

SHORT FILM, CHARACTER JOURNEY AND CRITICAL THINKING.

THOUGHTS FOR (SHORT) FILM ANALYSIS

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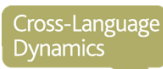
Twitter: @MartaFSuarez Web: <http://martafsuarez.com>



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



FILTA
Film in
Language
Teaching
Association



OWRI



Manchester
Metropolitan
University



FLAME
FILM, LANGUAGE AND MEDIA IN EDUCATION

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FILM NARRATIVES: COMMON STRUCTURE

ARISTOTLE

(and theories that followed)

THE THREE-ACT STRUCTURE & FULL FEATURE FILM

- Beginning, *protasis* or SETUP
Act I, around 30 min, 25%
Characters, setting, conflict
- Middle, *epitasis* or CONFRONTATION
Act II, around 60 min, 50%
Events ↗, climax, events ↘
- End, *catastrophe* or RESOLUTION
Act III, around 30 min, 25%
Resolution / Conclusion / Wrapping up



Joseph Campbell

Throughout the centuries, the hero of **mythical** stories follows the same journey:

DEPARTURE, SEPARATION

World of Common Day
Call to Adventure
Refusal of the Call
Supernatural Aid
Crossing the First Threshold
Belly of the Whale

DESCENT, INITIATION, PENETRATION

Road of Trials

Meeting with the Goddess
Woman as Temptress
Atonement with the Father
Apotheosis
The Ultimate Boon

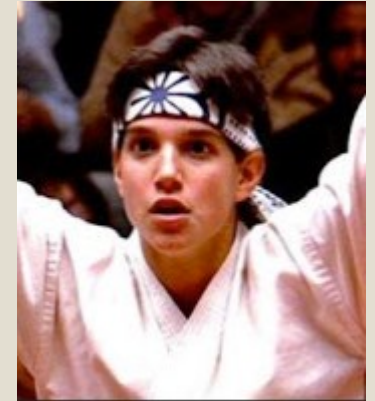
RETURN

Refusal of the Return
The Magic Flight
Rescue from Within
Crossing the Threshold
Return
Master of the Two Worlds
Freedom to Live

Christopher Vogler



... Following Campbell and the 3 Act structure, he renames the journey:



ACT ONE

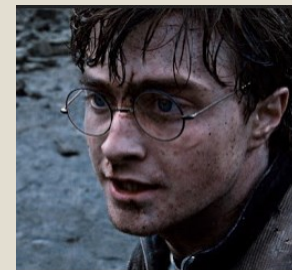
Ordinary World
Call to Adventure
Refusal of the Call
Meeting with the Mentor
Crossing the First Threshold



ACT TWO

Tests, Allies, Enemies
Approach to the Inmost Cave
Ordeal

Reward



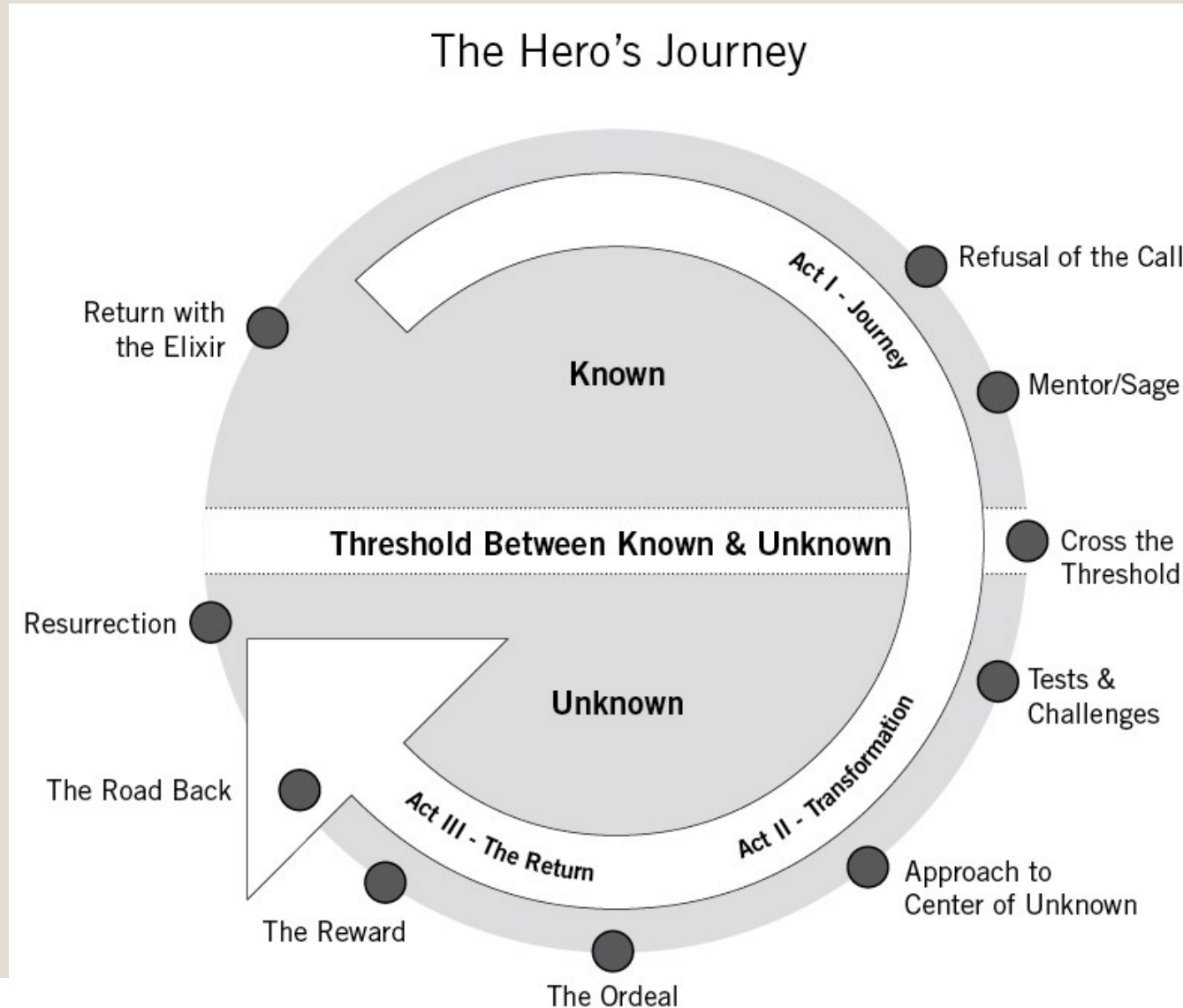
ACT THREE

The Road Back

Resurrection
Return with the Elixir



FILM NARRATIVES: COMMON STRUCTURE



This is by no means the only structure, but one usually described by screenwriting theory as common for the hero's journey (Syd Field, Blake Snyder, Robert McKee...).

Rom-Coms, action films, adventure or character dramas tend to fit within this structure.

THE MAIN CHARACTER

Making a good character:

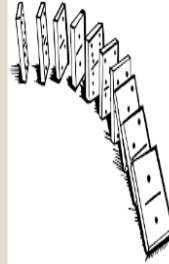
1. strong and defined dramatic need (desire and goal)
2. Individual point of view
3. Personify an attitude (manner, opinion)
4. Go through some kind of change or transformation (arc)

◦ © Syd field, *Foundations of screenwriting*

REVEALING CHARACTER



Choice in dilemma



Reactions



Traits: how do they relate to the story?



What does s/he want? When? Consciously?



CONSIDERATIONS ON GENRE

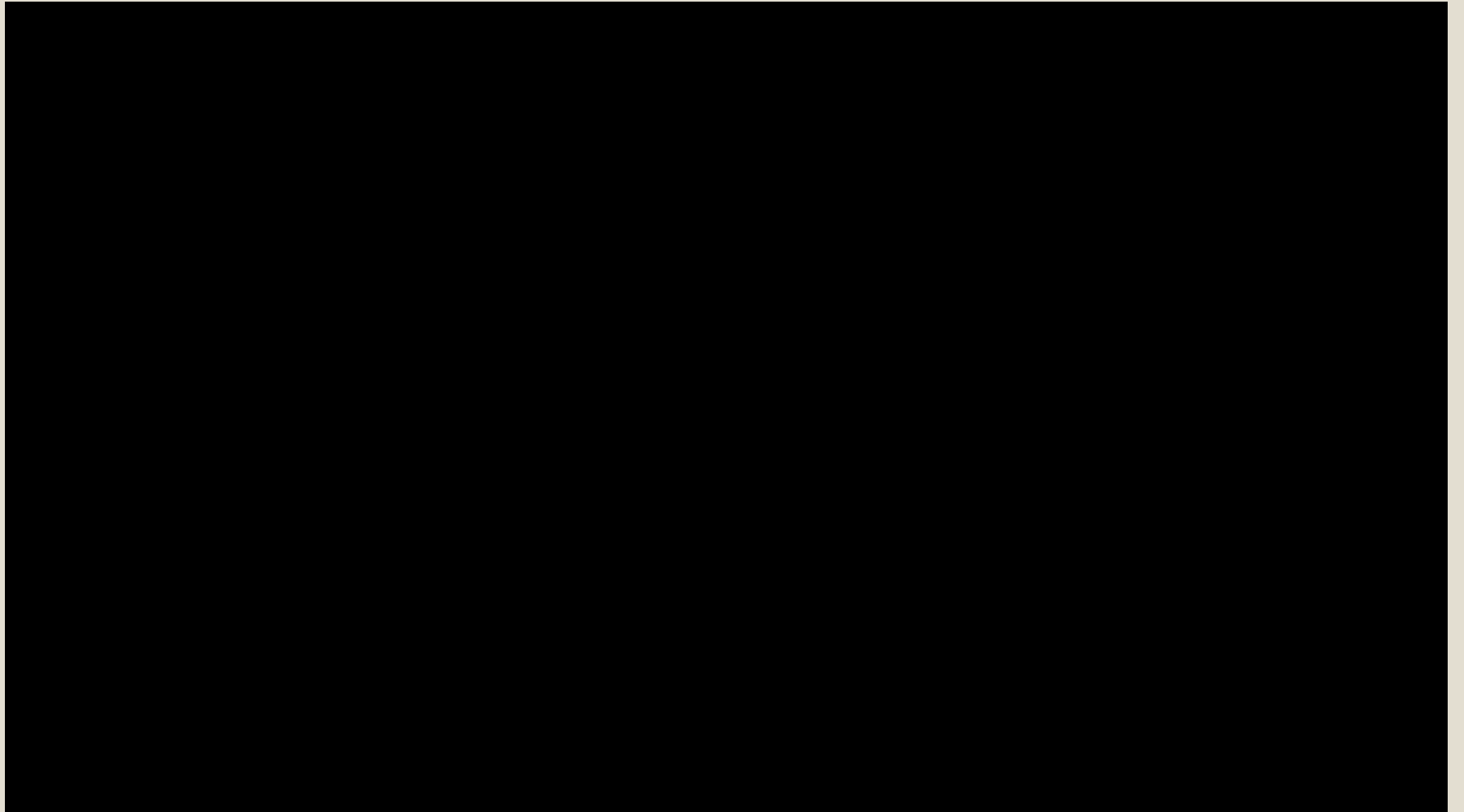
- Short films do not usually allow room for a full character transformation. It can be simple, such as overcoming a fear, making new friends or resolving a basic problem.
- Comedic characters do not usually change unless this transformation relates to a romantic pursuit.
- Short films allow for more experimentation, both in relation to plot and techniques.
- Some short films aim to produce an immediate emotion in the audience, such as laughter, shock or endearment.
- Because of the length, everything needs to be developed quicker, from the story to the character. Everything must acquire meaning.
- Always take in consideration the genre and what it might seek as a result.

OPENING AND CLOSING SCENES

- Relevance
- Mirroring or contrasting
- If it does not introduce the main character, look also for this scene
- Setting the narrative
- Setting the character
- Location, location, location
- Props and distribution
- Characters' position in the frame

ALMA

First establishing
scene: what are
the
expectations?



<https://vimeo.com/129649886>

ANALYSIS

Ordinary world: Street, cold winter, posters on the wall, names on the wall

Call to adventure: seeing the doll and attempting to enter the shop

Refusal: door is closed, moving away

Mentor: (magical help) door opens, inciting entry

First Threshold: crossing the door

Test, allies, enemies: other dolls

Inmost Cave: approaching her doll, touching it

Ordeal: struggle, conscience inside the doll ...

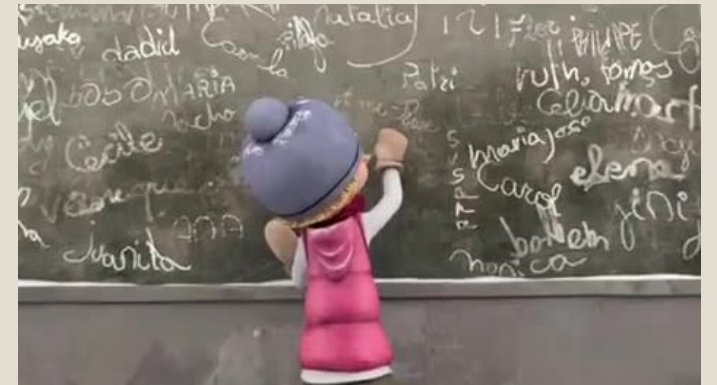
...Disruption! Shop as an antagonist hero

Reward: “shop” gets Alma

Road back: street is at peace, similar appearance

Resurrection: doll is replaced

Elixir: waiting for a new girl, shop has won all the names on the wall



ANALYSIS

Name

Character transformation is literal: Punishment

Fears: how can the audience relate?

What are these fears?

How is the director manipulating the emotions?

What is he using?

Expectations of the film based on the production company



BAO

(still on cinemas –Sept 2018-, wait for actual version)

Ordinary world: lonely middle age – elderly Asian woman

Call to adventure: one dumpling cries when she is going to eat it

Refusal: Spits it out, stares at it

Mentor: -

First Threshold: embraces it and looks after it

Test, allies, enemies: dumpling is growing up and pushes her away by making friends

Inmost Cave: Meeting the fiancé (non-Asian)

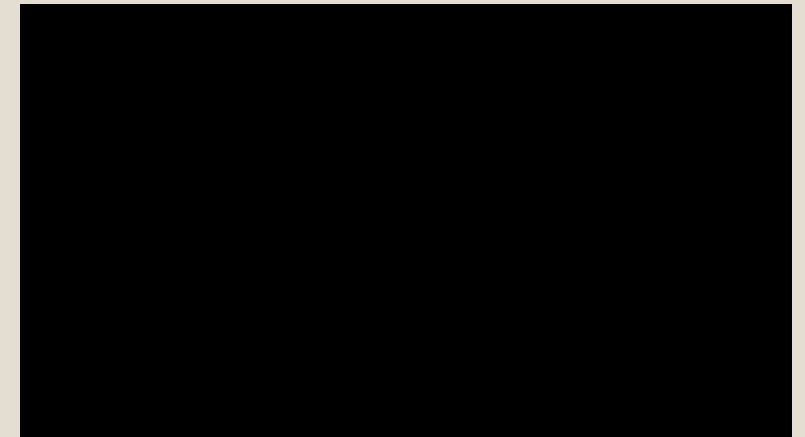
Ordeal: kicking the girlfriend out, keeping him indoors, eating him

Reward: apparent reward, as dumpling is now “part of her”, “back in the womb” (yet she grieves)

Road back: back at the house with the husband, alone once again

Resurrection: “dumpling” is a reflection of her son, who comes to see her and bring her doughnuts

Elixir: making dumplings together, big family, not alone anymore. Fiancé makes perfect dumplings



- Transformation:

Situational: alone > not alone

Internal: accepting her son has grown up, letting go, accepting his fiancé

Intercultural elements: family and food

Fears: how can the audience relate?

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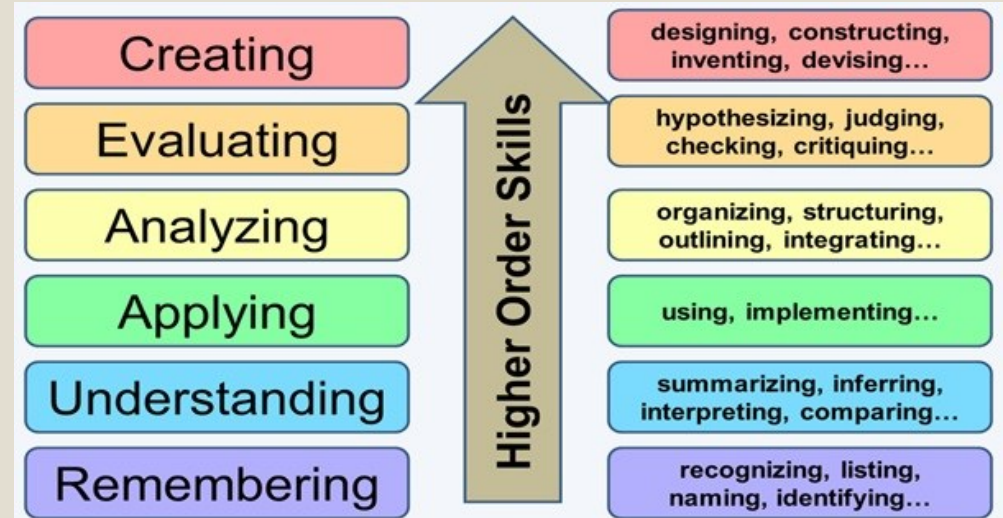
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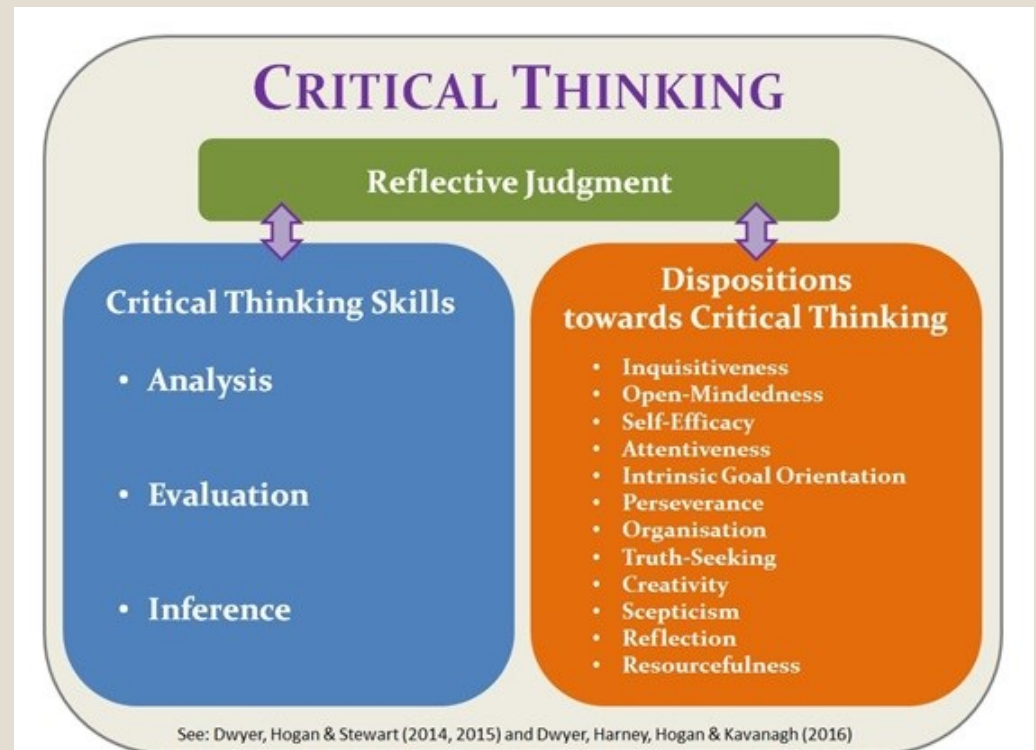


CRITICAL THINKING

- Debate
- Scholarship
- Argument
- Criticism
- Analysis
- Evidence
- Objectivity
- Precision

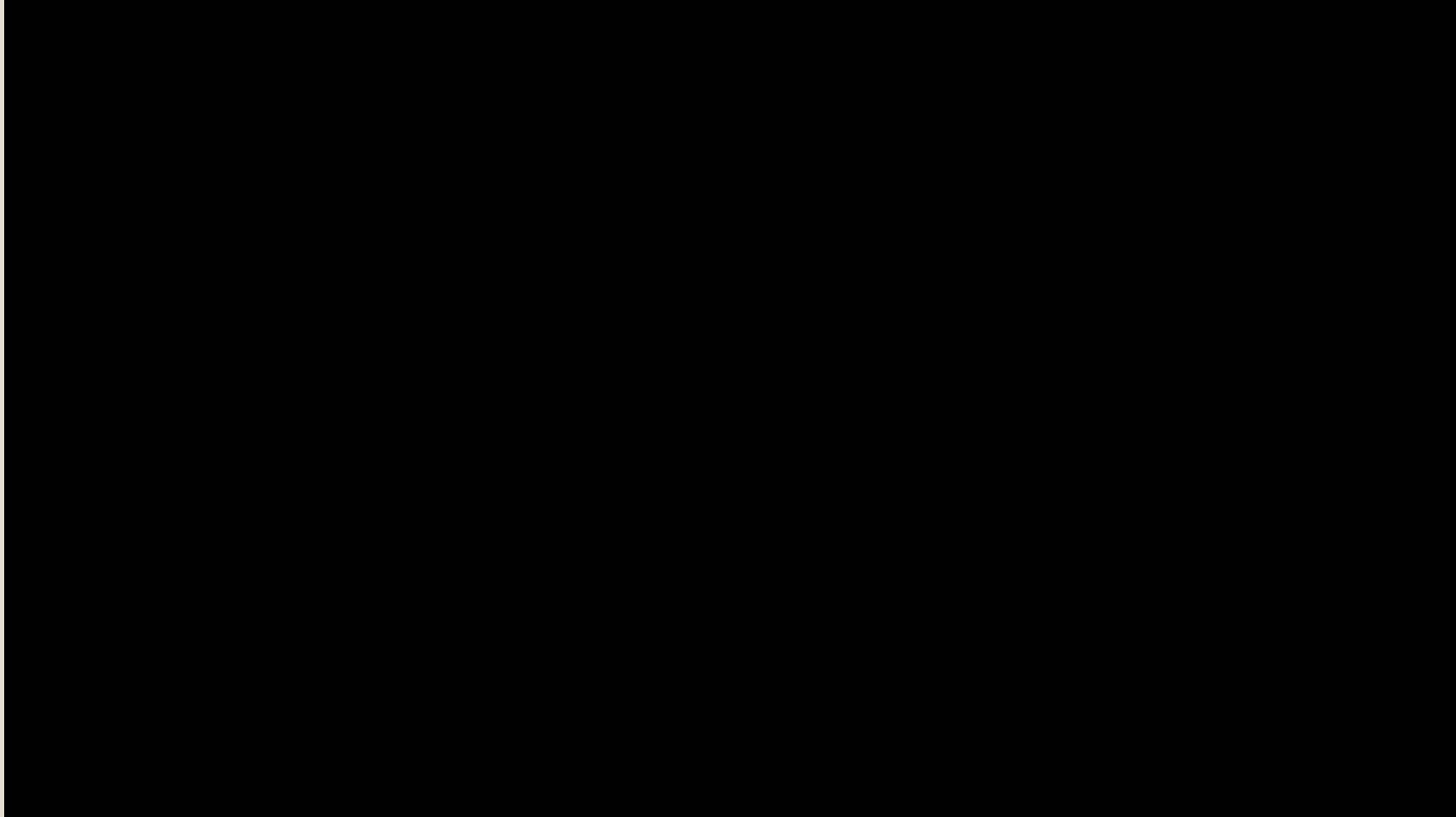


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GROUP DISCUSSION

Momentos <https://vimeo.com/17896628>



Creating resources

- Find material **widely available** / **use videos already sourced** for the language classroom
- If you need the students to do research, make sure there are some **relevant sources available**.
- Find alternative POVs or **themes** that you can suggest as a standpoint for comparison
- Reflect on **cultural relevance** and intercultural communication, both in relation to the video and the students
- Can you link it to **local news** or the students' interests?
- Make them **question** the message... even if at the end they agree with it. A good exercise to reflect on the message is to tell them to imagine that the film has been created as 1) political propaganda, 2) commercial purposes, 3) big corporation advertising, 4) charity association... Ask them to **infer ulterior motives** and messages that the video might convey if understood that way
- Make sure they understand that **criticism** does **not mean giving negative opinions**

USEFUL RESOURCES

- <http://www.filta.org.uk> – Especially the toolkit and the short films study guides
- <http://kidsloveshortfilms.com/> - catalogue of short films (animation)
- <http://kierandonaghy.com/> - excellent resource for ESL, with silent films and language resources
- Lynette Tan Yuen Ling, Coleen Angove and Anuradha Ramanujan, Using Film to Teach Critical Thinking: Three Approaches in the Rhetoric and Expository Writing Classroom, <http://www.universitypublications.net/ijas/0903/pdf/V6NA204.pdf> (with some practical exercises and ideas)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Critical Thinking (July 2018) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-thinking/> (Comprehensive definition, theoretical strands and further resources)
- Open University: Thinking Critically (Study Skills booklet): <http://www.openuniversity.edu/sites/www.openuniversity.edu/files/brochures/Critical-thinking-Open-University.pdf>
- Jason Bainbridge, Textual Analysis and Media Research: http://lib.oup.com.au/he/media_journalism/bainbridge2e/bainbridge1e_tools03.pdf
- Basic Film Terminology with examples: http://users.wfu.edu/jarretes/Basic_Film_Terminology.pdf
- Cottrell, Stella. *Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument*, 2017. Print.

REFLECTIONS ON SESSION

