such credits remind you of?
6. What do we learn at the very end of the end credits?

WATCHING THE FILM

EXPRESSION OF STUDENT IMPRESSIONS

Did you like this film? Why?

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FILM

1. What is the beginning of the film like?

The film begins with a strange first-person narration - a voice talking about his mental state and his illness, with ominous, serious music playing in the background. The viewer is immediately put in the position of trying to figure out what is happening. The first shot of the film is sped up (exchanging night, day, and the weather conditions), although the overall rhythm of the entire first sequence is quite slow.

2. How are the narrator's ambivalent thoughts about the old man highlighted in the narration?

He talks about how nervous he is and wonders why anyone would think he's crazy. He says that he loved the old man, that he did him no wrong and that he didn't covet his gold. The illness sharpened his senses, especially his hearing. He was driven to action by the old man's eye and points out that he was haunted day and night by the idea of the murders that were yet to come. All of the above creates a very open and unclear situation, and we do not learn the motives even at the very end. Also, we don't find out whether the old man has done something wrong to the protagonist and what their relationship was (family, master-servant, etc.).

3. What genre does the film belong to?

It can be interpreted as a combination of gothic horror, psychological thriller and drama.

4. What are the angles of the camera like and what do they aim to achieve?

There's a series of shots in the film with extremely noticeable angles and camera positions. For example, in the first sequence there are extreme high (completely vertical) angles of the bed and the staircase, over which we hear

the protagonist saying: "I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth". This suggests a possible omniscient perspective. An extremely emphasized low angle appears in the scene when the policeman enters the house - the camera seems to be looking at him from the floor and we get the impression that the old man may be alive. There are many shots that seem subjective even though they're probably not (for example, the protagonist seen through a keyhole or seen from a low angle when the old man's body is thrown under the boards). The totality of the camerawork in this film, with the intention of stylization and creating an atmosphere of tension, seems to be trying to achieve the unreliability of the narrative procedures and to underline the protagonist's fractured psyche.

5. Are there any extreme close-ups?

There are - the old man's eye, a light bulb, a keyhole, a watch, a knife, a bucket of water, a drop of blood.

6. Describe the sound in the film.

The sound consists of the narration which is present throughout most of the film, dialogue in scenes with the policeman, music and noises. The music is mostly barely audible, in the background, creating an ominous atmosphere. The music is very noticeable in the murder scene and in the scene of the protagonist's breakdown, i.e. his confession. In certain scenes and shots, some noises are quite noticeable: the heart pounding, the floor creaking, the door opening, rain, the clock ticking in the end credits. The sound mix is extremely emphasized in some scenes – certain elements are noticeably muffled or much louder. For example, the policeman's voice is muffled when the protagonist sees blood on the floor and hears the increasingly loud heartbeat, no matter if it's real or not.

7. What is the lighting in the film like?

In accordance with the film's topic and genre, darkness and dark tones prevail. In certain shots, the difference between light and darkness is very pronounced. Some shots are intentionally darker so it's difficult for the viewer to discern what is happening. Besides Gothic horror, such means of expression can also be associated with the painting technique of *chiaroscuro* and the aesthetics of film noir. This can be associated with creating an atmosphere, a feeling of tension, fear, uncertainty or emphasizing a psychological state.

8. What animation technique is used and how does it contribute to the atmosphere and the genre of the film? How can we relate this to the production design and costume design?

The film was created using two techniques: stop-motion animation and computer animation. The stop-motion animation, combined with the protagonist's "shabby" costume and worn-out elements of production design, looks old-fashioned, as if it wants to allude to the time of the action, i.e. the time when its literary model was created. Also, the physical nature, the "tangibility" of the stop-motion animation underlines the elements of murder such as the knife, blood, the dead body and the floorboards. The stylistic decision to combine stop-motion animation with computer animation may have been a decision made because of production reasons. However, it achieves an interesting contrast of forms, suggests the timelessness of the story and is used for some emphasized actions (the protagonist's intention, blood flowing upwards, etc.)

9. Which colour is particularly emphasized in the film?

Red. Besides being the colour of blood, the walls of the room in the scene where the policeman interrogates the protagonist and the scene where the protagonist imagines that blood is flooding everything are also red. The entire colour palette of the film is earthy tones – yellow, brown, orange – so red does not stand out in that sense, but it is

strongly emphasized in key shots/scenes. The only thing that stands out from this colour palette is the shot of the exterior of the house, which is bluish and gray and takes place in daylight.

10. What do the end credits look and sound like, and what do we find out from them? How can we interpret them?

The end credits are black and white, stylized with a font and filter to make it look like an "old", silent film. We learn that the film is an adaptation of a short story of the same name by Edgar Allan Poe. We can hear only the sharp ticking of a clock, which is connected to the transitions between each shot, i.e. each title in the end credits. The sound of the ticking can be associated with a heartbeat, with time (and life) passing by, etc.

11. What narrative or stylistic devices from literature can you spot in the film?

The narrator: almost the entire film is narrated by the film's protagonist, in the first person (so-called Ich-Form).

The unreliable narrator: a procedure that suggests to the reader/viewer that what the character is saying is not necessarily true, i.e. the reader/viewer cannot with absolute certainty distinguish what is reality and what is imagination or a subjective view of the event.

In medias res: the plot begins in the middle of the protagonist's reflection on his own mental state and how he planned the murder.

Retrospection: the entire film is set in the past, regarding the narration.

Poetic narration, repetition, as in verse: "I would turn the latch of his door and gently open it, *oh, so gently* - - I turned on the lamp, *oh, so cautiously*."

12. How closely does the film follow the plot of the original?

Quite faithfully, both in terms of plot and the narrator's voice.

[After watching the film, students can read the original story, compare similarities and differences, and consider in what ways the literary work and the film achieve atmosphere, tension, and genre characteristics.]

EVALUATION

- monitoring student activities while watching a film
- checking the understanding of the film by asking questions
- teaching sheet (quiz)

THE TEACHING SHEET (QUIZ) is available on the Film EDUCation website.