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FILM GENRE

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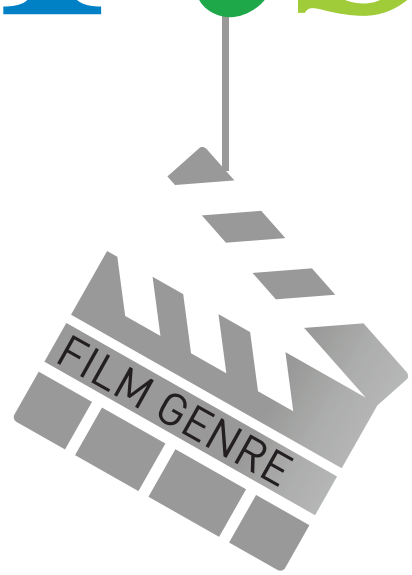

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Film Genre

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Genre: **INTRODUCTION**

The study of genre underpins the entire GCSE Moving Image Arts Course.
Students will be expected to recognise specific film genre conventions from the specification's set list of six core genres, and also to use them in their own creative practice.

The current list of set core genres is:

- Horror;
- Western;
- Action/Adventure;
- Romantic Comedy;
- Science Fiction;
- Crime.

CCEA will review the list of set genres every two years.

Students should be able to recognise and identify the following characteristic elements within each of the set genres:

Element	Description
Iconography	Genre films can be identified by key iconic images.
Setting	Some genres have a distinct location or time period associated with them.
Narrative	Genre films employ specific story structures and narrative devices.
Characters	Some characters are associated with particular genres and can attain the status of generic types.
Style	Genre films can be identified by specific visual and audio techniques.
Theme	Genre films often have characteristic themes.

This booklet contains fact sheets on each of the six set genres and provides some examples of genre specific conventions and characteristics.

Some recommended films for each genre are also listed.

Genre and the Audience

Students should be able to recognise the role of audience and how it informs the storytelling styles and conventions followed by the set genres. It should be clear to students what type of audiences certain genres are primarily aimed at. Students should also understand the intended or expected effect of genre conventions. So, for example, a horror film should serve to scare the audience and generate suspense. A comedy film, on the other hand, has a different set of intentions and conventions and audiences watching that genre will be expecting to laugh rather than to feel terror.

A comedy film which fails to generate laughter or a horror film which lacks sustained scares can both be said to have failed and the respective audiences for those genres are likely to reject such works. This awareness of audience and genre should also be reflected in the students' production work and in the accompanying written work. Understanding audience response is key to analysis and evaluation.

Students should also be aware that audiences play a central role in creating genres. Genre is essentially a dialogue between the filmmaker and the audience based on shared expectations and understanding of conventions.

Genre Hybrid

Students are expected to recognise a 'genre hybrid', that is any film which combines the elements and conventions of more than one genre. So, for example, Once Upon A Time In The West (1968) is a Western and adheres solely to the rules, conventions and themes of that genre. Cowboys & Aliens (2011), on the other hand, is a genre hybrid because it deliberately merges elements of the science fiction genre with those from the Western.

To qualify as a genre hybrid, the elements have to be evenly matched. So, although the zombie-themed horror film Land of the Dead (2005) also contains some fast-paced action sequences, its primary focus is on generating horror and suspense. Warm Bodies (2013), by evenly matching romantic comedy character types and conventions with the tropes and genre conventions of zombie apocalypse horror movies, is a genuine genre hybrid.

Definition: Horror films explore the theme of mortality in an extremely direct manner and strive to elicit feelings of fear, horror and terror from viewers. Their plots typically involve themes of violent death, supernatural occurrences, horrifying biological or physical changes and mental illness. Many horror movies pit characters against mysterious, supernatural forces but some, particularly within the slasher sub-genre, feature strongly defined and readily identifiable bogeymen.

Iconography

The following elements of iconography are common to the horror genre:

- supernatural entities such as ghosts and demons;
- monsters such as werewolves, vampires and zombies;
- masked killers;
- gothic settings, such as old castles;
- graveyards;
- sinister and isolated rural locations, such as farmhouses and abandoned manor houses;
- screaming victims;
- weapons such as knives, axes etc.

Setting

Horror films can unfold in any number of settings but the following are the most common:

- an exaggerated Gothic past, usually the 18th or 19th centuries;
- seemingly sleepy American small-towns or suburbs which hide dark secrets;
- places where young adults may congregate, e.g. high schools, and social events; such as high school proms and summer camps;
- isolated rural locations.

Narrative

A number of narrative concepts and tropes recur throughout the genre:

- In Gothic Horror movies film-makers draw upon the traditions of Gothic Horror literature. The settings are anchored in the Europe of the 19th and 18th Centuries and the stories are frequently adapted from or inspired by novels such as Dracula and Frankenstein.
- In slasher films, a disparate group of characters, usually young adults, are stalked and killed, one by one, by an unstoppable and sometimes literally supernatural killer.
- In zombie films, the dead return to life as shambling monsters with a hunger for human flesh and the surviving human characters must battle to survive this threat. Civilisation, as we know it, may collapse.
- In ghost stories, such as Poltergeist (1982) or The Haunting (1963), characters are menaced or threatened by supernatural forces.
- In 'body horror', disease or biological change drives the narrative. Examples of this include films such as Cabin Fever (2002) or The Bay (2013).
- In 'revenge of nature' horror films, such as The Birds (1963), nature itself seems to rebel against humanity with hitherto benign or non-threatening creatures attacking people.

Style

Because they aim to generate suspense and unease, horror films often use extremely expressionistic film language techniques. Low key lighting is used to dramatic effect to create stark shadows. Certain camera techniques are particularly dominant in this genre. Smooth gliding tracking shots may be used to suggest the unseen movement of malign forces. POV shots might also be used to suggest unseen monsters or to give us an unsettling 'killer's eyes' view. These are frequently handheld.

Music and diegetic sound effects are used to unnerve the audience. Musical scores may use musical motifs to reinforce the sense of terror, e.g. the shrieking violins in Psycho (1960). Other horror films, such as The Shining (1980), use atonal music to generate a sense of profound unease. Sudden unexpected sounds might erupt on the soundtrack to generate tension. Diegetic sounds such as screams may be amplified to further generate terror.

In terms of mise-en-scene, locations will be used to generate terror. Sometimes, in the case of a graveyard or morgue, the location will, in itself, offer an obvious source of terror. In other cases, a seemingly normal or benign location or setting will be made to seem frightening by being present in a new context. In The Shining (1980), for example, an exclusive ski hotel is presented in an eerie context.

Characters

Character types may include:

- mad scientists, such as those seen in films like Bride of Frankenstein (1935);
- maniacal killers;
- misunderstood monsters such as the central creature in King Kong (1935), who may be, on some level, sympathetic;
- doomed victims;
- heroic survivors who are ultimately left alone to battle the film's main threat;
- mediums, religious figures or mentors, who are able to offer the main character advice on battling the threat;
- disbelieving authority figures.

Themes

The following thematic questions recur throughout the genre.

- Is everyday reality hiding some sinister supernatural threat?
- Can we play God without paying some ghastly consequence?
- Is there a life beyond that which we can see?
- How would society respond if faced with a sudden upheaval of nature's laws?

Recommended Texts

All texts selected are certificate 15 or less but centres are encouraged to pre-screen texts for any content which may prove problematic in a classroom context. Where a text serves to illustrate more than one horror trope or sub-genre, it has been listed under both.

Supernatural visitations:
Poltergeist (1982)
The Haunting (1963)
The Blair Witch Project (1999)
Dead of Night (1946)
The Innkeeepers (2013)

Body Horror:
The Bay (2012)
Cabin Fever (2002)

Gothic Horror:
Bride of Frankenstein (1935)
Dracula (1958)
Masque of the Red Death (1964)

Revenge of nature:
The Birds (1963)

Slasher films:
Sorority Row (2009)
The Hole (2009)

Zombie films:
Land of the Dead (2005)
Warm Bodies (2012)

Genre Fact Sheet: **THE WESTERN**

Definition: Westerns are, in general, set in the United States in the mid to late 19th Century and concern themselves with the theme of settling the American States West of the Mississippi. The general theme is usually one of civilization versus lawlessness with determined settlers and their elected lawmen trying to protect their new territory from outlaws. Given the colonial nature of America's expansion westward many Westerns also focus on or address the conflicts between European settlers and their ancestors and the original Native American inhabitants of the continent.

Iconography

The following elements of iconography figure prominently within this genre:

- vehicles, such as covered wagons and steam locomotives;
- horses and horse-riding;
- Native American tribes, usually represented as noble warriors;
- vast expansive desert locations, usually visually stunning;
- flora found in the American South West such as cacti and tumbleweeds;
- small towns of quickly assembled wooden buildings;
- characters invariably wearing wide-brimmed Stetson style hats, side-holsters, cowboy boots and spurs;
- cattle and wild buffalo;
- 19th Century technology, such as telegraph machines and telegraph posts, cannons and Gatling guns.

Setting

Westerns usually unfold in the American West in the decades immediately after the American Civil War. There is some leeway however in terms of location and temporal setting.

- Cavalry Westerns, such as Fort Apache (1948), may focus on a military base in the West rather than a small town.
- Journey or quest-oriented Westerns such as Stagecoach (1939), The Searchers (1955) or The Lone Ranger (2013), might take place across a wider expanse.
- Some Westerns might be unmoored completely from the 19th Century as a time period. The Shootist (1976), for example, is set in 1901 and uses this later time period and its 'man out of time' central character to explore the death of the Wild West. Sergio Leone's A Fistful of Dynamite (1972) is unmistakably a Western but unfolds in 1913 against the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution. Kim Ji-Woon's South Korean film The Good, The Bad & The Weird (2009), though set in Asia in the 1930's, contains all the action tropes and character types one would expect from a Hollywood Western.

Narrative

A number of narrative concepts and tropes recur throughout the genre:

- In Westerns focused on lawmen, a heroic sheriff or similar will help rid a small town or community of lawlessness.
- In Outlaw Westerns, the narrative may follow a character who acts in opposition to law and order.
- In cavalry or military themed Westerns, the narrative explores the conflict between Native

Americans and later settlers. Earlier Westerns frequently demonised the Native Americans but latter Westerns, especially those made after 1970 e.g. Little Big Man (1970) and Dances with Wolves (1990) take a more enlightened and sympathetic view of Native tribes.
- Some narratives focus on the act of settling the West itself and may follow settlers as they journey from the Eastern United states to the West.
- In quest-based Westerns, such as The Searchers (1955), the narrative may focus on a wider journey or quest.
- In Ranch Westerns such as The Big Country (1958), the action may revolve around a single rancher or farmer and their efforts to maintain their land and livelihood.

Style

Because they usually explore life or death conflicts against an expansive backdrop, Westerns have always used film language to emphasise both setting and theme. In John Ford westerns such as Stagecoach (1939) and The Searchers (1955), location filming in places of vast scenic beauty such as Monument Valley is used to convey the majesty and vastness of the West. The genre itself has also been used to showcase technical innovations. Edwin S Porter's early silent Western The Great Train Robbery (1903) stunned audiences with its use of cross-cutting and with a chilling final image, a close-up of an outlaw firing his gun directly at the audience. With the advent of widescreen film formats, such as Vista-Vision and Cinemascope, film-makers used these wider frame sizes to convey more of the West's spectacular landscapes.

In order to emphasise tension, directors of Westerns often convey showdowns by using close-ups of the actors and editing tempos which take us from hero to villain and back again at increasing speed, until guns are finally drawn. This particular technique was taken to extremes by Italian director Sergio Leone and variations on his stylistic approach are now common.

Music also plays an especially important role in the genre. In The Magnificent Seven (1960), Elmer Bernstein's rousing score generates a sense of mythic exaggeration and excitement. In Sergio Leone's Westerns, Ennio Morricione's music generates a sense of operatic extremes. Indeed sometimes it proves so crucial to the action in Leone's films that elements of the music itself are given a diegetic source within the story, e.g. the mysterious harmonica-playing gunslinger in Once Upon a Time In The West (1968).

Characters

Character types in this genre may include:

- outlaws and gunslingers;
- sheriffs and lawmen bound by duty and personal codes of honour;
- saloon girls;
- newspaper men, eager to mythologise or condemn our heroes;
- bankers, railroad owners or other captains of industry;
- Native American warriors;
- cavalry soldiers;
- settlers from the East;
- farmers and ranchers.

Themes

The following thematic questions recur throughout the genre:

- Is violence and loss of human life an acceptable price to pay for law and order?
- Can men of violence ever hope to be part of wider civilisation?
- Should the land be protected from exploitation?
- Can settlers ever hope to build a civilisation which functions better than the one they've left behind?
- What is the price of progress?
- Is it right for displaced and threatened people to use violence to protect themselves?

Recommended Texts

All texts selected are certificate 15 or less but centres are encouraged to pre-screen texts for any content which may prove problematic in a classroom context. Where a text serves to illustrate more than one category or sub-genre, it has been listed under both.

Outlaws:
Stagecoach (1939)
The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford (2007)

Lawmen:
My Darling Clementine (1946)
Tombstone (1994)
High Noon (1952)

Native Americans:
Dances with Wolves (1990)
Little Big Man (1970)
Geronimo: An American Legend (1993)
The Lone Ranger (2013)

Journeys & Quests:
The Searchers (1955)
The Lone Ranger (2013)
Meek's Cut-Off (2010)

Gunslingers:
Unforgiven (1992)
The Quick & The Dead (1995)
Shane (1953)
Once Upon a Time in the West (1968)
The Shootist (1976)

Taming of the West:
The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962)
Once Upon a Time in The West (1968)

Displaced Westerns:
The Good, The Bad & The Weird (2009)
A Fistful of Dynamite (1972)

Cavalry Westerns:
Geronimo: An American Legend (1993)
Fort Apache (19480

Definition: Every story requires action of some kind, be it dramatic psychological change or actual physical action. In action and adventure movies, however, physical-derring-do and exciting brushes with danger are the primary narrative focus.

The genre has its roots in the earliest forms of American cinema. Both Westerns and the stunt-driven comedy spectacles of silent-era performers like Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd have influenced and continue to influence the genre.

The expansion of the martial arts film has influenced the entire genre with even mainstream Hollywood action films often borrowing ideas from Hong Kong film-makers such as performer/director, Jackie Chan.

In modern cinema, the genre has many guises and is often crossed with other genres to produce sci-fi/action films such Independence Day (1995), horror-action films like Underworld (2003) and action-comedies like Hot Fuzz (2007). In its purest form, however, the genre is anchored in an exaggerated version of present day reality in which the hero or heroes must face genuine physical peril.

Other genres may offer a more nuanced portrayal of evil, with antagonists having recognisably human qualities. In the action genre, evil is seldom tempered with humanising qualities. Bad guys are always identifiable as such.

Iconography

The following elements of iconography are common to the genre:

- exciting chases, often involving high-speed vehicles;
- shoot-outs or scenes of combat;
- physical combat, ranging from fisticuffs to complex martial arts fighting styles;
- lone heroes facing down multiple enemies;
- arch-villains and their henchmen;
- explosions;
- weaponry, with heavy emphasis on firearms;
- fast cars and exotic vehicles, such as helicopters.

Setting

Action/Adventure films can unfold in any number of settings, but the following are the most common:

- contemporary American cities, such as Los Angeles;
- exotic foreign locales, e.g. the various foreign cities and nations which serve as backdrops in films such as Skyfall (2012) and The Bourne Identity (2002);
- self-contained worlds, such as the skyscraper in which Die Hard (1988) unfolds, or the besieged police station of Assault on Precinct 13 (1977);
- worlds in dire need of heroism, such as the feudal Japan of Seven Samurai (1954).

Narrative

A number of narrative concepts and tropes recur throughout the genre:

- tough cop heroes who must bend or ignore the rules in order to stop some dangerous criminal threat;
- quests for objects with both protagonist and antagonists locked in competition, e.g. Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981);
- ordinary people forced to assume the mantle of heroism by dangerous new circumstances;
- espionage-themed or conspiracy-driven narratives, where the main character is pursued by governmental agencies, e.g. North by North West (1959) and The Bourne Identity (2002);
- circumstances forcing a reluctant warrior or group of warriors to protect a threatened community, e.g. Shane (1953) or Seven Samurai (1954)

Style

Because they aim to generate suspense and excitement, action films often use extremely expressionistic film language techniques. Sound effects will be exaggerated. Certain camera techniques are particularly dominant in this genre. Music may be anthemic, with readily recognisable motifs being used for both heroic characters and their enemies.

Wide aspect ratios might be used to capture as much action in frame as possible. Fast moving cameras may track alongside the action to increase the sense of excitement and speed. Handheld camera work may be used to give action scenes a sense of gritty immediacy. Slow-motion and speed ramping techniques might also be used extend or interfere with the flow of narrative time. Editing is often extremely fast paced, quick cuts being used to generate a mounting sense of excitement.

In terms of mise-en-scene, locations will be used to generate excitement. Car chases will, if possible, unfold in the busiest and most cinematic locations. Fight sequences will happen in the most visually appealing locations. Props will also be used with a view to generating maximum excitement and effect. Weapons and vehicles will be impressive and possibly outlandish.

Costumes will also be used to reinforce meaning. Heroes may not literally wear white hats but costumes will reinforce their status as heroic figures, e.g. James Bond's penchant for sharp suits or Indiana Jones' battered leather jacket and hat look.

Characters

Character types may include:

- tough cops;
- scheming criminal masterminds;
- fearsome henchmen;
- interfering bureaucrats who impede the hero's progress;
- heroic adventurers;
- reluctant warriors;
- sympathetic outlaws.

Themes

The following thematic questions recur throughout the genre.

- Can one man or woman working alone defeat the force of evil?
- What is the nature of heroism?
- Can violence only be repelled with more violence?
- How far should one go to survive?
- Can heroes driven to violence ever really be part of the communities they protect?

Recommended Texts

All texts selected are certificate 15 or less but centres are encouraged to pre-screen texts for any content which may prove problematic in a classroom context. Where a text serves to illustrate more than one horror trope or sub-genre, it has been listed under both.

Action Comedies:
Hot Fuzz (2007)
Shaolin Soccer (2001)
The Blues Brothers (1980)

Cop movies:
Hot Fuzz (2007)
Police Story (1985)
Assault on Precinct 13 (1977)
Speed (1994)

Quests:
Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)
The Good, The Bad and the Weird (2008)

Espionage Action:
The Bourne Identity (2002)
North by Northwest (1959)
True Lies (1994)

Reluctant warriors:
Seven Samurai (1954)
Shane (1953)

Vehicular carnage:
The General (1926)
Speed (1994)
The Blues Brothers (1980)

Sci-fi Action:
The Matrix (1999)

Genre Fact Sheet: **ROMANTIC COMEDY**

Definition: Romantic comedies or 'Rom-Coms', as they are more commonly known, tell light-hearted and humorous dramatic stories centered around the themes of romantic attraction and the difficulties of finding 'true love.'

Iconography

The following elements of iconography figure prominently within this genre:

- aspirational clothing;
- make-overs;
- romantic gifts and objects such as diaries, flowers, rings;
- idealised versions of real world cities;
- glamorous public spaces - leafy parks, upscale bars and restaurants;
- rain as a symbol;
- weddings and relationship related events, e.g. romantic meals, dances;
- public demonstrations of affection - such as a romantic clinch against a glamorous backdrop;
- public attempts at courtship or reconciliation, e.g. the hero's boom-box assisted plea to his estranged girlfriend in Say Anything (1989).

Setting

Romantic comedies usually unfold in aspirational and glamorous settings. These might include:

- exciting international cities, such as London, Paris or New York; where narrative action will be anchored around the most romantic and glamorous aspects of those cities (such as upscale restaurants / theatres) and urban slums will generally be ignored;
- spacious apartments with designer furniture, where characters may be seen in rooms visitors might not usually be invited into, such as bedrooms and bathrooms;
- small towns, generally in plots where the heroine must learn to re-embrace their roots in order to find true love, e.g. Sweet Home Alabama (2002);
- aspirational foreign locations, in which the heroine is a fish out of water, e.g. the rustic Italian small town, which the protagonist of Under The Tuscan Sun (2003) moves to;
- exciting aspirational workplaces, where the heroes and/or heroines of rom-coms will, more than likely, work in a glamorous profession such as magazine editing, e.g. Confessions of a Shopaholic (2007), or modelling/acting e.g. How to Marry a Millionaire (1953);
- high schools, particularly in more teen oriented rom-coms, such as 10 Things I Hate About You (1999);
- nostalgic versions of the past, such as Populaire (2012), for example, which takes places in a stylised version of 1950's France.

Narrative

A number of narrative concepts and tropes recur throughout the genre:

- Rom-coms are a sub-genre of comedy films but also draw upon other forms of romantic fiction. The influence of classic romantic novels such as Pride & Prejudice is often evident.

- The basic rom-com plot template has two people meet, form some connection indicative of deeper feelings and then part due to some contrivance or misunderstanding. Initially, the couple will resist the pull of their mutual attraction - social pressures, fear of rejection or some pre-existing but less than ideal relationship will deter them from surrendering to their feelings. But whilst our characters may be uncertain about the possibility of true love, the screenwriters and directors responsible for such films always ensure that the audience is aware of how right these could-be lovers are for each other.
- After this initial separation one or both of the characters will have a realisation: they will then actively pursue the object of their affections. After some degree of friction, awkwardness or farcical mayhem, the two will finally declare their mutual love for each other and the film will end on a happy note suggesting that an idyllic life-long bond has been formed.
- There are many variations on this basic plotline. In more serious rom-coms such as Woody Allen's Annie Hall (1977) or Marc Webb's 500 Days of Summer (2009), the film's narrative might revolve around the impossibility of a perfect romantic love. In some variations on the rom-com template such as Once (2006), the narrative concludes with platonic rather than romantic love.
- The rom-com's most used narrative device is the trope critics refer to as the 'meet cute'. In 'meet cute' scenarios, the way in which the couple meet is driven by social awkwardness, comic misunderstandings or whimsical happenstance. This method of meeting will usually serve to highlight just how different the two characters are but also serves to explain the otherwise improbable notion of two people with such divergent viewpoints or social statuses meeting. Examples of this trope include It Happened One Night (1934), in which a world-weary heiress and a struggling reporter find themselves arguing over the last available seat on a bus, or When Harry Met Sally (1989) where the titular couple-to-be meet for the first time and clash over values during a long car journey.

Style

As the Rom-Com generally intends to delight, amuse and charm audiences, the genre relies upon film language techniques calculated to buoy our mood. Exterior scenes may be shot in pleasant surroundings with warm natural light being used to suggest a feeling of romantic excitement. Alternatively, scenes may use dim lighting and rich colours to suggest a romantic, intimate mood. Rain will often be used as a feature of mise-en-scene, sometimes to suggest despondency but also, as in the conclusion of Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994), to represent the renewing and restorative properties of romance.

Popular songs and ballads will be used to convey both the sudden rush of romantic attraction and the heartache of separation. Montage techniques may be used for a variety of purposes. In wistful rom-coms, such as Annie Hall (1977) and 500 Days of Summer (2009), montage techniques are used to show us the hero's bitter-sweet recollections of a love affair that has ended. Sometimes montage sequences are used to convey sudden, positive change, such as the shopping montage which signals the heroine's suddenly elevated social status in Pretty Woman (1990).

Characters

Character types in this genre may include:

- driven career women who have abandoned the notion of romantic love;
- desperate single people of either gender;

- bachelors who are resistant to change;
- supportive best friend characters with comically exaggerated flaws or character traits;
- characters wounded by past relationships;
- rival suitors;
- unreasonable bosses or other authority figures;
- obstructive parents or family members;
- obstructive ex-partners.

Themes

The following themes recur throughout the genre:

- pre-destined love overcoming all obstacles;
- romantic union making both participants better, more complete people;
- the joys of love, even failed love, being ultimately worth the heart-ache and turmoil.

Recommended Texts

All texts selected are certificate 15 or less but centres are encouraged to pre-screen texts for any content which may prove problematic in a classroom context.

It Happened One Night (1934)
The Lady Eve (1941)
Populaire (2012)
Annie Hall (1977)
500 Days of Summer (2009)
The Shop Around the Corner (1940)
Sleepless in Seattle (1993)
Say Anything (1989)
When Harry met Sally (1989)
It Happened One Night (1934)
Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994)

Definition: Science Fiction generally deals with themes relating to issues raised by technology, scientific progress and humankind's place in the Universe. Given the broad scope of these themes there are therefore many differing sub-genres within the science fiction bracket. Time-travel films, such as Back to the Future (1985) and Looper (2012), can be classed as science fiction. So too can alien invasion movies, such as War of the Worlds (2005) and Independence Day (1996). The genre also includes tales of dystopian or sometimes post-apocalyptic futures, such as those seen in Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome (1985) or The Hunger Games (2012).

In general, in order to qualify as a science fiction film, the title in question must use futuristic settings, include references to futuristic technology and explore themes such as time travel, space exploration, alien life, and artificial intelligence. However implausible the action in a science fiction film may appear, it should still be largely based on some scientifically credible notions.

So Star Wars: A New Hope (1977), with its emphasis on exotic aliens and exciting space adventure qualifies as science fiction. The Hobbit: Desolation of Smaug (2013), on the other hand, though it offers a similarly fantastical adventure, lacks any reference to science or science-related themes and is classed as a fantasy film rather than a science fiction movie.

Iconography

The following elements of iconography are common to the genre:

- spaceships;
- artificially intelligent robots and computers;
- time-machines;
- futuristic cityscapes;
- futuristic weapons, such as laser guns;
- futuristic technology, such as teleportation devices or flying cars;
- ravaged, post-apocalyptic landscapes and worlds;
- extra-terrestrial creatures;
- parallel universes.

Setting

Science Fiction films can unfold in any number of settings but the following are the most common:

- points in the far future, where travel between the stars is possible and humanity has spread far beyond the confines of Earth;
- dystopian futures where, though the technologies of modern life still exist, the world has become a grimmer place, either through war and environmental collapse or through shifts towards totalitarianism;
- post-apocalyptic futures where an Earth-shattering event, such as nuclear war or climate change, has destroyed the world as we know it;
- near future worlds, not too far removed from our own, but altered by the advent of some new technology.

Narrative

A number of narrative concepts and tropes recur throughout the genre:

- In alien invasion films, extra-terrestrial forces attack Earth and are, at great cost, ultimately repelled.
- In post-apocalyptic films, survivors battle to survive their dangerous worlds.
- In time-travel stories the narrative usually revolves around the characters' efforts to alter the past or the future in order to save the world from some calamity.
- In dystopian science fiction films, the narrative often involves efforts to overthrow or overturn the institutional cause of that world's problems.
- In alien encounter stories, humanity's discovery of life beyond this planet has profound implications for its central characters.
- In films which explore the implications of technological progress, a new invention may have unintended consequences for humanity. The narrative might then explore how our characters cope with or try to undo this development.

Style

Because they generally aim to transport us to exciting new worlds, science fiction films place a heavy emphasis on visual spectacle. Cinematography and mise-en-scene are used to generate stunning vistas and to immerse us in new environments, such as alien worlds or futuristic cities.

There is a corresponding emphasis on visual effects shots.

In exciting space adventure films, such as Star Trek Into Darkness (2013), sweeping orchestral music is used to generate a sense of epic adventure. In other science fiction films, such as Tron Legacy (2010), the music itself uses electronically generated sounds and instrumentation to evoke a futuristic feel.

Characters

Character types may include:

- maverick space adventurers, such as the Star Wars series' character, Han Solo;
- reluctant heroes or heroines, forced by circumstance to fight for humanity's survival;
- tyrannical rulers, be they galactic warlords, such as Darth Vader, or the various despots seen in post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives;
- intelligent but emotionless machines;
- intelligent machines or non-human characters who acquire humanity;
- extra-terrestrial invaders;
- visiting extra-terrestrials, who seek to help humanity to advance to some higher level;
- scientists, whose works have unexpected consequences;
- ordinary people affected by extra-ordinary events.

Themes

The following themes recur throughout the genre.

- How would we respond if our technology rebelled against us?
- Are we alone in the universe?

- Do we have the right to create artificial intelligences and what might be the consequences of doing so?
- How would we survive if our species was faced with an extra-terrestrial threat?
- If time travel were possible, would we have the right to alter past events?

Recommended Texts

All texts selected are certificate 15 or less but centres are encouraged to pre-screen texts for any content which may prove problematic in a classroom context. Where a text serves to illustrate more than one science-fiction trope or sub-genre, it has been listed under both.

Alien encounters:
2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)
Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)
E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982)

Alien invasion:
Independence Day (1996)
War of the Worlds (2005)

Artificial Intelligence:
The Matrix (1999)
Robot and Frank (2012)
2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)
Wall-E (2008)

Dystopian Future:
The Hunger Games (2012)
Children of Men (2006)
Brazil (1985)
Blade Runner (1982)

Space travel/adventure:
Star Wars (1977)
Star Trek (2009)

Time Travel:
Twelve Monkeys (1995)
Back to the Future (1985)
The Terminator (1984)
Looper (2012)

Post-Apocalyptic:
Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome (1985)
Waterworld (1995)
Wall-E (2008)
I Am Legend (2007)

Definition: The Crime genre encompasses a wide range of sub-genres and storytelling traditions. In the main, however, the genre explores the criminal world and our central characters are most likely to be either detectives or cops trying to fight crime, criminals trying to thrive and survive, or ordinary people who have been pulled into this world by unforeseen circumstances.

Iconography

The following elements of iconography figure prominently within this genre:

- dangerous cities; the crime film is usually set in an urban environment and cities can almost function as characters within these films;
- tough private detectives or cops; the latter is usually clad in a trench coats and fedora;
- sharp suited gangsters;
- weapons, such as snub-nosed revolvers and Thompson sub-machine guns.

Setting

Crime dramas usually unfold in dark urban environments:

- Large cities figure prominently in the genre and are usually depicted in a manner which suggests the presence of a dark underworld existing just beneath the surface of civilised life. Hollywood cinema has produced a vast number of crime films but it is a genre which every film-making nation has contributed to. So major international cities, such as London, New York, Paris and Hong Kong, have all figured prominently in the genre.
- Small towns or less urbanised environments might also feature, however, particularly in films involving criminal fugitives, such as Gun Crazy (1949).
- Prisons can also serve as a major location in crime dramas.
- In films focusing on law enforcement, a police station or precinct house might serve as the central location.

Narrative

A number of narrative concepts and tropes recur throughout the genre:

- In detective films, a lone investigator, usually with his own code of personal honour, works to unravel a difficult case, usually encountering danger and exposing dangerous secrets along the way. Examples of this model include The Maltese Falcon (1941) and Chinatown (1974).
- In heist movies, the narrative generally follows a gang of career criminals attempting to pull off a major score. The tone can be light and broadly comedic, as in Ocean's Eleven (2001), or dark and serious, as in Heat (1995).
- In police procedurals, a police detective and/or police department must work to solve a difficult high profile case, e.g. Panic in the Streets (1950).
- In gangster films we follow the rise and, usually, the inevitable fall of a gangster. Examples include films such as The Roaring Twenties (1939) and Little Caesar (1931).
- In prison dramas, the focus might be either on a criminal surviving life behind bars or attempting to escape. Examples included Caged (1950) and The Shawshank Redemption (1995).
- In fugitive themed crime narratives, the main character or characters might be being

pursued by the authorities for their crimes. Examples include Gun Crazy (1949), in which an ill-fated couple's fondness for armed robbery leads to their pursuit and Dark Passage (1947), in which a framed man escapes from prison to try and prove his innocence.

- In hitmen films, the main antagonist or central protagonist might be a professional assassin. In Collateral (2004), the hero is an ordinary taxi-driver forced at gunpoint to ferry an assassin around. In Le Samourai (1967), the hero is a professional hitman who feels trapped by his circumstances.

Style

Because they often explore life or death conflicts, crime films often use stark and dramatic film language techniques. Crime films which fall under the Film Noir bracket, such as The Maltese Falcon (1941) and The Big Combo (1955), make creative use of low key lighting, black & white cinematography and bleak urban locations to create a sense of confinement and moral decay. Musical scores are generally dark and underscore the dangerousness of these worlds.

Lighter more comedic crime movies make their differences clear by rejecting such techniques. So, for example, the French heist movie Rififi (1954) uses stark black & white cinemtaography and a minimalist approach to sound design (its most famous and thrilling scene plays out in near silence). The more comedic heist caper film, The Italian Job (1969), uses high-key lighting, full colour cinematography and a jaunty sixties pop soundtrack.

More recent neo-noir crime films draw upon the expressionistic lighting techniques of film noir but apply them to modern settings. Examples here include Collateral (2004), which uses pin sharp digital cinematography and glowing street lights to give us an eerie vision of Los Angeles at night, The Driver (1978), which uses washed out colours and dark shadows, and the sci-fi/ noir genre hybrid Blade Runner (1982), which borrows lighting techniques and mise-en-scene concepts from classic film noir detective films but uses them to depict a dangerous city of the future.

Characters

Character types in this genre may include:

- career criminals with their own code of honour;
- detectives and lawmen bound by duty and a sense of justice;
- Femme Fatales;
- crime reporters;
- gangsters;
- master thieves;
- fugitives;
- convicts;
- hitmen;
- prison guards;
- crime bosses.

Themes

The following thematic questions recur throughout the genre.

- Is violence and loss of human life an acceptable price to pay for law and order?

- Can men of violence ever really be a part of wider civilisation?
- How far should law enforcement go to protect the innocent?
- What happens to people when circumstances force them into criminal acts?
- Can any criminal ever hope to beat the system?
- Can justice ever truly be served?
- Are our penal and police institutions humane and/or fit for purpose?

Recommended texts

All texts selected are certificate 15 or less but centres are encouraged to pre-screen texts for any content which may prove problematic in a classroom context. Where a text serves to illustrate more than one category or sub-genre, it has been listed under both.

Fugitives:
Gun Crazy (1939)
Dark Passage (1049)

Police procedurals:
Panic in the Streets (1950)
Heat (1995)

Heist movies:
Ocean's Eleven (2001)
Heat (1995)
The Italian Job (1969)
Rififi (1954)

Detective films:
Chinatown (1974)
The Maltese Falcon (1941)

Gangster films:
Miller's Crossing (1990)
The Roaring Twenties (1939)

Neo-noir:
Collateral (2004)
Blade Runner (1982)
The Driver (1978)

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