



FROM FACT TO FICTION

CLASSROOM GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILMS:

The **From Fact to Fiction** program is a series of thought-provoking short films, selected to examine the storytelling process through a variety of techniques. International in scope, the program includes animated and live-action films, with both narrative and experimental structures. The **From Fact to Fiction** program will delight and entertain, while introducing its audience to a wide range of storytelling methodology. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the program will encourage young viewers to consider the processes involved in filmmaking and to approach the screen as critical thinkers.

74 minutes, Color, English and Russian with English subtitles

USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **Havana Curveball**.

Support materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy.

SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

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FILM SOCIETY™**



SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Which film in this series was your favorite? Why?
2. Which film in this series was your least favorite? Why?
3. Which film in this series do you think was the most challenging to make? Why?
4. The films incorporate a wide range of storytelling styles, from documentary to animation to narrative fiction. Which film's style was the most interesting to you? What techniques did it use that set it apart from other films?
5. Many of these films are stories about a particular place. Which setting did you think was the most compelling, and why?
 - a. How did the landscape of Siberia shape the lives and the philosophies of the people in **Zima**?
 - b. Describe the setting of **Barn Dance**. How did it contribute to the tone of the film?
 - c. Did **Dance of the Death** feel like a universal film? What elements of it were specific to the place where it was created?
 - d. What did you notice about the setting in **Little Block of Cement with Disheveled Hair Containing the Sea**? Could these animals have existed together in a different environment? How did the landscape contribute to the story in this film?
 - e. What is the girl's neighborhood like in **So You've Grown Attached**? What is the connection between the world where the imaginary friends live, and the world where the humans live? Did you think the existence of parallel worlds was plausible in this film?
 - f. Describe world that the animator has created in **Cosmic Flower Unfolding**. Does it remind you of any environments on earth? What kinds of imagery do you think animators look at when they're getting ideas for their drawings?
 - g. The film **Silent** takes place within a number of

different historically important films. Setting is sometimes the clue that lets us know which film the story is referencing. Did you recognize any of these films by their settings? Which ones?

6. Another theme that recurs throughout this series is friendship. Which different kinds of friendships did you see in this series? Which of these films told the most interesting story of friendship?

- a. What is the origin of the high five, according to **The High Five**? How did such a simple gesture between two friends become so popular?
- b. Do you think that the two dancers in **Barn Dance** were friends? What kind of unspoken bond do you need to have in order to perform a dance routine with another person? What role do you think trust plays among athletes and performers?
- c. **Stop the Show (aka WAR)** makes a plea to the international community to stop making so many weapons. What lessons do you think world governments could learn by following the basic rules of friendship?
- d. What types of friendships and relationships are captured in the timeline of **Dance of the Death**? Do you think there were moments missing from this depiction of the life story? Which ones?
- e. What kind of friendship exists between the horse and the dog in **Little Block of Cement with Disheveled Hair Containing the Sea**? Do you think friendships among animals are common? How do animals develop friendships?
- f. What kinds of friendship does the girl have with Ex in **You've Grown Attached**? What happens at the end of the film? Is this a realistic depiction of a moment in childhood?
- g. How do friendship and teamwork help the two entertainers succeed in **Silent**? Do you think they make a good team?

7. This series focuses on the method of storytelling, the way that a fact or a true story develops into a narrative.

- a. Which films struck you as true stories, which were

WHICH FILM IN THIS SERIES WAS YOUR FAVORITE?



fictional, and which were something in between? Do you think that a fictional story can talk about a feeling or an event that is true?

b. Storytelling is a way to learn about people, places and interesting facts that you might not otherwise think of. Did any of these films introduced you to a new viewpoint, or show you a glimpse of the world that you might not otherwise have seen?

c. Do you think that film is a unique medium for storytelling? What can a film show or tell you that you might not be able to learn through reading or looking at still pictures?

8. What words would you use to describe this series as a whole? What common themes can you find? Do you think these films were interesting to watch together? Did any seem out of place?

9. Did you enjoy the From Fact to Fiction series? What more do you want to know about these films? What questions do you have about how they were made?

THE HIGH FIVE:

SYNOPSIS

The origin of the seemingly most instinctual of celebratory gestures can be traced to a spontaneous moment between Los Angeles Dodgers Dusty Baker and Glenn Burke on October 2, 1977. (Michael Jacobs, USA 2014, 10 min.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Describe the circumstances of the first recorded high five in sports.
- 2) In addition to the story about the high five, what other stories are told in this film?
- 3) What visual techniques did the filmmaker use in The High Five?
- 4) What do you think was the filmmaker's goal in creating The High Five? What does he want to communicate to his audience?

ZIMA:

SYNOPSIS

A dreamy, mesmerizing portrait of a season in remote Northern Russia and Siberia as told through the thoughts and feelings of people who live in one of the world's harshest climates.

(Cristina Picchi, Russia 2013, 13 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What does **Zima** tell you about life in Northern Russia and Siberia?
- 2) What do you notice about the people in this film? Are they like people you know? Are they different?
- 3) What visual imagery do you see in Zima? What does the imagery tell you about life in this part of the world? How do you think the filmmaker wants you to see Siberia and Northern Russia?
- 4) What is the message of **Zima**? Why do you think the filmmakers decided to create this film? What do they want you to take away from it?

BARN DANCE:

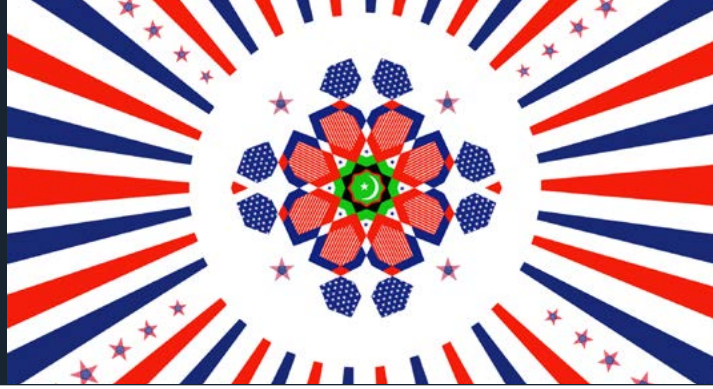
SYNOPSIS

A couple dances a pas de deux amid the light and shadow of an old barn.

(John Haptas, Kris Samuelson, Amy Seiwert, USA 2013, 5 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What happens in Barn Dance?
- 2) Have you watched a dance film before? Did you enjoy watching the dancers?
- 3) What is the relationship between the camera and the performance in Barn Dance? How would this dance be different if there were no camera present?
- 4) How does the filmmaker incorporate elements of the setting into the piece? Is it important that these dancers are in a barn? How would it be different if they were in a dance studio or on the street?



STOP THE SHOW (AKA WAR):

SYNOPSIS

This Max Hattler-directed short showcases his impeccable design skills and sound synchronization chops to tackle the weighty subject of arms dealers (Max Hattler, England 2013, 1 min).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What is the message of this film?
- 2) Do you think the film was effective in communicating its message?
- 3) What design strategies did the filmmaker use to convey his message?
- 4) What role did sound play in this film?

DANCE OF THE DEATH:

SYNOPSIS

From womb to tomb and all the moments in between are joyously captured in this rollicking race against time. (Yulia Novich, Russia 2012, 3 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What happens in **Dance of the Death**?
- 2) Why do you think the filmmaker chose to use this unusual form to talk about human life? Was the form successful?
- 3) What was unique about this film?
- 4) What is the message of **Dance of the Death**? Why do you think the filmmaker wanted to make this film?

LITTLE BLOCK OF CEMENT WITH DISHEVELED HAIR CONTAINING THE SEA:

SYNOPSIS

This paean to a horse and dog running free together on an abandoned farm in the Chimborazo province of Ecuador delivers gorgeous cinematography and arresting images, photographed in black and white. (dir. Jorge Lopez Navarrete, Spain, 16 min).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Who are the characters in this film?
- 2) What imagery is most powerful in the film?
- 3) Do you think we are meant to take this film at face value, or is there a larger meaning or metaphor?
- 4) What is the significance of the title, **Little Block of Cement with Disheveled Hair Containing the Sea**?

DO YOU THINK
THE FILM WAS
EFFECTIVE IN
COMMUNICATING
ITS MESSAGE?

SO YOU'VE GROWN ATTACHED:

SYNOPSIS

A young girl's imaginary friend, known as Ex, is given notice that his job is coming to an end in this witty and charming take on adolescence. (Kate Tsang, USA 2014, 15 min).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Describe the main character in this film. What is she like? Can you relate to her?
- 2) Do you like Ex, her imaginary friend? Do you think he is a good friend? What challenges does he help her through?
- 3) What did you think of the office of imaginary friends? Was it funny? Was it believable?
- 4) Did you think that the mix of animation and live action was effective in this film? How is the mix of animation and live action uniquely suited for this story?



COSMIC FLOWER UNFOLDING:

SYNOPSIS

Bay Area produced, this short takes the concept of a mandala in motion to psychedelic extremes. (Benjamin Ridgway, USA 2013, 2 min) .

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What imagery did you see repeated in **Cosmic Flower Unfolding**?
- 2) What do you think was the filmmaker's source material for these images?
- 3) What role did sound play in **Cosmic Flower Unfolding**?
- 4) What was the overall effect of this film? Did you enjoy it?

GLORIA VICTORIA:

SYNOPSIS

The final film in Theodore Ushev's incisive trilogy on art, ideology and power—following *Tower Bawher* (2005) and *Drux Flux* (2008)—is an antiwar treatise mixing constructivist, cubist, surrealist and expressionist styles. (Theodore Ushev, Canada 2013, 7 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What was **Gloria Victoria** about?
- 2) What imagery did you see repeated in the animation? What sources and inspirations do you think the filmmaker drew upon in creating this imagery?
- 3) What role did sound play in **Gloria Victoria**?
- 4) What feeling or message do you think the filmmaker wanted to leave with his audience? How did you respond to this film?

SILENT:

SYNOPSIS

Moonbot Studios and Dolby Labs team up to create this charming tribute to movie making as two cinematic-loving entertainers discover how sound and picture work together to create movie magic. (Brandon Oldenburg, Limbert Fabian, USA 2014, 3 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What was the basic plot of **Silent**?
- 2) Is it possible to enjoy this film without knowing film history? How does a knowledge of film history help you to understand **Silent** better?
- 3) What role did sound play in **Silent**?
- 4) Do you think the filmmakers were successful in their use of sound? How did sound shape the narrative in **Silent**?

WHAT ROLE DID SOUND
PLAY IN THESE FILMS?



POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

1) Create Your Own Story:

Drawing inspiration from the films, choose a moment in your life or a story you have heard, and transform it into a plan for a short film.

- Write a logline—a brief outline of the plot, meaning and message of your film (3 sentences)
- Decide on a genre for your film. You might choose to make a documentary, like **Zima**; narrative fiction, like **So You've Grown Attached**; animation, like **Stop the Show** and **Gloria Victoria**; or a more poetic format like **Barn Dance**. A story can be told in many ways, so think carefully about which format is right for your subject.
- Make a list of the characters who appear in your film. Include a brief description of each character.

As a homework assignment, students might write scripts or create storyboards for their films. If time and interest allows, they may be encouraged to film a short clip from each story idea, using phone cameras or available resources.



MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive.

Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

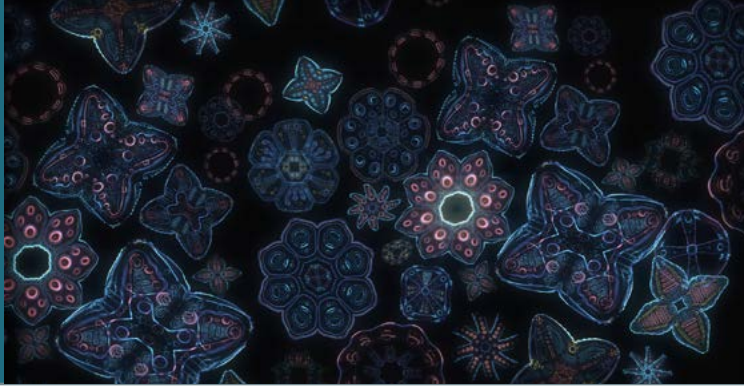
- (1) **Medium:** the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) **Author:** the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) **Content:** the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) **Audience:** the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) **Purpose:** the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.



CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM	<p>All Media Is Constructed. How is the message delivered and in what format? What technologies are used to present the message? What visual and auditory elements are used? What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?</p>
AUTHOR	<p>All Media Is Constructed by Someone. Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
CONTENT	<p>All Media Is A Language. What is the subject of the media message? What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content? What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response? To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?</p>
AUDIENCE	<p>All Media Messages Reach an Audience. Who receives the message? For whom is the message intended? What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message? What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message? How might others perceive this message differently? Why?</p>
PURPOSE	<p>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason. Why was the message constructed? Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How? To what extent does the message achieve its purpose? What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?</p>



THE ANIMATED FILM WHAT IS ANIMATION?

Animation is a process used to create motion pictures through the combination of still images (e.g., digital graphics, photographs of drawings, photographs of objects, etc.) which, when played in sequence, create the illusion of movement. All television cartoons, for example, are animations, and are made up of thousands of still images (drawn by hand or on a computer) that are played sequentially, along with a soundtrack, to tell a story.

TYPES OF ANIMATION

2D Animation Techniques

- Classic animation (e.g., Disney's *The Lion King*, most TV cartoons)
- Rotoscope (e.g., *Star Wars* lightsabers)
- Flip books

3D Animation Techniques

- 3D animation (e.g., Pixar's *Toy Story*, *Wall-E*, *Up*)
- Stereoscopic 3D (e.g., *Avatar*)
- Cut-out / Silhouette animation (e.g., *South Park*)

Stop Motion Techniques

- Claymation (e.g., Nick Park's *Wallace and Gromit*)
- Puppet animation (e.g., Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Coraline*)

HISTORY OF ANIMATION

The world's most famous animator, Walt Disney, began making short animated cartoons based on children's stories in 1923. In 1928 he introduced Mickey Mouse in the first animated sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, which became an immediate sensation. Throughout the next decade, Disney would add such elements as carefully synchronized music (*The Skeleton Dance*, 1929),

Technicolor (*Flowers and Trees*, 1932), and the illusion of depth with his multi-plane camera (*The Old Mill*, 1937), a device that allowed for animated cels to be photographed against a three-dimensional background. Although not the first animated feature, Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was the first to use up-to-the-minute techniques and the first to receive widespread release. The film's success can be attributed in part to Disney's willingness to use animation to create a profound dramatic experience. He strove for photographic realism in films such as *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941) and *Bambi* (1942).

The success of television cartoons led to the virtual disappearance of animated shorts produced for theatrical release. Animated feature-length films, however, flourished, especially after the release of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989), regarded by many as the studio's best animated feature in decades. Other Disney blockbusters followed, including *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994) and *Lilo & Stitch* (2002).

The development of computer animation was another great advancement in the form and resulted in feature films of astounding visual sumptuousness. In 1995, *Toy Story* was the first film to use only computer-generated imagery (CGI). In 2001 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences added a new Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film. The first recipient of the award was *Shrek* (2001). Other major animated features were *Toy Story* (1995) and *Toy Story 2* (1999), *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) and *Finding Nemo* (2003).

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