

Educational material

# Vilik: The Life of a Firefighter



**CLASS DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION:** 1st grade

**TEACHING AREA:** Culture and media

**TEACHING UNIT:** *Vilik: The Life of a Firefighter*

**CLASS TYPE:** Analysis of a short documentary film

**DURATION OF A TEACHING UNIT:** 45 minutes

## VILIK: THE LIFE OF A FIREFIGHTER

Kazakh National Academy of Arts, Kazakhstan, 2022

### MOTIVATION

Conversation with the students

1. Can you name some professions that are considered dangerous? Why are they dangerous?
2. What do you know about firefighters?
3. What does a day in the life of a firefighter look like? What kind of calls do firefighters respond to?
4. How does one become a firefighter?

### THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FILM

You will watch a short documentary film *Vilik: The Life of a Firefighter*, made in 2022 in Kazakhstan.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR WATCHING

1. How does the film start? What do we see and hear first?
2. Pay attention to the protagonist, how is he introduced? What do we learn about him throughout the film?
3. Pay attention to the rhythm and how it changes throughout the film.
4. Pay attention to the music in the film. What is its function?

### 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? What do we see and hear first?**

The film begins with the opening credits, which display the names of the crew members in a combination of white and red letters. This is followed by a series of short shots that quickly alternate. The shots are occasionally enriched by graphic details reminiscent of film tape (perforations, flashes), while in the background we hear non-diegetic music and the sound of camera clicks. The shots show close-ups and extreme close-ups of the fire station and fire

trucks. In a full shot, next to the fire truck, in profile, we see a firefighter and the narrator's voice (voice-over) appears, which will guide us through the entire film. The narrator talks about fire while we see different shots and photographs of firefighters at work.

**2. What does the name of the film look like? Why is it written in red and white?**

In a wide shot of the fire station; in the foreground, a fireman is standing in the right corner, looking through the window, and behind him is a fire truck. Above the vehicle, to the left of the fireman, the name of the film appears, the inscription "Vilik" is written in red and is almost half the size of the fireman, and the inscription "Life of a Firefighter" is written in white and appears right below the inscription "Vilik". In this way, the authors achieve a direct connection with the topic of the film and the protagonist.

The name of the film is written in a combination of red and white colours because red and white are associated with fire trucks and the profession of the protagonist and his colleagues. In this way, the motif of fire trucks is discreetly present in the credits and at the beginning and the end of the film.

**3. What do we call a scene or sequence preceding the opening credits?**

A cold open. Its purpose in this film is to introduce the audience to the protagonist, the atmosphere of the film, and to introduce the viewer to the world that the film wants to portray. This world is fast, unpredictable, loud and dangerous, as the opening credits suggest with their rhythm and dynamics.

**4. What is the difference between a scene and a sequence?**

A scene is a set of shots that creates a unity of location, time and plot, and a sequence is a set of shots that are united by a certain topic. A scene or sequence that takes place in a single shot is called a one-shot.

**5. How do we get to know the main character?**

We first hear Vilik's voice in the voiceover narration. At the beginning of the film, we don't see Vilik's face, and it is difficult to distinguish him from his colleagues in a firefighter's suit. His interview was filmed in a close-up, which allows for a good study of his facial features and emotions and gives the viewer the opportunity to remember the protagonist.

**6. Is Vilik the only character who addresses the viewers?**

No. Vilik's father Shakirizhan also addresses the viewers.

**7. What is the camera like in the film?**

The camera is dynamic, often handheld. Such a camera has greater freedom and offers the ability to react quickly, the ability to easily record unpredictable situations, but also to somewhat enhance the realistic impression on the viewer (a dynamic camera may suggest that there was no preparation that would have allowed, for example, setting up a tripod and using a static camera).

Camera states are divided into static and dynamic.

**8. How were the parts of the film divided, with what editing transition?**

With a fade out. A fade out is a type of editing process in which a shot gradually darkens frame by frame until it is completely black. This effect creates the impression that we have closed one chapter and are opening a new one. In this film, we see a fade out for the first time when the name of the film is displayed.

**9. What can we hear in the film? What does the sound of a film consist of, give some examples.**

The elements of the sound are: speech, noises, and music. This film contains all these elements: speech (Vilik's narration, his father's interview), noises (camera clicks), and music (diegetic and non-diegetic). The non-visual

instrumental music in this film is illustrative in nature and as such serves to create emotions in the viewer (fear, sadness, danger, etc.), but also to highlight some interesting parts of the film.

**10. Give examples of diegetic and non-diegetic music in film.**

Diegetic music is music whose source we see in the scene we are watching, for example, firefighters singing the national anthem at the beginning of the film, while non-diegetic music is music whose source we do not see in the scene we are watching. Non-diegetic music is used frequently in this film, from the opening credits to the end credits of the film.

**11. When do we first see fire in the film?**

After the firefighters drink tea and have breakfast, we hear the sound of an alarm. In the next shot, Vilik and his colleagues hurriedly put on fire suits, accompanied by non-diegetic music in a medium full shot. This is followed by shots of the journey to the scene of the fire (extreme close-ups and close-ups: the steering wheel of the vehicle, the hands and faces of the firefighters) which suggest uncertainty because the firefighters, as well as the viewer, do not know where they are going, how big the fire is, how dangerous the fire is. A meadow has caught fire.

A medium full shot is also called an American shot because it was often used in American western films. It shows a person approximately to their knees and the top of the person's head is near the upper edge of the frame. This way, the cowboys' belts with guns were more visible in the shot.

**12. As Vilik recalls and recounts to the viewer the great fire, what do we see?**

We see footage of the fire (taken with a cell phone). This is a different format of filming, the footage is vertical and does not fill the entire shot. To the left and right of the cell phone shot, there are blurry outlines of a burning fire, which is an effective and appropriate visual solution to show how dangerous fire is, which at the same time fills the entire shot.

**13. What is the highlight of the film?**

After the scene of a barbecue with Vilik's colleagues, in the dark we hear the sound of an alarm again, once more the extreme close-ups line up, and Vilik and his colleagues prepare for a new action. This time it's nighttime and as they approach their destination a large fire can be seen in the distance. We see extreme wide shots of the dark, burning street and the firefighters preparing and starting to put out the fire. In the background we hear non-diegetic music accompanying this devastating moment. Gradually we see that the firefighters have contained the fire and have the situation under control.

**14. What types of material does the film use?**

Archive material (photos of firefighters, mobile phone footage of an earlier fire that firefighters spent 57 hours putting out) and recorded materials (interview with Vilik and his father, footage from the fire station).

**15. How does the film end?**

Dawn comes after the fire, the house has burned down and is in ruins. Vilik and his colleagues stand together in the place where they put out the fire and look at the camera. We hear Vilik's voice again, talking about the people's gratitude to the firefighters. A team of firefighters stands as if posing for a picture, the shot freezes, the camera movement stops and the shot goes dark.

Stopping a motion, also called a freeze-frame shot, means a sudden stop of a natural movement, that is, a sudden transition from a dynamic state to a static one. The frozen shot is achieved by multiplying one frame (a static phase of movement) on the computer, as many times as you want the frozen frame to last (25 frames = 1 second).

## 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.