



MEDIA STUDIES

Exam board: Eduqas

Teacher name: Matt Fodor
Email address: matt.fodor@stockton.ac.uk

Hello, my name is Matt and I am the Media Studies teacher at Bede Sixth Form. I would like to welcome you to your four week media studies prep course, which has been designed to make the transition from GCSE learning to A level learning a little smoother. The resources in this pack are designed to help prepare you to start your media studies course in September and give you an understanding of some of the knowledge and skills you'll need to be a successful media student at Bede Sixth Form. Throughout your first year you will sit two exams and will submit one piece of coursework and so A level Media Studies requires a healthy mix of theoretical understanding and practical media ability. While the course is challenging it is also incredibly enjoyable and I hope that this is reflected in the tasks set out for you over the next four weeks.

Week 1 Task: Genre Studies

Genre is an incredibly important term for anyone wanting to study media studies. While it is a relatively simple concept and can be understood even by people who have never studied media or film before, as a media student you must study genre in a deep and meaningful way. Doing so will give you a strong understanding of how our media can work both as an art form and as a business.

Genre is a French word that roughly translates to 'type' and today we generally tend to associate it with film and television. However, while the use of genre has a long history in film, it has a far longer general history which dates back to Ancient Greece, at which time Aristotle used genre as a categorisation tool for ancient theatre plays. Nowadays most cultural production, whether this is television, magazines, music, painting or literature, ends up being assigned to one genre or another.

In all cases, what makes a genre possible is the existence of common elements across a range of productions which we call codes and conventions. In other words, it is the identification of repetition across a series of productions that results in them being described as a particular genre.

Task: Identify as many film genres as you can think of. Write them down on a piece of paper. If you can think of more than 15 you are doing exceptionally well!

A large part of the media studies course revolves around the study of theorists, and one such theorist that we study is called Steven Neale. Neale suggests that "genres are made up of instances of repetition" and that it is these instances of repetition that allow audiences and the producers of media to recognise one genre from the next.

Repetition can take the form of repeated storylines from one film to the next, the repeated use of props within certain genre, similar characters that exists from one film to the next and so on and so forth.

Week 1 continued

Task: Pick three genres from the list you have just made. Create a mind-map that identifies the instances of repetition (or the codes and conventions) within these genres. You can do this by suggesting common settings, props, character types, score, costumes, typical narratives, visuals and colour and tones that you would expect to see within each genre.

Task: Now watch at least 2 trailers that you feel fit into your chosen genres. Add any new codes and conventions to the mind-maps you have just created. How accurate have you been in your original lists?

We tend to think about codes and conventions as a tool primarily used by audiences to help us set our expectations for viewing film and TV. If we sat down to watch *Stranger Things* for example, we know that we are going to get a mix of both Science Fiction and Fantasy conventions, and we would likely be disappointed if we found that instead only contained the conventions of the western genre. While genre is important for us as audience members, it is also incredibly important to the people who create our media as producers can use genre trends to ensure success.

Producers tend to make films in genres that are popular at certain times in history as they can easily develop a strong understanding of what codes and conventions are going to be popular with audiences. So for example, almost ten years ago it was nearly impossible for Vampire movies to fail following the success of a film called *Twilight*. All producers needed to do to secure success was include similar codes and conventions within their films and audiences would want to watch them. Now the same can be said of superhero movies as producers know exactly which codes and conventions to include in their films to ensure that they can be successful.

A more interesting way of achieving large audiences is through the creation of hybrid genre texts, or to put it plainly, films with more than one main genre. By borrowing codes and conventions from more than one genre, producers can double their audiences!

Task: Watch the trailer for *Cowboys and Aliens*. Split a page in half and label one side “Western” and the other side “Sci-fi”. List the conventions of each genre that you have seen in the trailer. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH7KZD5vGBY>

Now watch the trailer for *Shaun of the Dead*. Complete this task again, only this time split your page into Comedy and Zombie / Horror. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12Ok6bbV7rQ>

If you have the time, you might want to watch the entire films. They both offer amazing insight into how impactful hybrid genres can be.

By now you should be starting to understand that genres are not as simple as they once may have seemed. Not only do we have to consider the existence of genres and hybrid genres, we also need to consider the fact that some genres have now become so large that they can be broken into “subgenres” or “genres within genres”.

Think about the horror genre for example. Both “*Scream*” and “*It Follows*” are both horror films, but they are massively different films. Wirth massively different sets of codes and conventions.

Task: If you are a horror fan, see how many horror subgenres you can think of and write them down. If you are not a fan of horror, do the same task but with comedy as your main genre. If you feel motivated to do so, you could do this task with more than one genre!

While Steven Neale stated that “Genres are made up of instances of repetition” he also stated that genre is “must contain difference” and went on to say that “this difference is essential for the economy of genre”. This is quite a confusing statement, but essential what he means here is that while genres must contain repeating themes in order to be categorised into the right genre, films and TV shows have to be different from one another, otherwise things would get boring very and nobody would watch films and TV anymore. This would kill the film and TV industry as if nobody watches, the media can’t make any money, which is what Neale means by the economy of genre.

Week 1 continued

Task: Using your understanding of codes and conventions, write a blurb for a film in a genre of your choosing (a blurb is the description of a film on the back of a DVD or blu-ray case). It must contain the codes and conventions an audience would expect to see but you should also try to make it original so that your film will draw an audience and not just be a copy of everything that came before it.

Once you have completed a blurb for a movie with one genre, do the same now for a film of your creation within a hybrid genre. Try to include codes and conventions of two contrasting genres. Each blurb should be about 150 words long.

Week 2 Task: Scene Analysis

Scene analysis

Film making is a complicated but subtle art, capable of manipulating our emotions without us even realising that we're being manipulated. Think about all the films that have made you laugh or cry, all the characters that you have grown to love or hate and all the horror films that have kept us awake at night long after the credits have rolled. These emotions that we feel are all the result of careful planning by film makers about how to get the biggest emotional response out of an audience. None of it happens by accident, and this week we will be exploring some of the techniques that have been used to manipulate our emotions by the media.

Task: Watch the two scenes below. One is the opening sequence for "The Dark Knight" (warning, this does contain some violence. If you are not comfortable with this then please do not watch this scene) and the other is the opening scene from Pixar's "Up". Watch each scene and try to write down the range of emotions that each scene made you feel. If you are feeling confident, you can write down any ideas you might have about why you felt this way when watching the scenes.

Dark Night Opening Scene - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E679XJellLs>

Up opening scene - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2bk_9T482g

One of the easiest ways to manipulate an audience is through the use of camera movement. We are powerless to see films in any way other than what the Director of Photography (that's the camera operator to you and I) intended us to see it. Basically, they force us to watch the film through their eyes. You might be surprised at just how drastically different camera angles can impact the way we feel about certain events and characters in the films we watch and to illustrate this, you are going to watch a short film that demonstrates just that.

Task: Watch this video on the 12 most commonly used camera angles - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SINviMsi0K0>

Task: Once you have watched the video "12 Camera Angles to Enhance your Films" go back and watch the scenes from The Dark Knight and Up. Identify any camera angles that you feel might be being used to manipulate the way you feel about certain characters or events in the scene.

You should now be able to see some of the ways that the makers of The Dark Knight and Up were using their cameras to manipulate you into feeling certain ways about characters. The way they make The Joker seem powerful in The Dark Knight through use of low camera angles and the way they make Carl seem alone in Up through the use of wide angles might be something you missed when you first watched the scenes, but you will notice them more and more now you know that this technique is used.

While we tend to think about film as a visual art, the sound design of scenes also has a significant impact on how audiences respond emotionally. The right choice of music can really impact the way that audiences feel when they watch a film or television show.

Week 2 continued

Task: Watch this short film that explains just how impactful the score of a film can be. (Warning, this contains the violent shower scene from Psycho, some pretty intense shark action from Jaws and some bad language. You don't have to watch it if you're easily offended). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCpYbSz1KqE>

Final task: Now that you have a better understanding of how scenes are visually and audibly constructed, you are going to plot out your own scene through the creation of a storyboard. Watch the following video called 'How to draw A-Grade storyboards (Even if you can't draw)' - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPrkxj2MyZI>

Create your own template (4 – 8 squares per page usually works best) and draw out a scene which uses camera angles to illicit an emotional response. You can draw any scene that you feel like drawing of your own creation, but highly emotional scenes would work best for this task. Some potential starting points could be the moment your character realises that they have just fallen in love, the moment they meet their worst enemy for the first time, a death scene, a success scene, a rescue scene. The choices are endless, so let your imagination run wild!

Your storyboard should include descriptions of any camera movements and any sounds or music that you would want to include in your scene. There are no rules here, but for your scene to work effectively I would include at least 12 squares in your storyboard.

Week 3 Task: Scriptwriting and Character Creation

As a part of your media studies coursework, you are likely to be tasked with creating an excerpt from a TV show. While you do not have to act in your own work (there is no need for you to ever appear on camera, unless you really want to!) you do have to create the characters and the events that do appear in your TV show.

This is one of the hardest but most rewarding skills that new students need to get to grips with, and it all starts with character creation. This is the foundation of your coursework and without a strong character, you will quickly find that your script, and therefore your coursework as a whole, will not work.

Creating characters is a little easier if you first have an understanding of the genre in which your character is going to exist, but it is entirely possible to create lifelike and believable characters without even having an idea of what your story is going to be about. I personally often find that my characters end up telling me what my scripts are going to be about!

Task: Choose a genre you want to work with today. For an extra challenge, choose a hybrid genre (an idea that we studied in week one!)

One of the best techniques I have found for creating characters is a game called '20 Questions' which was created by screen writing guru Syd Field. The exercise is simple, you have to answer 20 questions about your character without thinking too much about the answers.

Have a look at the example exercise I completed below. I tried to answer all of my questions without thinking too much about them, but I knew I wanted to create something in the Romantic-Comedy hybrid genre. I was both pleased and surprised by the results that I got!

Question	Answer
Name?	Stephen
Age?	45
Relationship status?	Single
Why?	He has a really weird personality.
Which is?	He is obsessed with The Undead. Vampires to be specific.

Why?	Ever since he was a little boy he has always loved monster movies. He got obsessed with them after watching Dracula at age 7.
So how has this impacted his relationships?	The girls he has dated don't really like the fact that he wears a cape and fake fangs to fancy restaurants when they go on dates!
What is his job?	He is a children's entertainer. He goes to Halloween parties and performs for kids.
Does he like his job?	He loves it, but he only really makes any money around Halloween.
How else does he make money then?	He works in a supermarket.
Do the people he works with know about his obsession?	Yes, because he still wears his fangs to work.
Is he lonely?	Of course he is. He's a 45 year old single man who has never had a girlfriend.
So, how will he find a girlfriend?	He is going to try and live his life as a 'normal' person, but to do that he first needs to research what 'normal people' are in to.
Will he tell his new girlfriend about his obsession?	No. He's scared this will scare her off.
So how will he satisfy this need to be a vampire?	He will wait till his new girlfriend is asleep and then sneak out of the house on a night to hang around the graveyards in the town.
Why doesn't he just find a girlfriend with similar interests?	He lives in a small town. There aren't that many local goth clubs around.
Why doesn't he find a girl online, like on Tinder?	He doesn't have a phone.
Why not?	His mum won't let him. He still lives with her!
Why?	Because he can't afford to buy a house of his own.
Why?	He spends all of his money on capes and gothic clothing that he buys from specialist shops.

After just writing the first thing that has come to my mind, I now have a good understanding of who Stephen is, what his motivations are in life, and even what genre my film is likely to be. I think I have the perfect outline for a Vampire based Rom-Com! From here I can start to develop ideas for scenes (the idea of Stephen learning to be a 'normal' person and trying out his 'normal' person costume for the first time is hilarious. The same can be said of him showing up for a date in a fancy restaurant while dressed head to toe in a vampire costume)!

Task: Create your own character using the twenty questions method. I find it useful to create several of these, so if I were doing this for real, I would write one for Stephen's girlfriend and for Stephen's controlling mother too. Have a go at creating some characters for yourself.

Once your characters exist, it is time to start thinking about your screenplay (or script. Both terms mean the same thing).

Scripts work by pitting two opposing forces against one another. This is an idea explored in detail by a media theorist called Claude Levi-Strauss. Levi Strauss suggested that all stories have a Binary Opposite at the centre of them, and it is these binary opposites that drive the story forward. So, for example, if we take 'Good vs Evil' as our binary opposites, we end up with a binary opposite that can drive our story forward. Our overall story is going to show the fight between good forces and evil ones. A binary opposite of 'Success vs Failure' is another classic set of binary opposites that we see in a whole range of films.

Task: Choose a film or TV show that you have been wanting to watch for ages and watch it! As you watch the media text, try to write down what you feel are the binary opposites within the film / show. Note: There are often several binary opposites in media texts, so don't worry if you end up with a long list!

Week 3 continued

Binary opposites create conflict, and without conflict, a script will not work. Each scene should have conflict within it. If your main character has a goal (let's take Stephen from my question sheet for example) and there was no conflict, he would end up getting a girlfriend in the first scene, and the story would be over right away. We have to create conflict, so my binary opposite would be 'Stephen wants a girlfriend vs Stephen's vampire obsession'. The two ideas cannot coexist, and so this creates a story for us to watch and enjoy. The binary opposite creates a problem for Stephen to overcome which in turn creates scenes for us to watch. This is a very complex idea, so if you don't understand it right away, try to think of it like this: If your character doesn't have a problem to overcome, then you don't have much of a story!

Task: Try to write some binary opposites for your own character to overcome. List at least three of them, then write ways that your character might try to resolve these binary opposites. So, for example in my "Stephen wants a girlfriend vs Stephen is obsessed with vampires" binary opposite, I could show Stephen trying to overcome his vampire issue by studying 'normal' people and going shopping for 'normal' clothes.

Disclaimer: I know that vampires are 'normal' people too and that in actual fact there is no such thing as a 'normal person'. I just couldn't think of a better way to put it!

Once your idea is in place, it's time to actually write your script. In media studies we write 5 page scripts for our coursework before filming them and making them come to life. Exactly how we write scripts can be a little complicated to begin with however.

Task: Watch this excellent video on how to format a screenplay - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZszextv6yE>

Hint: You need to write your script in the present tense. It should be set to size 12 font and should be in a font called 'Courier New'. You can only write what is visible for the audience to see, so you could not write about what your character is thinking or feeling, but you could write what they look like they are feeling (For example - 'Stephen looks sad' is perfectly acceptable whereas "Stephen feels sad" is not. It seems picky, but these are the rules!)

Using your character and your binary opposite list, try to write a scene with your main character in it that shows them trying to overcome a problem caused by the binary opposite. Note: This is a very difficult task, do not be put off if you find it very difficult to begin with!

Task: Write another scene! Now that you have your first one written, see if you can write another. If you get that one done and find that you are enjoying the process, why not carry on?

Week 4 Task: Representations within the media

A large part of what we do in media studies revolves around the analysis of media texts. A media text is anything that we choose to study at in the classroom, so we would consider everything from a movie poster, a video game extract or even a full film to be a media text. One of the key things that we analyse within media texts are the representations that exist within them.

While the idea of representation is a broad subject for study, it is often helpful to simplify it, and we can do this by breaking down the word 'Representation' into two words; 'Re-Presentation'. To put it simply, we study the ways one group of people are being shown to us by a different group of people - the media.

Our media often shows us very simplified versions of people, and we call these simplified representations 'Stereotypes'.



Week 4 continued

Task: Draw and label the following. (Don't worry if you can't draw, this is not the point of the task!)

- 1. A doctor**
- 2. A gamer**
- 3. A cleaner**
- 4. A French person**
- 5. An American person**

It is entirely possible that you have just drawn stereotypical representations of these people that may have very little basis in fact.

Look back over your picture. Is your doctor male? Do they have a white or blue lab coat on? Do they have stethoscope or a head lamp or a needle in their possession? If so, this is a stereotype.

Is your gamer male? Overweight? Unpopular? Young? Unattractive and unsuccessful? If so, you have again created a stereotype, and actually this is an inaccurate stereotype (Recent studies have shown that more females than males play video games these days, and their ages are well over 30 years old!).

We can recognise stereotypes through their simplicity. Media theorist Stuart Hall states that 'Stereotypes reduce people to nothing more than a few codes' and he is generally correct. Going back to your drawings, this is likely exactly what you did. If you drew your French person wearing a striped top, this is a code. If your American person was waving an American flag, this would also be a code! Codes are just features of stereotypes.

Stereotyping can be quite harmful, especially when we consider that Hall goes on to say 'stereotypes tend to exist where there are inequalities of power', which means that usually it is people who have no power in society that are turned into stereotypes.

Task – Watch the trailer for the documentary Miss Representation - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keVhWR9esmA>

Make a list of the representations and the stereotypes of women that we tend to see in society. Also try to answer the following questions.

- 1. How many hours a day do American teenagers consume media for?**
- 2. What percentage of 'Clout positions' (which means positions of power) do women hold in entertainment, publishing and advertising?**
- 3. What percentage of writers, directors, editors and producers in Hollywood are women?**

Write a paragraph about what this potentially tells us about women's power in society and about how this might impact the way they are shown (or represented) in our media.

As a media student you will examine the media through the ages which means that not only do you look at modern media, but you must analyse some older media texts too. This is largely because of the work of media theorists like Liesbet Van Zoonen who says that the way our media represents people changes with the times.

As media students, it is up to us to test whether she is right or not.

Task: Examine the following advert for Tide detergent from 1955 - <https://bit.ly/2VXMwZX>

Use actual examples from the poster to explain how women are being represented in the poster. Research other adverts from the 1950s (like this one <https://bit.ly/2StHWR5> and this one <https://bit.ly/2KYIefq>) to see if you can give an overall summary of how women were represented in the 1950s.

Suggest reasons as to why you think women were shown this way in the media.

While it was certainly true that the representations of women in the 1950s was different to how we see women represented today, we have to explore if the same ideas around sexism exist in today's media.



Task: Watch this 2016 ad for Clorox detergent. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8NbiVo-07g>
Try to decide whether the roles of women have changed or whether the representations similar to the ones seen in the 1950s.

Research Task: Explore the media as a whole. Spend some time watching music videos, film trailers, TV show scenes, video game scenes. Are the representations of women the same as the ones in the Tide and Clorox ad? Are women seen as care givers? Sexual objects? Weaker than men? Powerless? Why do you think this might be?

Can you find any exceptions that show women as strong?

As media students we explore our world through the window of our media. We can learn a lot about the way society works through examining the media that we create, which is one of the reasons why I personally love teaching media studies so much. After looking at the media in today's tasks, what can you gather about society's views on the female gender?

Write 200 word summary of your findings.

Reading list

Wjec / Eduqas Media Studies for A level year 1 and AS (Bell and Johnson) - <https://bit.ly/35xpxrJ>

Media Theory for A Level: The Essential Revision Guide (Dixon) - <https://amzn.to/3faWNtc>

Screenplay: Foundations of Screen Writing - <https://amzn.to/3dfvufK>

Miss Representation (2011, Newsome)

How Documentaries Lie to You. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jelo4bliA1Y>

Straight Outta Compton (Gray, 2015)

I, Daniel Blake (Loach, 2016)

