



A young Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* (1972) looks out from Ellis Island at the Statue of Liberty, marking the beginning of the narrative of his life in the USA.

NARRATIVE

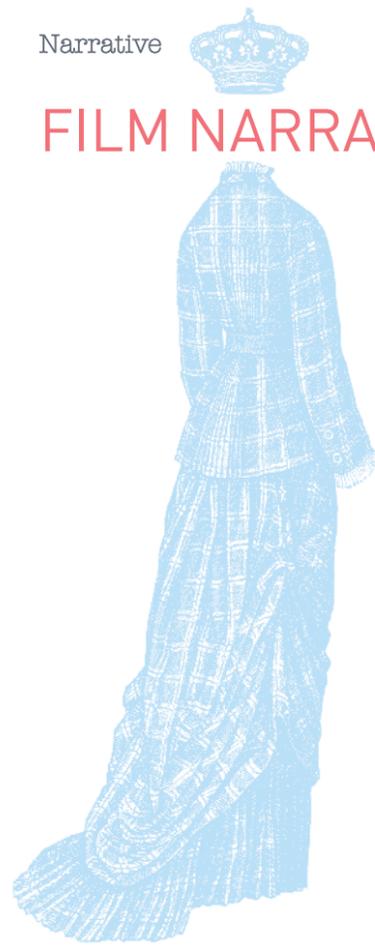
If the audience does not jump out of their seat on this one, you have failed.

Francis Ford Coppola, director of
The Godfather

Film narrative can be described as the art of storytelling through image, light and sound. The film narrative relies on the same fundamentals of storytelling that the written narrative does. A setting has to be established, characters need to be introduced, their personalities developed and storylines must engage the audience. The filmmaker's vision is inspired through story elements and is then brought to the screen through production elements.

This chapter examines how filmmakers combine production and story elements to create meaning and emotion within audiences and to engage them in the world of the film.

FILM NARRATIVE

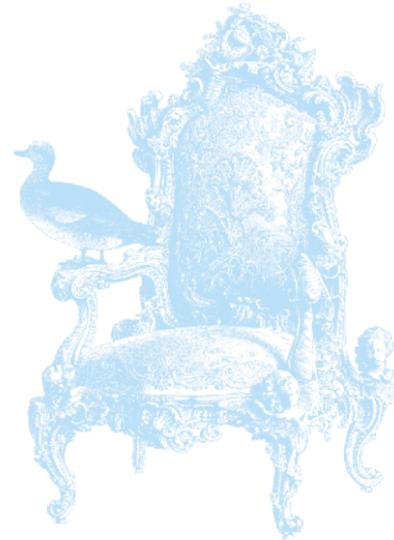


FILM NARRATIVE AND THE AUDIENCE

The first audience to experience on-screen film did so in 1895, with a screening by Auguste and Louis Lumière. The Lumière brothers' first film was entitled *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895). Predictably, the action consisted of workers leaving the Lumière factory. This was typical of early filmmaking.

The audience's fascination came from being able to see moving images on screen. Film subjects included rivers, waterfalls, ski slopes, animals, early motor cars, boats and trains. In *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1896), the Lumière brothers placed a camera next to a railway track and it thrilled audiences to watch as the approaching train came closer and closer. In 1898, English filmmaker George Albert Smith mounted a camera on the front of a moving train to film a 'phantom ride'. While such films provided excitement for audiences, 'thrill cinema' soon gave way to narrative.

Just as filmmaking was new to humans, so too was film viewing. Most audiences were not experienced filmgoers and those that were had been viewing



events rather than stories. In 1903, Edwin S. Porter made the silent narrative film *The Life of an American Fireman*. The film is an early example of how filmmakers learnt to use editing to help the audience understand what is happening in the story. It begins with a split screen showing a fireman on one side and a mother putting her daughter to bed on the other—this is an early example of parallel editing. The audience then sees a shot of a fire alarm being activated, followed by a shot of firemen leaping into action and sliding down a fire pole. Shots of the fire crews travelling to the fire provide action and excitement. Suddenly, the sequence cuts to inside the burning building, in the bedroom where earlier the audience saw the mother putting her daughter to bed. She screams out of the window for help and soon a fireman bursts in and rescues her and her daughter. Interestingly, the audience then sees the same action repeated from the outside of the building. Perhaps Porter thought that audiences would be confused by cross-cutting the interior and exterior shots together. A later version of the film does indeed feature a more modern cross-cutting style (editing to show action occurring at the same time in different locations).

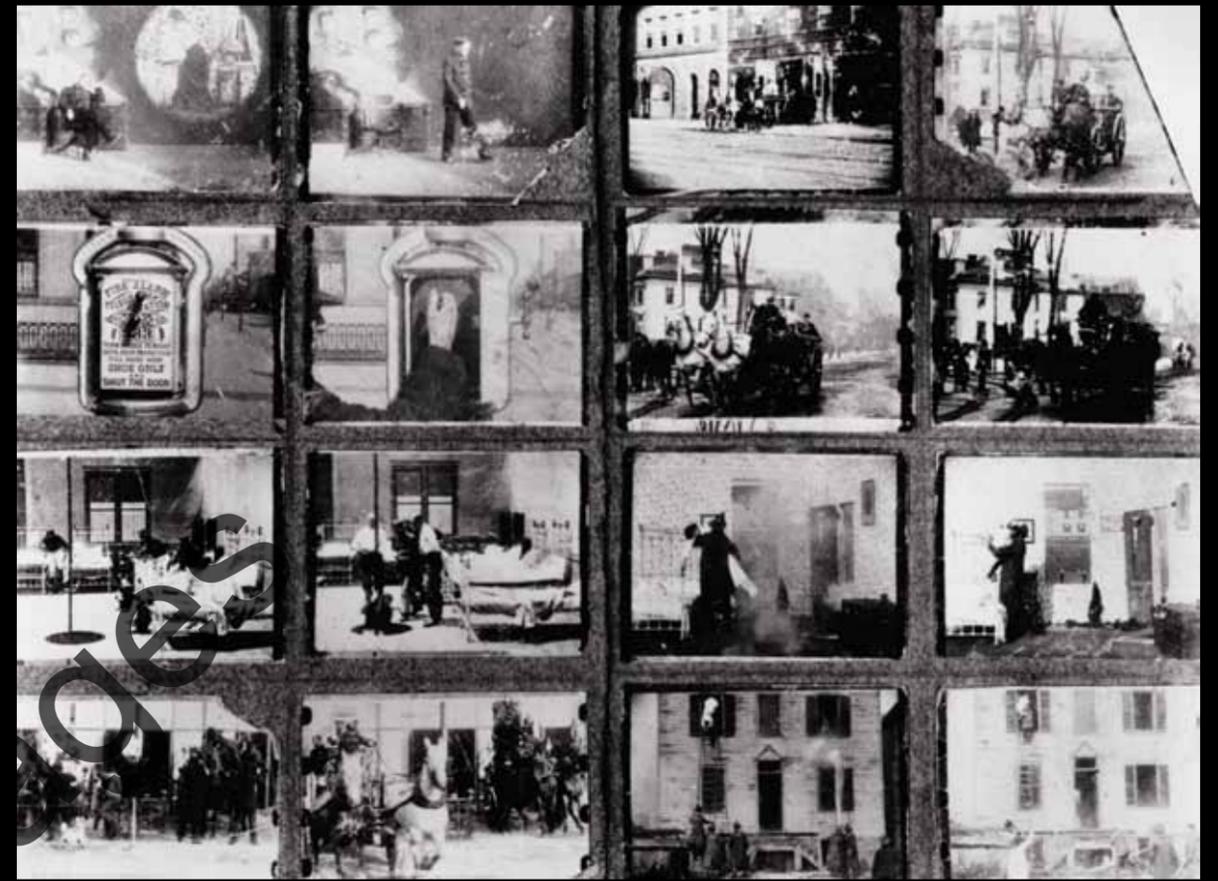


FIGURE 6.1.1 *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903) was an early experiment in film continuity editing.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

View Porter's short film *The Life of an American Fireman* online. Use the film's stills in Figure 6.1.1 to re-edit the film in a more modern, cross-cut and parallel way.

AUDIENCE RECEPTION

The reception context in which a narrative is viewed can affect the way the audience understands, experiences and responds to a film. The Australian film *Animal Kingdom* (2010), tells the fictional story of a Melbourne criminal family who, in an act of retribution, murder two young policemen in a quiet suburban street. The film won the World Cinema Jury Prize at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and was successfully released in the USA.

While filmgoers overseas view the same fictional narrative as those in Melbourne, the reception context, and therefore the viewing experience of the audiences, is very different. Residents of Melbourne in 1988 would be likely to remember the cold-blooded

ambush murder of two young police constables checking an abandoned car in Walsh Street, South Yarra. Although *Animal Kingdom* is fiction, viewing the film evokes memories for some of the real-life crime and the real-life criminals involved. While overseas filmgoers react to the story and the characters in the film, some Melbourne audiences recall the criminals they saw on television and in court proceedings after the 1988 incident. Although not a documentary, the film becomes a retelling and a reinterpretation of history to some Melbourne viewers.

An audience's response of enjoyment or disappointment is often dependent on its expectations of the film. If a film is marketed as a terrifying horror, it will satisfy the audience if it is scary and disappoint them if it is not.

Teenage girls often choose horror films as entertainment for sleepovers. Perhaps they choose horror to experience the shared response of fright while sitting safely with friends. If this is the case, the scarier the film is the better the experience will be. Conversely, if the film is not scary it will be received in a different way, perhaps as comic entertainment that the group will mock and laugh at together.

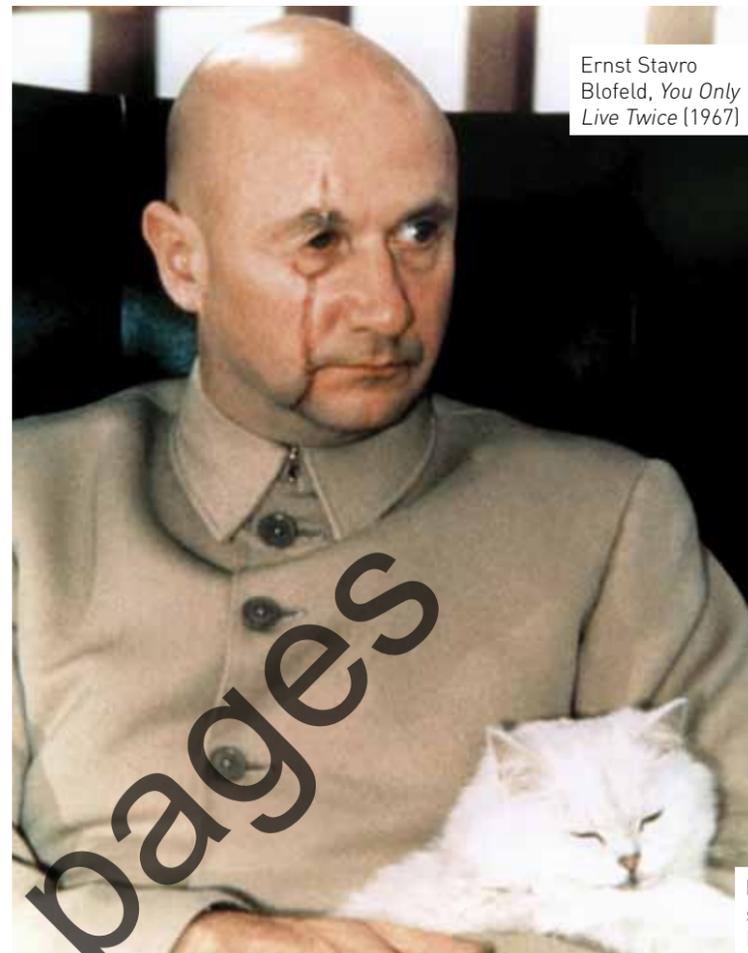


A news photo of police on the scene of the 1988 Walsh Street murders in South Yarra, Melbourne



A still from the 2010 Australian film *Animal Kingdom*, showing two police constables checking an abandoned car

FIGURE 6.1.2 Although *Animal Kingdom* (2010) is a fictional film narrative, audiences who lived in Melbourne at the time of the Walsh Street murders would naturally compare the film to real-life events.



Ernst Stavro Blofeld, *You Only Live Twice* (1967)



Dr Evil, *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999)

FIGURE 6.1.3 Mike Myers created humour in the *Austin Powers* film series by modelling the character Dr Evil on the James Bond villain Ernst Stavro Blofeld.

Audiences sometimes respond to a film on a personal level because of who they are and the experiences they have had. Often an audience member will identify strongly with a character or storyline because they have had a similar life experience. A father struggling with his career might identify with the character of Richard in *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) while his teenage son might identify with Dwayne, a young man experiencing the anxieties and frustrations of adolescence. In *Marathon Man* (1976), John Schlesinger uses the audience's experience of having a dentist drill into a tooth to his advantage by setting a torture scene in a dental chair. As Laurence Olivier brings the drill towards the screaming mouth of Dustin Hoffman, the audience is horrified by their own fear of the experience.

Another factor affecting audience reception is the medium through which the film is experienced. Viewing a film on a MP3 player will vary significantly from viewing it in a darkened cinema. The size of the screen and the limitations of the phone's speakers may not allow the viewer to fully experience elements of the *mise en scène*, or visual composition, including depth of field, colour and sound mixing. A film viewed in a classroom may evoke expectations of study and homework, while viewing it with friends at a cinema may evoke feelings of enjoyment and entertainment.

AUDIENCE AND GENRE

Modern film audiences are familiar with the codes and conventions of film genre. This awareness affects audiences' understanding and response to film narratives. Audiences understand that the science fiction genre is usually set in the future and can therefore suspend their belief to accept that police cars can fly, as depicted in *Blade Runner* (1982), and actress Sean Young is a plausible 'replicant' or robot version of a human.

Genre understanding can also encourage audiences to explore themes or relate to a text closely. In *The Truman Show* (1998), director Peter Weir questions the ethics of the reality television genre and explores the themes of identity, belonging and freedom.

Familiarity with a genre also allows the audience to enjoy satire aimed at that genre. Knowledge of James Bond films adds to audience enjoyment of the *Austin Powers* film series, which are a satire of the Bond film franchise. Humour in the satire genre draws on the audience's knowledge of other film genres and their texts. This referencing of other texts is known as intertextuality.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

- 1 Write a list of your top ten favourite films.
 - a Identify the genres of your favourite films.
 - b Choose at least two films from your list (preferably from different genres) and use them to copy and complete the following table in your notebook.
 - c Add to your table by including an assessment of a fictional film narrative that you are studying.
 - d How did your reception context of this text differ to your viewing experiences of your favourite films?

| FILM TITLE | GENRE (What story and production elements in the film are typical of this genre?) | YOUR EXPECTATIONS (What type of viewing experience did you expect?) | STORYLINE (What is the main storyline in the film?) | ACTION (What action occurs in the narrative?) | YOUR RESPONSE (What was your response to the film? Did you laugh, cry, feel scared etc.?) |
|------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

STORY ELEMENTS



NARRATIVE PROGRESSION

OPENING

Opening sequences are often referred to as 'set-ups'. They provide a platform from which the narrative is launched. In the opening sequence, the audience is oriented into both the physical setting and the historical setting of the film. The filmmaker also introduces the characters and begins to develop these characters for the audience.

The opening sequence begins the process of presenting narrative possibilities to the audience. In the opening sequence of M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999), the audience is introduced to Dr Malcolm Crowe and his wife Anna. Through the action including the acting, visual composition, camera work and editing, the audience is introduced to several narrative themes important to the understanding of the characters and the story. Within minutes, the audience knows that Malcolm and Anna are in love. The loss of this love is a theme that is explored later. The sequence also explains Malcolm's profession as a successful child psychologist and how his success has come from sacrifice and putting his wife 'second'.

The opening sequence also sets the context for the audience's understanding of Malcolm's relationship with the character Cole, whom the audience meets immediately after the opening sequence.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters, storylines and themes introduced in the opening sequence are developed throughout the middle of the narrative. This involves change in character relationships and often the introduction of new characters who present new narrative possibilities to the audience.

The development of a story is often influenced by the genre of the film. A typical murder mystery introduces characters in the opening sequence, normally the victim(s) and the suspect(s). The murder takes place and the detective, whether amateur or professional, investigates the crime (facing challenges and dangers), solves the crime and finally confronts the killer in the closing sequence. Any unresolved story points are revealed to the audience. These might include the killer's motive, how they did it and the evidence that proves their guilt. Each genre will vary but all conventional narratives follow the opening, development and closure format.

(ANNA ignores MALCOLM and clears her throat. She leans forward in her seat and reads the certificate out loud as MALCOLM tries to tickle her.)

ANNA

In recognition for his outstanding achievement in the field of child psychology, his dedication to his work, and his continuing efforts to improve the quality of life for countless children and their families, the City of Philadelphia proudly bestows upon its son Dr Malcolm Crowe ... That's you ... the Mayor's Citation for Professional Excellence.

(Beat. The power of the words sobers the two of them.)

ANNA

They called you their son.

MALCOLM

Wow. We should hang it in the bathroom.

(ANNA turns to MALCOLM. He smiles. She just keeps staring. Beat.)

ANNA

This is an important night for us. Finally someone is recognising the sacrifices you made. That you have put everything second, including me, for those families they're talking about. They're also saying that my husband has a gift. You have a gift that teaches children how to be strong in situations where most adults would piss on themselves.

(Beat.)

I believe what they wrote is real.

(ANNA lets go of his hands. ANNA's eyes are emotional. MALCOLM smiles softly.)

MALCOLM

Thank you.

The Sixth Sense, motion picture, Spyglass Entertainment, 1999

The opening sequence of *The Sixth Sense* begins the story, establishes the setting, introduces the characters of Malcolm and Anna and suggests the themes that are developed later in the narrative.

CLOSURE

Just as the opening sequence provides a beginning for the narrative, the closing sequence of a film brings the narrative to its conclusion. The closing sequence leads the narrative to the point of climax, both in a storytelling and emotional sense. It is the point in a film at which the audience reaches an understanding about unanswered questions relating to story and character. For example, the hero confronts the anti-hero and order is restored; two lovers torn apart are reunited; the mystery surrounding an investigation is explained; a journey comes to its end.

The closing sequence often invites the audience to reflect upon the narrative and the characters it has just experienced. In the closing sequence of *The Sixth Sense*, Shyamalan brings the audience to a new understanding of the events witnessed throughout the film. Malcolm's realisation about the truth of his existence develops within the audience a different understanding of the relationships between Malcolm and Anna, and Malcolm and Cole.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Briefly outline the narrative progression of a typical romantic comedy and an action thriller.
- Watch the opening sequence of a fictional film narrative that you are studying and answer the following questions:
 - What is the setting of the film?
 - What characters have been introduced?
 - What narrative possibilities have been suggested?
 - What themes have been introduced?
- After watching the narrative unfold in the middle of the film, answer the following questions:
 - How has the story developed?
 - What problems have the characters encountered?
 - How have the characters changed?
 - How have the character's relationships changed?
 - What themes have been developed?
- Now watch the closing sequence of the film and answer the following questions:
 - How did the filmmaker bring the story to a conclusion?

- b How have the main characters changed when compared to the opening sequence?
- c Have the narrative possibilities drawn the audience to a conclusion about what will happen to the characters in the life 'beyond the text'?

MULTIPLE STORYLINES

Multiple storylines are common in narrative film. While most narratives follow one storyline closely, it is common for backstories or complementary stories to run concurrently. *Little Miss Sunshine* tells the story of a family driving from New Mexico to California to get the youngest member of the family, Olive, to a beauty pageant. While the family is travelling, the audience is also presented with the character's individual stories: Richard trying to get his book published, Sheryl trying to keep her family happy, Frank's recovery from a suicide attempt, Dwayne's vow of silence and Grandpa's unique way of coping with growing old. The characters' stories all interrelate.

Some narratives present multiple storylines involving characters that do not know one another but may be linked through their stories. *Babel* (2006) presents the stories of several people living in different countries whose lives are affected by one another's decisions and actions.



FIGURE 6.2.1 The multiple storylines in *Babel* (2006) present a narrative that is dependent on character motivations and actions.

Film genres such as action, comedy, science fiction and film noir almost invariably follow a main story based on attaining a goal, such as solving a crime or defeating a villain, while running a love story involving the hero or heroine parallel to the main action.

NARRATIVE POSSIBILITIES

Throughout a narrative, possibilities are presented to the audience. The meeting of a boy and a girl could present several narrative possibilities, such as the possibility of romance, the possibility of rejection and the possibility of an unhealthy obsession. All of these possibilities take the characters and the film in different directions.

Often the narrative possibilities are dependent on the genre. In a romantic comedy, the likely possibilities are love or rejection. Unhealthy obsession might be the possibility in a psychological thriller in which one of the characters stalks the other.

While genre films present recognisable narrative possibilities, non-genre films or hybrid genre films also rely on narrative possibilities to engage the audience. In *Run Lola Run* (1998), Tom Tykwer quickly introduces the characters Lola and Manni and the narrative possibility that Manni will be killed if Lola can not get the 100 000 deutschmarks he needs to give his boss. As Lola thinks of the people that she can go to for help, more narrative possibilities present themselves. Will she go to her parents? If she does not get to Manni in time will he rob the store? Narrative possibilities engage the audience through natural human curiosity. As the possibilities are presented, the audience becomes curious about what the characters will do and how the story will unfold.

Sometimes the filmmaker will use narrative possibilities to completely mislead audiences so that they can be shocked or surprised later in the film. Master director Alfred Hitchcock skillfully presents several narrative possibilities in *Psycho* (1960) that are never realised. For example:

- Sam and Marion might break up.
- Sam and Marion might get married.
- Marion might become romantically involved with Norman.
- Marion might return to Phoenix.

By suggesting these narrative possibilities, Hitchcock is able to surprise and shock audiences by taking the story in directions that they have not even considered.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Watch the opening sequence of a fictional film narrative that you are studying and answer the following questions:
 - a What narrative possibilities have been presented to you in the first scene?
 - b Of the narrative possibilities presented in the opening sequence, how many are realised throughout the course of the film?
- 2 Think of your favourite film and list the narrative possibilities presented in the opening sequence. Follow one of the narrative possibilities that comes to fruition and make a new list of the narrative possibilities this outcome presents.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Character development is the revelation to the audience of a character's personality, beliefs, strengths, weaknesses and emotions. Character development is also an examination of the relationship between characters. The audience is normally introduced to the main protagonist at the start of a narrative. From this point onwards, viewers learn more about who the character really is, sometimes being fooled by the filmmaker along the way.

Character development can be achieved through various narrative devices. The simplest is the traditional 'Once upon a time there was a girl named...' fairytale format, in which the audience is immediately introduced to the main character and then told her story. In this format, the character's development is revealed to the audience. *The Lion King* (1994) is an example of this structure. The audience sees Simba's story from his birth, through to his ascension to his father's throne. Along the way, the viewer sees Simba's character change as he develops from a weak young lion exiled from the pride into the strong, adult Simba.

Another technique in character development is to look back on a character's life or part of it. Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) opens with the death of the title character Charles Foster Kane, followed by a newsreel presentation of his life. The newsreel gives the audience a quick introduction to the achievements of Charles Foster Kane, millionaire newspaper owner. The journalist making the newsreel tells the audience that knowing what he did is not enough: it is important to know who he was. Welles then tells Kane's story through the remembrances of characters who knew him, and by showing the effect that he has had on them. Each of these small stories within the broader narrative reveals more about the character of Kane.

Sam Mendes uses a different technique in *American Beauty* (1999) when the main character, Lester Burnham, introduces himself in a voice-over at the start of the film and tells the audience that he is already dead. Mendes then develops Lester's character by showing the story of Lester's last year of life. At first, Lester is presented as a conservatively dressed, downtrodden, unhappy man who has no meaningful interaction with either his wife or his daughter. But this is not the real Lester Burnham. Through Lester's decisions and actions, the audience discovers more about him as the narrative unfolds. Lester's narration also develops other characters within the film. The below extract from Alan Ball's screenplay illustrates the beginning of Carolyn's character development through Lester's narration, Carolyn's appearance and Annette Bening's acting.

Exterior—Burnham house—Moments later

Close on a single, dewy American beauty rose. A gloved hand with clippers appears and snips the flower off.

CAROLYN tends her rose bushes in front of the Burnham house. A very well-put together woman of forty, she wears colour-coordinated gardening togs and has lots of useful and expensive tools.

LESTER watches her through a window on the first floor, peeping out through the drapes.

LESTER (V/O)

That's my wife Carolyn. See the way the handle on those pruning shears matches her gardening clogs? That's not an accident.

Exterior—Burnham house—Continuous

JIM #1

Morning, Carolyn.

CAROLYN

(Overly friendly)

I just love your tie! That colour!

JIM #1

I just love your roses. How do you get them to flourish like this?

CAROLYN

Well, I'll tell you. Egg shells and Miracle Grow.

JIM #1 and CAROLYN continue to chat, unaware that LESTER is watching them.

LESTER (V/O)

Man. I get exhausted just watching her.

LESTER's POV: We can't hear what JIM #1 and CAROLYN are saying, but she's overly animated, like a TV talk-show host.

LESTER (V/O) (cont'd)

She wasn't always like this. She used to be happy. We used to be happy.

American Beauty, motion picture, DreamWorks Pictures, 1999

This is the audience's introduction to Carolyn. Her matching gardening accessories and Lester's comment about them begins the character development process. The audience is introduced to a woman so concerned with appearances that she wears colour-coordinated gardening clothes. This theme is reinforced later in the narrative.

This dialogue tells the audience that Lester does not like the character that Carolyn has become. He is unhappy and he believes that 'they' are unhappy. Presumably, even before the audience meets the characters, the Burnhams have changed from a once-happy couple to the disconnected couple they have become.

It is not just what characters say that develops them, but also what they do. When confronted with being fired as part of a corporate restructuring, Lester blackmails his employer. With the money, Lester buys a 1970 Pontiac Firebird: 'The car I always wanted and now I have it. I rule.' Lester is beginning to take charge of his life through his actions. The decisions he makes and the actions that follow them develop within the audience a better understanding of his character.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Consider a fictional film narrative that you are studying this year:
 - a List the decisions and actions that reveal the character of the main protagonist.
 - b Choose two characters and explain what changes occur in their character development over the course of the film.
- 2 The following table outlines some simple characters and a development in their character. Copy and complete the table in your notebook.
 - a Come up with cause or motivation for their character development.
 - b List the things they could say and the actions they could take that would illustrate the character development to the audience.

| CHARACTER | DEVELOPMENT | CAUSE/MOTIVATION | DIALOGUE | ACTION |
|--|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| A woman who idolises her son | Becomes a woman who disowns her son | The son murders an innocent young woman. | 'From this moment on, I have no son.' | As the woman listens to a phone message left by her son, she cuts his image out of the family portrait. |
| A happy man with a successful business | Becomes depressed and considers committing suicide | | | |
| A frail, bullied schoolgirl | Becomes strong-willed and confident | | | |
| A young internet chatter | Turns into an obsessive online stalker | | | |
| A committed white supremacist | Becomes disenchanted with white supremacist theory | | | |
| A well-respected and honest judge | Decides to convict a man he/she knows is innocent | | | |
| A popular, creative novelist | Becomes a novelist with writer's block | | | |



FIGURE 6.2.2 Character motivation and cause and effect are fundamental elements of the film narrative in *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007).

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Cause and effect is a narrative function that helps audiences understand how character motivations and decisions drive the story. After characters and narrative possibilities are presented to the audience, the narrative relies on the characters and their changing circumstances to engage the audience.

Film narratives rely on characters making decisions that affect themselves and other characters in the narrative. This drives the story through narrative possibilities and character development. Character A does this, which makes Character B do that. What will Character A do now in response?

Narrative depends on cause and effect to create drama. Cause and effect can consist of character motivations and decisions or events happening outside the character's control. In *American Beauty*, it is the threat of losing his job that makes Lester blackmail his boss and the company he works for into giving him a huge payout. Carolyn is unhappy in her relationship with Lester, so she begins an affair with her real estate rival.

The narrative function of cause and effect may be presented in a non-conventional, non-linear manner. This is demonstrated in *Before the Devil Knows You're*

Dead (2007) where the narrative is presented in a non-sequential format. Two brothers are motivated by money to commit a 'victimless crime'. Andy, who needs to repay the money he has embezzled from his company, convinces his brother Hank, who needs money for child support, to commit a robbery. This action triggers an unforeseen chain of events that results in tragedy. The non-sequential nature of the film heightens the drama as the audience puts the pieces of the cause-and-effect puzzle together.

The cause-and-effect chain is a foundation of storytelling and a fundamental element of creating drama in a narrative. Cause becomes effect, which in turn becomes cause. Consider the cause-and-effect chain in *Run Lola Run*.

- Cause:** Mani loses Ronnie's 100000 deutschmarks.
- Effect:** He decides to rob a store to get the money.
- Cause:** Mani robs a store.
- Effect:** Lola runs to her father to ask for help.
- Cause:** Lola asks her father for the money.
- Effect:** Lola's father refuses to give her the money.

- Cause:** Lola's father refuses to help.
- Effect:** Lola helps Manni rob the store.
- Cause:** Lola and Manni rob the store.
- Effect:** Lola is killed in the getaway.

Tom Tykwer, director of *Run Lola Run*, manipulates the technique of cause and effect by presenting the narrative three times, each having a different cause-and-effect chain determined by a small change in character action at the beginning of each of Lola's runs.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Answer the following questions in relation to a fictional film narrative that you are studying:
 - What motivates each character?
 - What events are caused by the character's motivations?
- Give examples of the cause-and-effect chain from two of the fictional film narratives that you have been studying this year.

SETTING

The setting of a fictional film narrative refers to the location and the historical period in which the story takes place. Location refers to the physical geography of the story.

- On what planet does the action take place?
- In which country?
- In which city?
- On which street?
- In which building and in which room?

The setting of a narrative helps to tell the story because the audience already has an understanding of settings and their context within film genres. For example, Wes Craven's horror film *Scream* (1996) opens in an isolated house on a dark and windy night. A young blonde girl named Casey cooks popcorn as she waits alone for her boyfriend to arrive. Think about it: it is dark, she is isolated, she is young, pretty and alone, and it is a horror film. The audience expects her to get killed or, at the very least, attacked.

In other genres such as the western, film noir, comedy, romantic comedy, science fiction and fantasy, the audience also understands the codes and conventions that apply to the specific genre. In a conventionally plotted action thriller, the audience can

be sure that the narrative will culminate in a setting that hosts a showdown between good and evil as in *Die Hard* (1988) or *The Dark Knight* (2008).

In film noir classics, such as *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), *The Big Sleep* (1946) or the more modern *Chinatown* (1974), the audience understands that the main protagonist is a cynical, often flawed character who is faced with moral choices that are often complicated by a beautiful but ultimately selfish and manipulative woman.

The science-fiction audience puts aside logic and their knowledge of the real world to accept the setting of the science-fiction reality of films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Planet of the Apes* (1968) or *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977).

Similarly, a narrative set within the fantasy genre, such as *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002) and *Twilight* (2008), defines the reality in which its characters can live. The audience accepts the notion that Harry Potter can ride a broomstick, just as viewers believe Bella can fall in love with a vampire.

The setting can also help to develop character, as it does in *The Third Man* (1949). Holly Martins, a US writer of western novels, arrives in Vienna, Austria after the Second World War (1939–45). Holly is a man with a strong sense of right and wrong. After hearing police accusations against his friend, Harry Lime, Holly vows to clear his name. But in Vienna the ideals of right and wrong have been destroyed, just as the buildings have been bombed into rubble. Vienna is a setting in which the simplistic rules of right and wrong do not apply. Against this backdrop, Holly is exposed as a naive innocent who must question his beliefs of right and wrong, good and evil. It is largely the setting that gives this character the opportunity to develop in front of the audience.

Lars and the Real Girl (2007) is a quirky comedy about a lonely, delusional young man who falls in love with a life-size doll. Director Craig Gillespie utilises a snow-covered, isolated country location in Wisconsin, USA to emphasise the loneliness felt by the main character, Lars Lindstrom. In a small-town setting there is no escaping the embarrassment of the situation for Lars' brother Gus, which helps the audience understand Gus' point of view.

The historical period of a film addresses whether the story takes place in a contemporary time frame, in a historical setting or in the future. Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* (1989) is set in the late 1930s. This allows the hero, Indiana Jones,



FIGURE 6.2.3 Lars' unconventional relationship with a life-size doll in *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007) is amplified in the small, isolated town the film is set in.

to be challenged by one of the most evil regimes in history, Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party. Depicting the Nazis as an enemy makes Indiana Jones even more of a hero because, just as the Nazis represent evil, by opposing them Indiana represents good.

Setting can also refer to the duration of time in which the story occurs within the lives of the characters. The narrative in *Citizen Kane* covers the time frame from Charles Foster Kane's childhood through to the days after his death, a lifetime of more than seventy years. The narrative in *Run Lola Run*, on the other hand, takes place in a time frame spanning twenty minutes in the lives of Lola and Manni.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

- Chose a fictional film narrative that you are studying and answer the following questions:
 - How does the setting relate to the narrative?
 - What is the historical period of the narrative and how is it relevant to the film?
 - What locations are used in the narrative and how do they help to develop the story?
 - What is the duration of the story in the main protagonist's lifetime?

STRUCTURING OF TIME

Film narratives operate within codes and conventions and audiences view films with an understanding of these codes and conventions. Film uses codes and conventions to help audiences overcome the limitations of real time. For example, when a character opens the front door of their house and the camera then fades into a shot of the character driving a car, the audience immediately understands that the character has walked to their car, opened the door, got in, fastened their seatbelt, turned the engine on, pulled out into the street, and is now driving the car to another destination. The audience does not have to see all of this happen in order to believe that it has. In fact, viewers do not even think about it happening.

Audiences accept the convention that films compress time so that the events of a character's lifetime can occur within the two hours or so set aside to watch the film.

While audiences are familiar with the conventional, linear presentation of time in which they see a story unfold from beginning to end, filmmakers can challenge these conventions through restructuring

the order of time. Michael Gondry uses a non-conventional structuring of time in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) by mixing present time with memories, flashbacks and dreams throughout the narrative. The unconventional time structure of the film develops the theme of confusion and loss, which is part of the story of two lovers who have their memories of one another erased.

Time can also be restructured when subjective time replaces real time, as in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Director Sergei Eisenstein stretches the famous scene in which the army massacres the revolutionaries (including women and children) on the Odessa Steps beyond the 'real time' that it would have taken for the soldiers to march down the stairs.

Occasionally, a film narrative presents the story in real time. In other words, screen time and story time are the same, such as in *My Dinner with Andre* (1981) and *Nick of Time* (1995). This has also been applied in television, with the series *24* being presented in real time, minus commercials. Audiences are so used to time being restructured in film that real time in film is rare and somewhat risky for the filmmaker.

Time can also be manipulated in a film narrative through such devices as time-lapse photography, slow motion, fast motion, flashback and flashforward.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 How is time structured in a fictional film narrative that you are studying? Is time structured conventionally or non-conventionally? Explain your answer. If the film uses flashbacks, flashforwards or dream sequences, explain how these engage the audience into the narrative.
- 2 Watch the scene in *Citizen Kane* in which Kane and his first wife Emily meet at breakfast. How does this scene move time forward? What does the scene communicate to the audience about Kane and Emily's marriage? This scene takes up two minutes and twenty seconds of screen time. How much time in the duration of Kane's life does the scene represent?
- 3 Choose a scene from a fictional film narrative that you are studying that manipulates time. What is the effect on time with regard to the duration of the character's lives? What filmmaking techniques has the creator used to achieve this restructuring of time?

POINT OF VIEW

In presenting the narrative, the filmmaker decides from whose point of view the story will be told. In a conventionally plotted narrative, the point of view is that of one or two main protagonists. For example, the main narrative in *American Beauty* is presented from Lester Burnham's point of view. In other words, it is his story the audience is seeing. The film, however, does not exclusively present Lester's point of view. At different stages throughout the film, Sam Mendes shows the point of view of Lester's wife Carolyn, his daughter Jane, her boyfriend Ricky, and Angela, the object of Lester's desire.

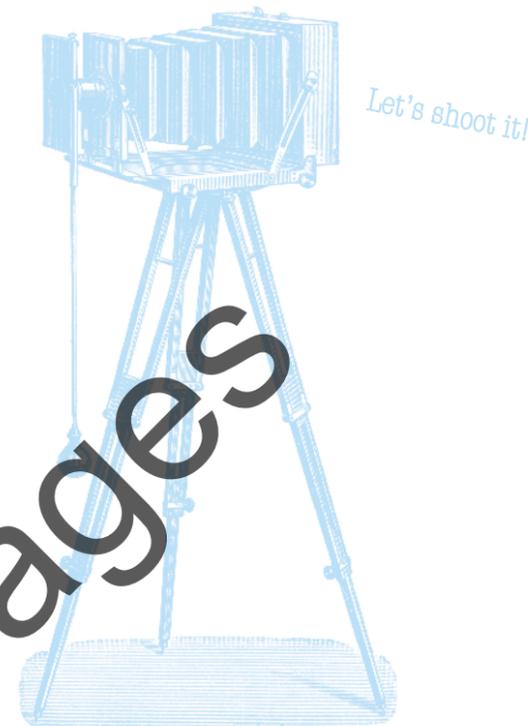
Point of view does not need to be limited to one character. Throughout a narrative there may be several characters' points of view, as in *Crash* (2004) or *Little Miss Sunshine* in which point of view moves from one character to another as the film tells the stories of a collection of interrelated characters. The same narrative can also be presented from several points of view, as in *Go* (1999), in which the audience sees the same story unfold from three different characters' points of view. In *Run Lola Run*, Lola is the main protagonist. While most of the narrative is presented from her points of view, the audience is also shown the point of view of her boyfriend Manni, her father and several other characters.

Sometimes genre will define point of view. For example, a romance is almost necessarily presented from the point of view of the two people falling in love. If the story includes another character whose love is perhaps unrequited, their point of view may be presented as well. A western such as *High Noon* (1952), a crime drama such as *The Godfather*, and an action adventure such as *The Dark Knight* are almost always seen from the point of view of the main protagonist.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 From whose point of view is the narrative presented in a fictional film narrative you that are studying this year? How do you know?
- 2 Is the narrative only presented from the main protagonist's point of view, or are the points of view of other characters presented? If so, which character(s)? Give examples from the film.
- 3 Discuss the genre of a fictional film narrative that you are studying. Has the narrative point of view been determined by the genre of the film?

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS



A film is made up of various components, which are often referred to as 'production elements'. When studying a film, you need to be able to deconstruct it in order to understand how the director has put the component parts together to create story, meaning, themes and emotion. The production elements of film include:

- film format (type of film stock or video)
- camera technique (angles, movement, lens, shot type)
- lighting
- sound
- editing
- mise en scène (visual composition)
- acting.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

The Director is going to be the author of the performances, the story of the film. The Cinematographer is the author of the use of light in the film and how that contributes to the story.

ERNEST DICKERSON, CINEMATOGRAPHER/DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY OF DO THE RIGHT THING (1989)

Film directors oversee and shape the creative processes that come together to produce the on-screen narrative. Standing right at the shoulder of the director is the director of photography or cinematographer.



FIGURE 6.3.1 *Citizen Kane* (1941) director Orson Welles (left) acknowledged the creative contribution of cinematographer Gregg Toland (right) by sharing his screen credit with him.