

Exploring sound in films

Lesson 10 Lesson Plans

Class level

First class upwards

Learning objectives

The child will be enabled to:

- recognise that there are different elements in a film soundtrack: music, sound effects, and voice (as well as silence)
- explore how these elements contribute to the setting and mood in films
- understand that it is the job of the sound mixer to put all these sounds together in a film

Methodologies

Individual work and group work

Resources

Television, VCR, DVD player

Time

One class session

Curriculum links

English: Emotional and imaginative development through language – Writing: *Responding to music through creative writing*

Visual arts: Drawing, paint and colour – Making drawings and paintings in response to music

Geography: Human environments – People and places in other areas: *Subtitled films, traditional music of other countries*

PE: Dance – Exploration, creation and performance of dance: *Movement to music*

Suggested films

Jaws, The Haunted Mansion, Fantasia, A Bug's Life, Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, Bend It Like Beckham, Billy Elliot (as appropriate to class level)

Film portfolio

Creative writing exercises, artwork



Introduction

Discuss:

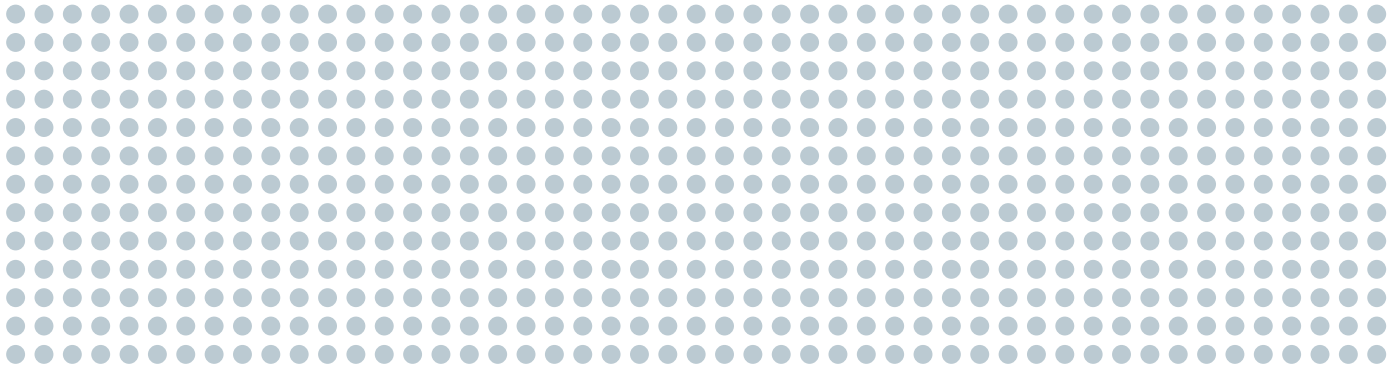
- What do you think sound is?
- What sounds can you hear on films? What are they?
- Why do you think films have sound effects?

The teacher gives the children a definition of “soundtrack.”

Soundtrack

A film soundtrack can comprise voice, music, sound effects, and silence.





Play a scene from a film of your choice. Ask the children to listen carefully for all the different sounds they can hear.

- Describe the sounds you hear. In what way does the music add to this film?
- Can you tell how the characters are feeling by listening carefully to how they are speaking?
- Name the other sounds you hear – for example, a door opening, water gushing, teeth chattering, etc.
- What do you think of the music that was composed for this film? Does it create the right mood for the audience?





Development

- List different types of films (see film activity sheet in Lesson 2, “Elements of a film”): westerns, horror, comedies, adventure, etc. What kind of music or sound effects would you expect to hear in these films?

Discuss:

Sound in films

The sound in films – the soundtrack – is made up of different elements of sound: music, voices (dialogue), sound effects, and silence.

Music

Discuss music at the beginning, middle and end of films.

- Music in a film can enhance emotions: for example, in *ET*, when ET is leaving, the music is very sad.
- Music often suggests a particular type of film: for example, the music in a horror film is easy to identify.
- Music at the beginning of the film sets the theme, and music during the closing titles reinforces the mood of the film’s conclusion.

Fantasia (Disney)

Animators came together and listened to hundreds of pieces of classical music. They selected eight pieces that created wonderful pictures in their minds. They created animation sequences to accompany this music. The eight pieces of animation can be seen in *Fantasia 2000*.

Voices

How do the voices add to your impression of the speaker in the film?

- The sound, pitch (high or low) and tone of voices will affect the way you imagine the character.
- You create an image of what the character looks like: old or young, happy or sad, excited or frightened.
- Practise putting on different voices – of a young person, an elderly man, a frightened girl, a baby.

Sound effects (e.g. door closing, footsteps, screams, laughter)

- Many sound effects are available from sound libraries, but others – like a door slamming, or a body falling to the floor – are made by a person called a Foley artist. Foley artists are named after Jack Foley, who invented many tricks for sound effects: for example, the sound of crackling fires was recorded by crinkling cellophane; a knife going into a body was created with a knife going into a head of cabbage.

Types of sound effects

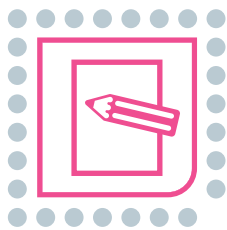
- Sound effects can be either *on-screen* or *off-screen*.
- On-screen* sound effects are those when we see the event, for example, the footsteps of an actor walking down the street.
- Off-screen* sound effects are the sounds of activities that the audience may never see, for example, the sound of a car arriving outside the door while we are looking at the actor eating his dinner, a passing siren, birds or crickets, etc.



Activity

Show the children another scene from a film, but this time cover the television screen. Ask the children to imagine what is happening from listening to the sounds only. After the listening activity in groups, the children discuss what they think was happening. They give feedback, and watch the sequence afterwards.

Alternatively, the children can watch a sequence of a film with no sound. In groups, they make a list of the sound effects they would need if they were the sound mixer on this film.



Further extension work

Music: Sound effects

1. Watch a scene from a film, and write down the different sound effects you hear, stating whether they are on-screen or off-screen.
 - Would you change any of the sounds if you were the sound mixer on this film?
2. Watch a scene from a film. Choose a scene without dialogue. Concentrate on sound effects and music only. The children write down all the sounds they hear, and note when they are heard.
 - Discuss how they will create the sound effects themselves from classroom materials.
 - Each group will produce sound effects for a selected scene. Watch the scene again with the volume turned down, and the groups create sound effects when necessary.
 - Change around the sound effects for each group.
3. Read a descriptive passage to the class. The children jot down the sounds described in the passage, then create the sound effects in the same way. Re-read the story with sound effects.

Creative writing / Visual arts / PE: Responding to music (junior infants to second class)

Listen to music – classical, pop, jazz, theme songs.

The children respond to the music by creative writing, drawing or working in paint and colour to express what they imagine is happening. This activity can be expressed through dance also. The children can make their own instruments, for example, percussion instruments, and use these for sound effects.