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(Mis)representation at the movies: film, pedagogy, and postcolonial theory in the secondary English classroom

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**(Mis)representation at the movies:
Film, pedagogy, and postcolonial theory in the secondary English classroom**

by

Lucas Alan Rodewald

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Overarching Research Questions.....	4
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	5
CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL COMMENTARY	18
CHAPTER 4 THE ADVENTURES OF TEACHING <i>INDIANA JONES</i> IN THE WORLD OF THE OTHER.....	22
CHAPTER 5 THE (WHITE) KING OF THE WORLD: PEDAGOGY, IMPERIALISM, AND POSTCOLONIAL (MIS)REPRESENTATION IN JAMES CAMERON’S <i>AVATAR</i>	35
CHAPTER 6 CURRICULUM DESIGN	49
Curriculum Narrative.....	49
Demographic Study	53
Instructional Commentary	54
Minnesota State Standards.....	58
Unit Objectives	59
CHAPTER 7 LESSON PLANS.....	60
Lesson Plan 1	60
Introductory Film Analysis Checklist (1.1)	64
Introduction to Film Analysis Review Questions (1.2)	66
Lesson Plan 2	67
Mise-en-Scène Assignment (2.1).....	71
Lesson Plan 3	72
Mise-en-Scène Analysis Checklist (3.1).....	76
Lesson Plan 4	78
Cinematography Analysis Checklist (4.1)	82
Cinematography Assignment	84

Lesson Plan 5	85
Editing Analysis Checklist (5.1)	88
Editing Assignment (5.2)	90
Glossary (Student Copy)	92
Glossary (Instructor Copy)	95
Lesson Plan 6	100
Lesson Plan 7	104
<i>Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom</i> Viewing Guide (7.1)	107
Lesson Plan 8	108
<i>Raiders of the Lost Ark</i> Viewing Guide (8.1)	112
<i>Orientalism</i> Assignment (8.2)	113
Lesson Plan 9	114
<i>Avatar</i> Viewing Guide (9.1)	117
Lesson Plan 10	118
<i>Avatar</i> and Environmental Justice Assignment (10.1)	121
Unit Culminating Assessment Directions	122
 CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION	 124
Analysis of Research Questions	124
 THESIS BIBLIOGRAPHY	 126
 CURRICULUM UNIT BIBLIOGRAPHY	 133

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the potential role of film study in the secondary English and Language Arts classroom. Highlighting the frustrated current pedagogical relationship between most secondary instructors and film, it seeks to provide educators with resources to assist them in weaving motion pictures into their classrooms. Specifically, it describes using film to teach secondary students fundamental concepts of postcolonial critical theory. As a result, the thesis addresses three overarching questions: 1) To what extent can the study of film serve as a pedagogical tool in the secondary English classroom? 2) What strategies and concepts can instructors use to make the study of film in their classrooms a reality? 3) How can the study of film be used as a means of postcolonial theory? Three films comprise the thesis's central focus: Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009).

By focusing on the medium's ability to develop visual literacy skills—stressed by both NCTE and IRA as vital for students in the twenty-first century—the thesis provides ways that film can serve as a rich topic of analysis that both challenges and engages students. In addition, it focuses specific attention on using films to help students visualize and connect with postcolonial critical theory. The three films selected for examination in both the critical essays and the corresponding curricular design, in particular, embody and represent several areas of focus common to postcolonial analysis. A comprehensive literature review of film pedagogy and two critical essays on the selected films are paired with a curricular design consisting of ten lesson plans, complete with handouts, assessments, and instructional notes for educators to use in their own classrooms. Combined, these artifacts provide cogent arguments that film both can and should be included in the secondary curriculum as it links students' inherent interest in multimedia content with the essential analytical and critical thinking skills that make up the heart of every English classroom.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“I believe that the motion picture is destined to revolutionize our education system and that in a few years it will supplant largely, if not entirely, the use of textbooks.... The education of the future, as I see it, will be conducted through the medium of the motion picture.”

— Thomas Edison, 1922

“It is an acknowledged task of schools to assist the young in how to interpret the symbols of their culture.”

— Neil Postman, 1985

Nearly a century ago, Thomas Edison speculated about the impact film could have in the classroom. Recognizing its potential to be both an engaging and valuable object of study, he envisioned an educational landscape wherein teacher and student deconstructed and learned in tandem from the world’s most popular medium of entertainment. In the decades following this prediction, however, the anticipated integration of film into the literary curriculum progressed at a relatively glacial rate. Despite technological developments over the past fifty years making film more accessible for educational purposes, the motion picture remains an often overlooked, misused pedagogical resource for most instructors. As Goble notes, “Students report that high school and middle school teachers often use the ‘read the book, watch the movie’ method of teaching film,” an exercise that reaps minimal educational benefits, as well as low degrees of student interest (28). The medium’s potential is further limited by a common reputation among educators and administrators that diminishes its pedagogical value. Vetrie remarks, “[These educators] believe film is simply entertainment that is unsuitable for educational purposes, and think students should only be reading in a language arts classroom, not watching movies” (40).

Such a dismissal is surprising—perhaps even foolish—when it can be argued that, in some sense, film has never been more prevalent than it is currently. The past year’s box office totals shattered previous records, with ticket sales climbing higher than ten billion dollars in the United States alone. With the sudden rise of streaming services over the past decade, such as Netflix, HBO Now, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, viewers are exposed and have access to films and television programs instantly. Smart phones, tablets, and other mobile devices supporting these services have further strengthened the tie between viewer and medium, allowing content to be

played and absorbed virtually anywhere. As a result, our students are watching—and they are watching a lot. In recent years, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Literacy Association (ILA) have recognized the increasing importance of training students in the areas of digital and media literacy, and have stressed the specific need for the instruction in interpreting and analyzing film:

Being literate in contemporary society means being active, critical, and creative users not only of print and spoken language but also of the visual language of film and television, commercial and political advertising, photography, and more. Teaching students how to interpret and create visual texts...is another essential component of the English language arts curriculum. (“Standards for the English Language Arts” 5)

This objective, however, remains elusive for many educators, hesitant to bring film into their classrooms because of their own inexperience with the medium, or skeptical about how its study will seamlessly coincide with other learning objectives in their curriculum. As Lee and Winzenried observe, “Teachers were—and still are—the gatekeepers to what technology is used in the classroom.... Unless the teachers believe the technology will enhance the students’ education, feel comfortable using the technology, and are able to use the technology as an integral part of their everyday teaching, they will generally not use it” (10-11).

As a result, and with recent advances in technology making the study of film more practical and practicable than ever before, the responsibility falls on educators’ shoulders to incorporate this content into their classroom. The successful and meaningful inclusion of film in the secondary English and Language Arts curriculum, specifically, is the objective of this thesis project. In addition to the standards developed by the NCTE and ILA calling for the instruction of media literacy, others have noted the importance of weaving artifacts from popular culture—including film—into the secondary classroom. Giroux and Simon posit, “Educators who refuse to acknowledge popular culture as a significant basis of knowledge often devalue students by refusing to work with the knowledge that students actually have, and so eliminate the possibility of developing a pedagogy that links school knowledge to the differing subject relations that help to constitute their everyday lives” (3). As Marcus articulates, too, “Just because the ‘vocabulary’ of film is audio-visual rather than print-based doesn’t make movies less of a human statement of meaning with social, cultural, and political messages open to interpretation and interrogation”

(7). A goal of any English teacher is to empower their students with the ability to think critically about the world around them. But if the English and Language Arts classroom will truly serve as a place where media and digital literacy skills are cultivated, then incorporating film into the curriculum becomes a necessity. By providing students with the opportunity to deconstruct and analyze the stories, images, and perspectives they encounter on a daily basis outside of school, students will not only be engaged and invested in their work, but will also develop applicable, relevant skills able to be put into practice immediately after they leave the classroom.

In short, this thesis offers a rationale for the inclusion of recent, popular film into the secondary literary curriculum. In addition to addressing practical concerns from educators—i.e. how to actually “teach” a film, along with other issues that may arise from movie screenings for instructional purposes—it underscores the valuable lessons and concepts the medium offers as well. Specifically, it advocates for using film to help students understand the fundamentals of postcolonial critical theory with a curricular unit constructed around films from Steven Spielberg’s *Indiana Jones* franchise (1981-2008), as well as James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009). Drawing and expanding on the research of previous scholarship pairing critical theory, film, and literature cohesively, it makes the case that recent, popular film can serve as much more than an engaging spectacle for students to consume: it can also be a fruitful instructional tool to help them envision otherwise complicated theoretical underpinnings. Hobbs, author of *Reading the Media: Media Literacy in High School English*, remarks, “The use of digital media and popular culture texts not only stimulates young people’s engagement, motivation, and interest in learning, but enables them to build a richer, more nuanced understanding of how texts of all kinds work within a culture” (7). Such an outcome is desired by all English teachers when they plan their semester and unit objectives months before the year’s first class period. Film is one tool that can make this goal a reality. Thus, utilizing film and regarding it as an object worthy of serious study in the secondary classroom allows students to become more perceptive observers of the images and ideas they are bombarded with on a daily basis. Film is a pedagogical resource filled with untapped potential to be both an engaging topic of study, and a “text” ripe with concepts and ideas critical for students to consider in the ever-increasing digital world around them.

Overarching Research Questions

The following research questions serve as the foundation and focus for this thesis project.

- 1) *To what extent can the study of film serve as a pedagogical tool in the secondary English classroom?*
- 2) *What strategies and concepts can instructors use to make the study of film in their classrooms a reality?*
- 3) *How can the study of film be used as a means of teaching postcolonial theory?*

A brief theoretical underpinning for the project is verbalized by Steinberg: “I maintain that if pedagogy involves issues of knowledge production and transmission, the shaping of values, and the construction of subjectivity, then popular culture is the most powerful pedagogy force in contemporary America” (82). This project embraces such an ideology, as one of the primary goals of the unit is for students to become more perceptive observers of popular culture texts, and for them to think carefully about representations of individuals from different cultures found in recent films, television series, and other areas of everyday life. It is my hope that this unit prompts current educators to rethink their current opinions of film and its instructional value and that the ideas, suggestions, lesson plans, activities, and assessment methods found in this curricular design assist them in weaving the medium into their own classrooms as well.

This project opens with a literature review that examines existing scholarship and research on film and literary pedagogy. A brief case for the teaching of postcolonial theory, specifically, in the secondary English classroom follows this review. Two critical essays on Steven Spielberg’s landmark *Indiana Jones* franchise (1981-2008) and James Cameron’s runaway blockbuster *Avatar* (2009) are included, demonstrating the pedagogical merit of using such texts to teach postcolonial theory. Finally, an extended appendix includes a curricular design featuring twenty lesson plans, handouts, and commentary on assessment, instructional methods, and interdisciplinary connections.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Film in the Secondary English Classroom

A comprehensive review of current scholarship on the relationship between film and pedagogy serves two purposes. First, it reveals the current status of film in the secondary classroom: an often misused and overlooked resource commonly deployed for uninspiring or purposeless activities, or treated as a “reward” of sorts for students at the end of a unit or during the week preceding a scheduled school holiday. This thesis project recognizes the frustrated present standing and misperception of film’s limited educational role and seeks to dispel this myth by providing instructors with ideas and resources to weave this content into their curriculums more purposefully and successfully. The second objective of this literature review is to examine existing scholarship advocating for the inclusion of film in the secondary curriculum. Such works influence and provide credibility to the ideas and concepts posited in this thesis project and curriculum design, and further attest that the medium has the potential to aid instructors in preparing students for the digital world outside their classrooms. In short, this section demonstrates the extent to which film can serve as a valuable instructional tool in the secondary English classroom.

The Instructional History and Current Status of Film in the Classroom

The instructional incorporation of major technological developments over the past century is examined in Lee and Winzenried’s comprehensive monograph, *The Use of Instructional Technology in Schools: Lessons to Be Learned*. They trace the progression (or lack thereof) of modern technology in the classroom, including film, radio, television, computers, and even recent tools such as interactive white boards, in an attempt to explore the reasons why teachers have embraced some forms and rejected others. Underscoring the importance of bringing digital and media content into the curriculum, they note, “Kids lead high-tech lives outside school and decidedly low-tech lives inside school This new ‘digital divide’ is making the activities inside school appear to have less real world relevance to students” (4). The use of digital content, they argue, “can enrich the teaching, make the learning more relevant, engage all manner of students, individualize much of the teaching, enhance the efficiency of the teaching, open new, unexplored worlds, reduce teachers’ workload, and when successfully used ... can

assist to enhance national productivity in knowledge-based economics” (5). Yet while certain technologies have blossomed as instructional resources in recent years, film has struggled to become an integral part of the twenty-first century secondary classroom. The advent of DVDs made film more accessible and practical to integrate into curriculums, eliminating the need for bulky and expensive projectors, and allowing teachers to pause and move throughout the film with greater ease than traditional videocassettes. Despite these advances, Lee and Winzenried remark that its use remains primarily banal and purposeless: “Film is used in many schools as an entertainment tool. Many rainy lunchtimes or a late Friday afternoon lesson were given over to watching a film.... The pattern of teacher use was still akin to the old days...a supplement to their teaching” (46, 161). This practice, they argue, neither engages learners nor yields any significant educational benefits, leaving the viewing experience inconsequential and ultimately irrelevant for students.

Lipiner, in his 2011 article “Lights, Camera, Lesson: Teaching Literacy Through Film,” similarly notes this common mishandling of film in schools: “In many cases, film is not viewed as an instructional main course but as dessert. Poorly developed practices that use film as a reward or reinforcement tool cultivate a suspicious attitude toward ‘fluffy’ uses of moving images in the classroom—an attitude shared by many teachers and administrators” (376). Hobbs, too, has explored the ineffective use of film pedagogy in her 2006 article, “Non-Optimal Uses of Video in the Classroom.” She details a study conducted with over 130 middle and secondary school teachers, which found that “the practices of using [film] as a substitute teacher or time-filler are so common that they have become normalized by routine practice and are considered ordinary and appropriate” (35). This perspective, as Vetrie argues in “Using Film to Increase Literacy Skills,” leads to the medium being ignored as a “serious” object of study, causing it to be regarded instead as “unsuitable for educational purposes” (Vetrie 40). In other words, some—perhaps most—educators fail to purposefully include film in their curriculum, in part, because they are so used to seeing it as something other than a valuable educational tool. Such a dismissal is clearly outdated, considering the overwhelming exposure students have to film and other digital mediums today, a sentiment Muller also underscores in her article, “Film as Film: Using Movies to Help Students Visualize Literary Theory.” She states,

Some educators insist that the English classroom is a stronghold in a war against impending technology. Its fortress, founded on the works of men such as Samuel

Johnson, protects the classics and rewards traditional reading and writing skills. Yet, regardless of what we teach in the English classroom, or how fervent our passion for printed texts, students are inherently more interested in multimedia than traditional printed texts. (32)

Muller's point underscores the importance of considering students' intrinsic interests when planning curricular units. By providing students the opportunity to examine texts and content they are drawn to naturally outside the classroom—such as film—educators can both engage learners and make their objectives and lessons appear more meaningful than those focused on traditional literary texts. Yet this notion has remained largely unfulfilled due to a widespread stigma in education that film, ultimately, is not a worthy topic of study.

This narrow perception of what can and should be taught in the secondary English classroom is found in many schools across the country (Goble 32). The possibility of studying film within its curriculum remains insignificant in the eyes of most administrators and educators, skeptical of the medium's potential to serve as anything more than an entertaining break from the traditional routine of literary studies. This dismissive opinion extends beyond a school-to-school basis, and impacts attitudes toward the film studies discipline as a whole. Fischer and Petro articulate the result of this ignorance—the overlooked, underrated nature of film's educational role—in their introduction to 2012's *Teaching Film*. Purposefully entitled "Memories of Underdevelopment," their preface acknowledges the dismissal and lack of recognition film studies have received by most areas of academia, stating that, as a result, it often "fall[s] between the cracks" (3). They draw attention to the fact that for those instructors who *do* desire to weave film into their classrooms, there are very few resources and services available to make such a goal possible: "Despite scholarly advances in the field and the improved access to the materials initiated by the birth of video, DVD, and the Internet, film teachers and researchers are still pioneers—in the best and worst senses of that term" (6). Such an absence of resources obstructs instructors from envisioning pedagogy systems that pair film and traditional literary texts concurrently in their curriculums.

Film and Media Literacy

The question arises, then: of what does the general absence of cinema in the pedagogical landscape deprive students? And inversely, what can be gained from its *inclusion* in this

landscape? This thesis argues that the purposeful incorporation of film in the English and Language Arts classroom yields a myriad of benefits for students. One obvious quality is a likely increase in student motivation and interest in learning. Because students can easily see the immediate relevance of analyzing or deconstructing a recent, popular film, for example, their level of engagement will naturally increase. Reflecting this idea, Marcus, Metzger, Paxton, and Stoddard provide a compelling case for film's place in secondary classrooms in their monograph *Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies*. Although aimed primarily at history instructors, many of their ideas and arguments are easily transferable to the English classroom. Of film's role in pedagogy, they assert, "Films have the potential to lift students to a higher level of inquiry. Young people get more excited about lessons using popular media than about instruction only using official school materials such as textbooks, primary documents, or worksheets" (5). Hobbs has likewise argued for the incorporation of film and content from popular culture into secondary classrooms because they are naturally engaging topics for students to examine. In her overview of alternative English and Language Arts courses, *Reading the Media: Media Literacy in High School English*, she emphasizes the importance for providing students with opportunities to develop analytical skills necessary for deconstructing the media-driven digital world around them: "Growing up in such a culture, our students are hungry for serious discussion about what they experience via the mass media; as a result, when media content becomes classroom subject matter, students' discussion and writing are not tentative" (6).

The NCTE and ILA have officially recognized the growing need for media literacy instruction in recent years. Standard Six of the most recent Standards of the English Language Arts, in particular, issues a call to action for teachers to include content in their curriculum that allows for such skills to be cultivated: "Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts" ("Standards for the English Language Arts" 26). Expanding on this standard, NCTE makes it clear that the opportunity to critique and analyze digital and multimedia texts in the English classroom is "crucial not only for students in the process of developing their skills as, say, storytellers...[it is] also essential for a deeper understanding of our culture" (27). In other words, the opportunity to evaluate such material allows students to become better, more informed "readers" of culture and society. However, as Stoddard notes,

because students are so familiar with and surrounded by multimedia content, many educators make the mistake of assuming that young people are, accordingly, also media *literate*. Though a great number of adolescents are, indeed, savvy consumers of media, they do not necessarily evaluate or reflect on what they consume and how it influences their understanding of issues in contemporary society. He further asserts that this shift in the way young people access, consume, and produce media without the reflective habits of mind that are key to critical media literacy makes the case for a renewed focus on teaching both with and about film (Stoddard 221).

Central to the study of film and media literacy is the idea of developing students' critical thinking abilities. This concept is broadly defined across academia, with scholars like Andrews noting its close relationship to the act of argumentation and understanding rhetoric (49). Others, such as Hamby, equate critical thinking with "critical inquiry," the process of "carefully examining an issue in order to reach a reasoned judgment" (77). For the purposes of this thesis project, however, the definition most applicable is put forth by Ennis, who asserts: "critical thinking is reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (32). He notes that ideal critical thinkers can perform a variety of cognizant tasks, including the ability to make and judge value judgment, attribute and evaluate unstated assumptions, and interrogate arguments and images from a variety of media (33). Such skills lend themselves naturally to the English curriculum, and are certainly able to be fostered by the study of film, too.

Consequently, if today's English classroom will truly serve as an environment where students become equipped with skills making them more critical observers in their everyday lives, it is imperative that the curriculum includes visual, digital, and popular culture "texts," including film. Certainly, they are just as worthy subjects for critical analysis as traditional, printed works of classical and contemporary literature. Utilizing technology and popular culture allows educators to motivate students to learn within an environment they are both familiar and comfortable with. As Lipiner argues, "We must therefore accept the fact that literacy exists in other forms than simple print: in moving images and within the hypertexts of the digital world, to name only a few" (375). Hobbs similarly echoes this idea, and argues that the benefits for students extend beyond merely a more confident stance in analyzing films: "A media literacy approach to language arts can awaken and inspire students, challenging them to invest the energy and commitment it takes for active development of print literacy skills to occur" (142).

Therefore, exposure to multimedia texts can help students strengthen academic abilities across the curriculum, while engaging them throughout the experience.

Film and Student Engagement

Lipiner also acknowledges the high level of student interest in and academic benefits from studying popular culture texts when incorporated purposefully. Referencing the successful results of secondary classrooms that have woven film and other multimedia content into their courses, he remarks, “This approach to teaching literature and literacy engaged and motivated the students...by encompassing both written and visual representation of texts. Their simultaneous learning of film and print-based texts enabled them to develop critical literacy skills” (392). Instructional approaches that engross students with relevant texts alongside authentic, critical inquiry activities will assist them in strengthening critical thinking and communication skills—abilities necessary for interacting with the digital and media-driven world in which they live. In short, by harnessing students’ inherent interests in multimedia and film, teachers can provide a rich learning environment that affords learners greater possibilities of success both in school and beyond. This philosophy provides the backbone for this thesis project, which aims to capitalize on students’ inherent interest in popular films, guide them through a fruitful analysis of them, and increase their understanding of literary analysis and theory in the process.

At its most fundamental level, the study of film assists students in viewing motion pictures and television from a more critical standpoint. Costanzo observes in 2004’s *Great Films and How to Teach Them*, “Through film more than books, students today discover the importance of close viewing, or watching a movie several times in order to understand how it works” (x). However, several scholars have also noted that teaching film helps students develop digital literacy skills that are also transferable to their study of printed texts, thereby making them also better readers of classical and contemporary works of literature. Vetrie argues, for instance, “Students who gain experience in listening, speaking, and writing through interaction with film begin to radically improve their reading and writing proficiency” (42). Brown, in her groundbreaking *Teaching Literary Theory Using Film Adaptations*, acknowledges that most secondary students’ reading is currently limited to school assignments, the occasional bestseller, or informational texts connected to hobbies or personal interests. By and large, however, their

experiences with “stories” come through film and television (9). As a result, although students are perhaps familiar with the basic tenets of literary analysis, they typically have more opportunity in life to practice such critical thinking with film rather than traditional written texts.

Golden similarly observes the disconnect between students’ hesitancy to read and discuss printed texts with their confidence to work with digital or multimedia content in *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom*: “Kids tend to be visually oriented, able to point out every significant image in a three-minute MTV music video, but when it comes to doing the same with a written text, they stare at it as if they are reading German” (xiii). The fact is that many students can be intimidated by their reading and writing assignments. Brown posits that, at the heart of this intimidation “is often the seemingly inaccessible primary source. However, when this text is presented as part of an intertextual web that includes film...and when students can begin to compare and contrast what they have read with what they have seen and heard, classroom frustration does markedly dissipate” (11-12). Smilanich and Lafreniere similarly underscore the potential value film holds especially for teaching struggling or unmotivated learners: “Film offers an immediacy and accessibility that the printed text frequently does not. Students who are intimidated by, or impeded from, accessing print texts are able to discuss films with acuity and insight” (604). Therefore, analyzing and critiquing films helps open up the possibilities of students mastering the analysis and critique of printed texts. They suggest that “by understanding how filmmakers choose to compose a shot, students seem better able to understand that authors of a printed text choose certain words or images that have connotative meaning” (605). This thesis project builds on this pedagogy by weaving film and written text together in a multidisciplinary curriculum unit aimed at teaching students the basics of postcolonial literary theory.

Additional Instructional Benefits of Teaching Film

Identity and Representation in Popular Culture

Benefits encouraged by the study of film are constructive for students in areas of academic study beyond the English classroom. In addition to critical thinking skills, Russell has noted that decision-making abilities are also sharpened by analyzing films, especially when they contain controversial social issues relevant to today’s society (2). His 2009 anthology, *Teaching Social Issues with Film*, also argues that film allows students to become closer to a topic of study

than other media allows (1). Likewise, Marcus and Metzger assert that films allow students to develop empathy for cultures and perspectives unfamiliar to them: “Films can be used to help students care for others, and especially groups of people who are often marginalized in history, in the hopes that it will affect their decision making and relationships with people in the present and future” (29). Finally, Hobbs observes that enrollment in courses emphasizing media literacy skills “led to significant increase[s] in students’ civic engagement” (111). Such an outcome—students acquiring a more thoughtful and observant perspective of the larger world around them than they previously held—surely attests to the merit of teaching content, such as film, that allows this to occur.

Obviously, one of the goals of teaching film is to make students view movies not just as pure entertainment, but also as historical accounts, cultural artifacts, and interpretations to be examined, questioned, and discussed. As Marcus, Metzger, Paxton, and Stoddard emphasize, developing students’ abilities to think critically about film is “crucial because movies have the potential to be a powerful influence on young people, considering how many they watch as a part of youth popular culture. Therefore, training students to critique the messages in films and think for themselves is vitally important and part of...film literacy” (115). Particularly, film studies may serve as a means of helping students consider representations of marginalized people and cultures in popular movies, television series, and other forms of media they consume every day. Salazar defines representation as, essentially, a “presentation drawn up not by depicting the object as it *is* but by re-presenting it or constructing it in a *new* form or environment” (172, emphasis added). Representation, in other words, is a process through which meanings, associations, and values are socially constructed and reinforced by a culture’s people. Said, one of the pioneers of postcolonial theory, argues that, often times, there are no individual aspects taken into account with cultural representations—non-Western cultures, in particular, are habitually represented as a homogenous mass (4). Typically, such generalizations lead to crude, inaccurate stereotypes and assumptions made about differing cultures, resulting in a dichotomized relationship wherein one culture dominates or governs the other. Salazar further articulates that not only do cultural representations help form the images people have of others, but if they are assimilated *by* those others, they help form the images they have of themselves as well (172). Therefore, as Hobbs asserts, the study of “representation matters because adolescents benefit from understanding how the images, stories, and patterns of identity are presented to

them as ‘natural’ through TV comedy and drama” (74). Accordingly, incorporating texts that allow students to examine the cultural (mis)representations they see consistently in the world today also provides them with an opportunity to discuss, critique, and deconstruct such images.

Critical and Literary Theory

Images of identity and representation are often intentionally composed, written, framed, cropped, and created by individuals who are also involved in constructing a message for a specific purpose. As a result, these multimedia messages represent authentic aspects of students’ lived experiences and reproduce many of the informational cues they make use of in their perception of physical and social reality. Goldfarb asserts in *Visual Pedagogy: Media Culture in and Beyond the Classroom* that, at their core, “media representations reaffirm our understanding of social reality” (60). Since many films both draw on and *shape* common stereotypes of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, it is important for students to understand their significance in order to become more astute observers in future encounters with works of popular culture. Brown has previously explored teaching critical theories—including psychoanalytic and thematic—via film, and has noted the success the medium provides at making challenging concepts more accessible. She observes that students who struggle when facing an essay arguing a theoretical reading of text become more comfortable when they are shown a film version exercising the same type of critical lens (13). Likewise, Muller has used film versions of *Moby Dick* to teach students the fundamentals of deconstructionism, finding that this method allows students to better understand the principles of its theoretical foundations.

Weaving film into the secondary curriculum provides students with a chance to break down and examine these everyday images and messages—a concept central to this thesis project. Costanzo remarks that English and Language Arts classrooms can serve as environments where “movies can be ‘read’ and re-read alongside other forms of storytelling as mirrors of our culture, chronicles of our history, and influential shapers of our daily lives” (x). Similarly, Grieco remarks that allowing students to reflect on the power of the concept of representation helps them recognize how their own identity is situated within a network of power relationships (Hobbs 83). In “Film Across the Curriculum: Teaching Subject Matter as Text,” Wexman makes a similar argument for instructing students to consider and challenge the binding social constructs that permeate so much of the popular culture they participate in. As a result, she suggests that “rather than blindly following a tradition presented as unified and authoritative,

they will then be in a position to forge their own paths through the varied and conflicting traditions that make up modern culture” (Wexman 105). Certainly, such an outcome resonates with secondary educators as they prepare students to enter the post-high-school world beyond their classrooms. Bringing relevant, engaging cinematic texts can make this goal a reality, and assist students in becoming more astute consumers of and participants in American popular culture.

Practical Concerns of Teaching Film

Although it is clear that the benefits to studying film in the secondary classroom are significant, many instructors remain hesitant to work with the medium because of their own uncertainty regarding *how* to successfully bring it into the curriculum. Existing scholarship presents a variety of strategies to make such incorporation possible. For example, Golden’s curricular examples feature “viewing days,” where film screening accounts for roughly twenty-five minutes of classtime, with students taking notes concurrently, and the remainder of the period devoted to discussion or reviewing particular key scenes (97). At such a pace, most films would span approximately four to five class periods, a reasonable pace that allows the movie to become a significant, but not all-consuming, curricular text. Others, such as Corrigan in *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, advocate more extensive time allotted to viewing, including whole class periods (6). A third possibility involves ensuring the film’s availability online for students to access outside of the classroom. Muller, however, makes a convincing argument that, regardless of the overall time dedicated for in-class screenings, instructors should avoid frequent interruptions or stoppages as they disrupt the film’s narrative: “the problem with frequent ‘stop and go’ showings [are] that [they] create an extremely “jarring” viewing experience. There is little opportunity to get a sense of the story’s ‘flow’” (38). Regardless of daily format, instructors must create a viewing schedule that balances students’ need to have a somewhat genuine cinematic experience with the instructional need to point out and discuss significant details.

Across the board, however, film pedagogy advocates underscore the importance of articulating a clear purpose for viewing and studying films. Stoddard asserts, “When intentions [of why the student is watching a film] are unclear, the educational premise...can suffer. Students may end up watching the film simply for its entertainment value, unaware of how to connect it to anything else they are learning” (18). Marcus and Stoddard emphasize the need for

students to have an objective for the viewing period: “data collection instruments—graphic organizers, a list of ideas or questions to consider, or other methods” can be used to help students focus on the aspects of the film that align with instructional goals (20). Such devices ensure that students will not become lost in the film’s story alone, and subsequently ignore the cinematic techniques at work to create the images in front of them. Corrigan similarly advises students to record elements of the movie that strike them as repeated to emphasize a point or a perception (21).

For instructors who are hesitant to teach film because of their own inexperience with the medium, Stoddard offers reassuring advice that such fears are relatively inconsequential for its successful incorporation into their curriculum: “Although it is helpful for teachers to understand how lighting, camera angles, and other production techniques are used to tell a story and promote particular perspectives, what is more important is [their] consistent emphasis that a film represents a particular view on an event or issue” (222). Accordingly, instructors need not fret if their exposure to film or its technical elements has been relatively minimal; their understanding and experience with teaching traditional literary texts provides them with an already sturdy base on which to foster meaningful discussion of film and television.

However, most scholars do recommend a brief unit introducing students to the basics of film study in order to help them reach deeper levels of inquiry later in the unit. Golden provides a variety of lesson activities to teach students fundamental shot types and cinematographic concepts, several of which are utilized in this curriculum design (6-26). These beginning activities involve teaching selected film clips rather than entire movies, as they provide easy, digestible excerpts to familiarize students with the essentials: lighting, sound, camera movement, angles, and editing. Throughout such a unit, Golden underscores, it is important for instructors to encourage students to interrogate key scenes and think deeply about their construction: “When you watch any film clip, it is important that you do not allow the students to simply say, ‘I saw a long shot,’ or ‘That was non-diegetic sound.’ The film terms themselves mean nothing once they are removed from their effects. Instead, students must be encouraged to say, ‘I saw a low-angle shot that demonstrates _____’” (26). From this platform, students can embark on more significant discussions of the larger thematic issues prompted by the film.

Corrigan provides a convincing list of reasons for allocating significant time for students to write about the films they study: “It can help them understand [their] own response to a movie

better...make comparisons and contrasts between one movie and others, as a way of understanding them better; make connections between a movie and other areas of culture in order to illuminate both the culture and the movie it produces” (6). Costanzo’s monograph also includes valuable activities and project ideas for instructors to consult, all of which challenge students to create meaning and think critically about the ideas and topics each film presents (119). A well-constructed curriculum design would therefore include additional activities and assessment methods that not only evaluate student’s media literacy skills, but also challenge them to think critically about the film’s content and respond with writing.

Several practical concerns may arise for instructors attempting to bring film into their classrooms. Teachers need to be prepared to justify film-based instruction in terms of academic standards and may also need to provide parents or legal guardians with a rationale for its inclusion too. Golden acknowledges that instructors will “want to have a purpose in mind whenever [they] get that call from a parent whose child has said that all [they] do is watch movies in class” (96). The NCTE and ILA have presented a persuasive response to such skepticism:

Teaching students how to interpret and create visual texts such as illustrations, charts, graphs, electronic displays, photo- graphs, film, and video is another essential component of the English language arts curriculum. Visual communication is part of the fabric of contemporary life. Although many parents and teachers worry that television, film, and video have displaced reading and encouraged students to be passive, unreflective, and uninvolved, we cannot erase visual texts from modern life even if we want to. We must therefore challenge students to analyze critically the texts they view and to integrate their visual knowledge with their knowledge of other forms of language. (“Standards for English Language Arts” 5)

In general, being honest and straightforward with parents, legal guardians, and other educators about the purpose and educational philosophy of teaching nontraditional literary texts can only assist instructors as they plan and execute curriculum units focused on film studies.

Regarding other parental and administrative concerns, Marcus and Metzger recommend open communication in advance that clearly articulates the purpose and philosophy behind incorporating film in the curriculum. They observe that “school administrators and parents may

be more accepting of a request brought to their attention in advance than willing to forgive a problematic use of film over which they felt they had no input or control” (26). Additionally, they address the potential concerns of showing controversial content in such films: “Many teachers have successfully secured parent and student support for controversial films in the classroom by sending home a letter explaining the educational goals and inviting questions or feedback” (26). Regarding copyright issues for showing films in the classroom, Russell states, “Simply put, a film must be used in a nonprofit educational institution, in an instructional class...and for educational purposes, not for entertainment or recreation” (9.) Under the current federal guidelines of off-air recording for education purposes, instructors are also allowed to make copies of films for their courses and would not be in breach of copyright laws (Russell 9). This allowance ensures that educators will have a variety of options for providing students access to the films covered in class.

Conclusion

Being literate in today’s society requires that individuals understand and respond to all forms of texts—visual, electronic, print, and digital. Students today have grown up exposed to a consistent barrage of multimedia messages and images, making the instruction and analysis of such content critical. It is worthwhile to remind educators that engaging students’ imaginations often requires an interdisciplinary approach. Such an approach should also, therefore, strive to include film. Brown posits, “perhaps the only indisputable premise of the art of teaching is that the teacher must begin where the student is” (10). Her words ring true: the accessibility of current technology in even the most old-fashioned of classrooms makes it possible for teachers to meet students on familiar terrain and to use film to help them become more deeply engaged with literary studies as a whole. Film cannot replace reading, writing, and the study of printed literature in the secondary curriculum, nor does it seek to do so. However, the medium does have the potential to link students’ inherent interest in multimedia content with the essential critical thinking skills that are at the heart of every English classroom. The substantive, purposeful use of film in the classroom offers a way of involving young people actively, helping them to bridge the gap between the narrow world they have already experienced and the broader one they are capable of imagining.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL COMMENTARY

A Brief Case for Teaching Postcolonial Theory in the Secondary English Curriculum

“Everything we do in life is rooted in theory.”
— bell hooks, 1994

The case for teaching critical and literary theory in the secondary curriculum is directly connected to the heart of what the English classroom is and always should be: a place where students can learn to read both the word and world. The job of the English instructor, then, as Appleman posits, is not only to help students read and write, but also to help them *use* the skills of reading and writing to understand and interact with the world around them (2). As a result, educators must also instruct students on the concepts of ideology—the systems of values and beliefs that create expectations for societal behaviors and norms. Although ideology can, at times, be individual, it is generally a social and political construct and one that subtly shapes and affects the culture at large. Appleman argues, too, that because history has demonstrated that such ideologies are not always benign, they need to be interrogated and sometimes resisted (2).

Literary theory helps students become able to do this by providing them with critical lenses to view both the text and the world in a different light. As Bonnycastle states, studying literary theory “means you can take your own part in the struggles for power between different ideologies. It helps you to discover elements of your own ideology, and understand why you hold certain values unconsciously” (34). In addition, it helps students become more engaged and critical readers of literary texts, a point Eckert has further emphasized: “Teaching students to use literary theory as a strategy to construct meaning *is* teaching reading. Learning theory gives them a purpose in approaching a reading task, helps them make and test predictions as they read, and provides a framework for student responses and awareness of their stance in approaching a text” (8, emphasis added). Consequently, teaching critical and literary theory affords scholars not only with the opportunity to gain valuable critical thinking skills and perspectives with which to examine their social surroundings, but also aids them in becoming stronger, more astute readers and writers of written and visual texts.

Teaching postcolonial theory, in particular, is a focus of this thesis project and curriculum design. As a critical lens, postcolonial theory seeks to examine the experiences, processes, and effects of colonialism. In its most fundamental sense, the theory considers issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony. More than this, however, Tyson remarks that, at its core, postcolonial theory helps “us see connections among all the domains of our experience—the psychological, ideological, social, intellectual, and aesthetic—in ways that show us just how inseparable these categories are in our lived experience of ourselves and our world” (417). Especially pertinent to the twenty-first century, the theory also contemplates the effects of neo-colonialism, a concept Parker defines as a modern, and at times more subtle, version of the devastating effects of colonialism. In this system, local oligarchs and colonial powers—now represented not only by colonialist governments, but also by international corporations bearing such ideologies—continue to oppress and profit from different nations and cultures (288). Similarly, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin link the expanding modern concept of globalization to colonial ideology, and argue that its study and analysis are natural extensions of postcolonialism (6). For students, then, understanding and utilizing postcolonial theory assists them in becoming more critical observers not only of the texts they study in the classroom, but also the similar issues and content they confront outside of it.

One of the most appealing facets of teaching postcolonial criticism is that it encompasses such a broad field of disciplines and lends itself to relevant, engaging discussions for students. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin again emphasize the theory’s ubiquity: “...while postcolonial theory was a creation of literary study, it has provided a methodology for this wide range of disciplines” and has been adopted to characterize concerns in fields ranging from “politics, sociology, religious studies, environmental studies, migration studies, anthropology, and economic theory” (5). In other words, students are able to recognize that the theory’s concepts apply to more than just the novel they read or the film they view in class. In her introduction to *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*, Wisker articulates that its field and theory emphasize readers considering historical and cultural contexts in order to be able to read and view texts with greater insight into why they were produced, how, where and to what ends, as well as what and why they might be arguing for or against something (xii).

A focus on postcolonial literary theory also raises issues about the different ways in which works produced by writers from a myriad of cultural backgrounds, geographies, and literary traditions can be classified and surveyed together. Additionally, it involves discussions about the cultural and societal experiences of migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, and place—all of which are found not only in works of literature, certainly, but are examined and debated on national and global stages, too (Ashcroft, et. al 3). Regardless of how it is applied, the theory allows students to see important aspects of literature that are typically obscured or overlooked without this critical lens, and helps them recognize that cultures do not exist as set collections of customs and norms, but are means of relating to oneself and the world.

Other topics contemplated by postcolonial theory include the consideration of what constitutes an individual's identity and how it is formed by the society around them. In addition, it examines how hybridity (for example, the creation of new transcultural forms within the space produced by colonization, where people of different backgrounds live and move together) affects social hierarchy and other aspects of a people's culture (Wisker 189). It also assesses the negative effects of essentialism and "Othering," where groups of people are constructed and represented as if each individual were the same as the next—a tactic frequently employed by colonial and imperial powers as a means of stereotyping and denigrating colonized people. In addition, the theory considers the representation and presence of historically marginalized groups in literary works, and makes a concerted effort to avoid seeing such figures in terms of a distinctly subaltern position. Postcolonial criticism also concerns the environment and considers the ways in which humans relate to each other, other species, and the planet itself in the face of a growing ecological crisis. Such issues and topics—avoiding essentialism, Othering, becoming acquainted with unfamiliar cultures and populations, and speaking out against their oppression and other injustices—are ones that transcend the walls of the classroom and will assist students in becoming more thoughtful, perceptive participants in society as whole.

Tyson prompts several questions raised and examined by the study of postcolonial criticism, including these: How does the text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression? What does the text reveal about the problems of postcolonial identity? What does the text posit about the politics or psychology of anti-colonialist resistance? What commentary does the text offer about the operations of cultural difference in shaping our

perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live? And finally, to what extent does a literary text in the Western canon reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology through its representation of colonization or its silence about colonized peoples? (431-432). Because such questions certainly address issues and prompt discussion of matters that occur outside the texts students examine, postcolonial theory allows scholars of all ages to, again, become more perceptive observers of how the issues of colonialism still transpire in the world today.

In summary, postcolonialism offers instructors a rich, relevant method of criticism for their students to consult while studying a myriad of literary texts. As this thesis project demonstrates, many components of the theory are applicable to not only traditional literary works, but also the medium of film. What makes postcolonialism such an engaging, important lens for instructional use is that it transcends the discussion and activities of the classroom and becomes an applicable, meaningful perspective for students to consider in the world beyond. As a result, educators who weave postcolonial literary theory into their classrooms help prepare their students to become not only better scholars, but also more conscious, observant, and informed global citizens.

**CHAPTER 4: THE ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES IN THE WORLD OF THE
“OTHER”: TEACHING POSTCOLONIALISM THROUGH
CHILLED MONKEY BRAINS**

“I’m not going to have anything nice to say about this place when I get back!”
— Willie Scott (*Kate Capshaw*), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)

In 1975, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe presented a scathing critique of one of the most famous, acclaimed, and widely studied novels of the twentieth century: Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Speaking at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Achebe posited that Conrad’s novel—regarded by many as one of the world’s landmark literary critiques of imperialism—is embedded with racist portrayals of both the African continent’s people and landscape. Reflecting on Conrad’s consistent depiction of the region as an environment wild and hostile to its invading European forces, one that naturally threatens to degenerate them into savagery and madness, he argued, “*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as ‘the other world,’ ... a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality” (1785). For Achebe, not only is the area demeaned by such a crude, xenophobic portrayal, he claimed, but its location and inhabitants are used by Conrad as nothing more than a “setting and backdrop” for his novel, a sinister stage for the European characters to explore and wage war against, without a trace of humanity in them (1790). This stereotypical image, Achebe suggested, was not Conrad’s own invention, but one that Western culture and its imagination consistently perpetuate in popular television, newspapers, and cinema (1793).

Less than a decade after Achebe’s lecture, a different environment would be similarly used as an exotic background in a new tale of Western exploration: Steven Spielberg’s *Indiana Jones* franchise. Beginning with 1981’s *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the film series follows Dr. Henry “Indiana” Jones (Harrison Ford), a fictional American archaeologist, as he travels around the world in an array of exhilarating adventures. Typically, these escapades feature Jones engaging in thrilling sword matches or fistfights with dastardly villains, navigating through breathtaking car chases and other outlandish, death-defying situations, and wooing the occasional female love interest. Yet another hallmark of Spielberg’s series, however, is that these tales are almost uniformly staged against a distinctly foreign backdrop, often bearing

hyperbolized, stereotypical, and dehumanizing trademarks quite similar to those Achebe criticized in *Heart of Darkness*: a wild, menacing landscape filled with evil indigenous characters that threaten the existence and well-being of the Western hero. Throughout the original *Indiana Jones* trilogy and including the franchise's most recent installment, 2008's *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, indigenous characters and their homelands are frequently stereotyped and degraded in order to accentuate the heroism of its title character. Much like the "other world" image of Africa projected by Conrad's novel, this series, too, perpetuates a Western re-imagining of foreign lands as untamed, hostile worlds that subsequently dehumanize and mock the people and cultures found there in actuality.

Despite such problematic content, both *Heart of Darkness* and the *Indiana Jones* franchise have been canonized and are regarded as "classics" of their literary and cinematic mediums, respectively. In Achebe's critique, he acknowledges that the novel stands as one of the most widely read and taught texts in both secondary schools and at the university level (1791). It remains one of the classic texts in many literary collections, including the most recent edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Historian Adam Hochschild's introduction to the most recently published edition of Conrad's novel even calls it "the most scathing portrait of colonialism in all of Western literature," further illustrating that, for many readers, postcolonial critiques like Achebe's have failed to dissuade them of the work's literary significance and merit (xviii).

Similarly, Spielberg's franchise has also been robustly received by the global film and entertainment industry. The American Film Institute lists *Raiders of the Lost Ark* as one of the one hundred greatest American films of the past century, placing it above cinematic classics like *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991, Jonathan Demme), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971, Stanley Kubrick), and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966, Mike Nichols) ("AFI's 100 Greatest..."). Combined, the *Indiana Jones* series has received fourteen Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in 1982, and has won seven ("*Raiders of the Lost Ark*: Awards"). Combined, the films have grossed nearly two billion dollars worldwide, with *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* raking in almost three-quarters of a billion by itself ("Box Office: *Indiana Jones* Series"). The series' brand extends beyond the film industry today: a popular attraction at Disney's Hollywood Studios theme park in Orlando, Florida, is styled after

the franchise and allows park-goers to daily reenact some of the films' classic scenes in a special-effects driven stunt show.

As a result, it is tempting to view films like the *Indiana Jones* series—seemingly “escapist” works of fiction that focus on action and spectacle more than plot or characterization—as being nothing more than “just movies” or “just good fun,” and to regard analyzing their problematic issues of representation or racial superiority as simply reading too much into them. Such a mindset even reflects Spielberg’s own opinion of these films; upon the release of the franchises’ second installment, 1984’s *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, he remarked, “It’s just a popcorn adventure, with a lot of butter” (Gordon 126). However, as Kotwal notes, “It is important to revisit such films to expose them not simply as action films, but rather as films that endorse ideologies of colonialism” (Kotwal). Indeed, three of the series’ installments—*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Temple of Doom*, and *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*—serve as particularly strong examples of narratives that consistently endorse Western superiority, perpetuate Orientalist imagery, and exhibit a pervasive “Othering” of indigenous cultures. Therefore, it is critical to view and study these films not only as iconic American adventure blockbusters, but also as canonized misrepresentations of non-Western people and cultures.

In addition, the films’ reinforcement of colonial philosophies also makes them ripe with potential to be used as “texts” for the instruction of postcolonial criticism in the secondary education classroom, a type of pedagogical approach that Steinberg underscores in “Islamophobia: The Viewed and the Viewers.” Addressing the consistently degrading racial stereotyping of Arab characters in modern television and film, she posits, “I maintain that if pedagogy involves issues of knowledge production and transmission, the shaping of values, and the construction of subjectivity, then popular culture is the most powerful pedagogical force in contemporary America” (Steinberg 82). Wilson has likewise argued for the incorporation of critical theory into secondary education curriculums:

Critical lenses can be a vehicle for...critical literacy -- increasingly important in a media-drenched society. Our ultimate goal is for students to question the taken-for-grantedness of systematic knowledge, understanding that what appears to be the ‘natural’ view is actually...produced by particular combinations of historical, social, political influences. (69)

A focus on postcolonial theory using popular culture, such as a unit structured around a series like Spielberg's, can provide students with the ability to examine precisely what Wilson articulates, as their fictional narratives demonstrate the very real means in which Hollywood and Western culture as a whole continue to marginalize foreign cultures. Thus, much like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the films of the *Indiana Jones* franchise can serve as fruitful, modern day texts for students to analyze, scrutinize, and problematize under the lens of postcolonial theory. Such an exercise will allow students to gain a more significant understanding of the colonial and racist ideologies still at work in the world around them, and help them recognize their presence in other areas of today's popular culture.

The series' most explicit examples of such ideologies are found in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, a film widely dismissed by critics today as the series' weakest installment because of its overt racism and sexism (Gordon 126). And certainly, as Postone and Traube recognize, the film is replete with colonial attitudes that "seek to represent imperialism as a civilizing, socially progressive force...to legitimize Western domination of others" (13). For students beginning to grapple with the basics of postcolonial theory, the film's rampant problematic content is easy to identify and break down. As the film opens, viewers are transported from downtown Shanghai, China, 1935, to the exotic, untamed land of "the Other." After an extended action sequence—preposterous in both its execution and its setting, as over the span of a few minutes, Jones and his accomplices crash-land their plane on a snow-capped mountain, immediately toboggan down slopes of temperate rain forest filled with pine trees and other brush, and then raft down a river enveloped by lush, tropical vegetation—they are approached by an indigenous man, who assists them in reaching the shore. When asked by Willie Scott (Kate Capshaw), an American showgirl who has helplessly become entangled in Jones's journey, to identify where they are, Jones replies, "India." Willie presses further, asking Jones to explain how he knows they are in *this* specific country, and rather than having him provide an answer, the film cuts to the face of the indigenous man, described in the film's script as simply "bizarre," "painted," and "skinny," as if to contend that by observing only his skin color, bodily appearance, and clothing (an unassuming loincloth), viewers will recognize the exact physical and cultural location the characters have entered (Huyck and Katz).

This type of crude, stereotypical imaging continues as Jones, Willie, and his sidekick Short Round (Ke Huy Quan), a young Chinese orphan boy, make their way to the man's rural

village. Instantly, Jones is christened as a savior by the indigenous population. Upon entering the community, the villagers—almost all elderly, impoverished, and dirty—flock to him as if by instinct, chanting and touching his arms, torso, and feet, giving Jones the aura of a god or superhero. He is someone who can liberate them from their plight, despite being an obvious outsider who knows nothing of their culture and struggles. The movie easily falls under a variety of racist tropes found in what Hughey deems the “white savior film,” in which, “nonwhite characters and cultures [are] essentially broken, marginalized, and pathological, while whites can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the nonwhite pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities” (2). The film makes it seem that Jones’s profession and background—a dashing American archaeologist—are the only traits needed to immediately unlock and understand any culture. Here, the indigenous village is portrayed as a dysfunctional community, seemingly waiting for the Western presence to come and rescue it.

As a result, Jones becomes the village’s—and, accordingly, the film’s—messiah figure, as he journeys on their behalf to liberate their children from slavery in the nearby palace of Pankot and also to restore the *Shivalinga*, a ritual object representing the god of Shiva, back to its rightful place of worship in their community. The trio’s trek to this palace is a parade of racial and cultural stereotypes: they ride on elephants, are cheered on by the complacent villagers, and camp overnight in the jungle, an environment portrayed as sinister and threatening with boa constrictors, large bats, monkeys, spiders, and other creatures frightening Willie behind every tree trunk. On more than one occasion, the journey mirrors the deep descent into the African wilderness found in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: Marlow’s remark that he and his companions “were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet” parallels the treacherous, foreboding environment Jones and company encounter here in India (40). In this way, both the landscape and its inhabitants ultimately appear inhumane and socially regressive, a stark contrast to the Western presence of Jones and Willie, who embody the colonial ideal of the “metropolitan,” a notion which, as Tyson argues, assumes that the culture and lifestyle of Anglo-Europeans is superior and more civilized than those of native populations (419).

This colonial imagery is further perpetuated when the trio arrives at Pankot and is treated to a ceremonial feast by the region’s adolescent ruler, Little Maharajah (Raj Singh), and his Prime Minister, Chattar Lal (Roshan Seth). Once again, the native culture is not only presented

as peculiar to the Western audience, it is also mocked as degenerate and animalistic. The dinner menu, like the journey to the palace, is a Western imagining of traditional Eastern diets, consisting of: “snake surprise”—a large boa constrictor stuffed with live, smaller snakes; a variety of large, cooked, sinister-looking beetles; a tomato soup that appears “traditional” at first glance, but is soon revealed to include eyeballs in its contents; and finally, a dessert of “chilled monkey brains,” served directly out of a primate skull. As a whole, the spread is rife with crude, stereotypical images that present the Eastern culture as barbaric, many of which are not just hyperbolized, but also culturally inaccurate. In his historical analysis of the film, Kotwal notes that these Indian hosts, “like most Hindus, are staunch vegetarians and [would] never eat monkeys or snakes in any form because they are revered in their polytheistic traditions” (Kotwal). In this scene, the film ignores cultural and regional authenticity and provides its audience with a false, crude misrepresentation instead.

As a result, the viewers come to regard both the food and culture with disgust through two different means: first, because the film continually cuts from the cuisine to Willie’s increasingly horrified reaction to its repulsiveness, and the second, by the Indian leaders’ greedy, grossly exaggerated consumption of these local “delicacies.” After eating a whole snake in a single gulp, an official belches loudly, while Little Maharajah noisily slurps his eyeball soup. Even if the food *were* culturally authentic, the film portrays its consumption as disgusting and primitive, certainly inferior to the Western cuisine and lifestyle. Not only are these foreign diners consuming savage food; they *themselves* are savages, and, thus, more easily dislikeable. Postone and Traube argue that this type of culinary debasement leads to the indigenous culture being dehumanized and viewed as an ominous “Other,” incompatible with modern civilized society: “The badness is inherent in the very nature of the Other, a nature that is graphically embodied in the food the Other consumes” (13). And while Spielberg may have envisioned this scene as simply serving as comic relief, it propagates xenophobic colonial ideology that presents native cultures as both inhumane and decadent.

Such grotesque representations are certainly not exclusive to Spielberg’s film; in fact, they are commonplace throughout today’s popular culture. Almost every character of Indian background in modern film or television is typically characterized by this one-dimensional, subhuman representation. Netflix’s critically acclaimed comedy series *Master of None* (2015) parodied and acknowledged these stereotypes in its fourth episode, “Indians on TV.” The

episode opens with a two-minute montage of one-dimensional Indian characters that have dominated screens over the past half-century, pairing the Indians from *The Temple of Doom* with Apu from *The Simpsons* (1989), Hadji from *Johnny Quest* (1964), and Mike Myers mock-impersonating the culture in 2008's *The Love Guru* to show how the culture has continued to be debased in front of Western audiences. Having students consider *The Temple of Doom*'s indigenous characters alongside these portrayals, as well as other examples they recall from past experiences, will allow students to realize the ongoing perpetuation of degrading tropes that dehumanize and lampoon marginalized ethnicities. In addition, an activity like the one Aegerter recommends in "A Pedagogy of Postcolonial Literature," would further help students understand the significant effects of such caricaturing and reduction: "They free-write about a time when they were marked by their difference and when that reduced them to a singular and stereotypical sense of self—a self that has little to do with the complexity they embody beneath any superficial marker" (148). Many students, she notes, write about times they traveled outside the United States and were immediately identified as "American" because of their accents or attire, which quickly led to them being viewed as "the Ugly American tourist" (148). By allowing students to consider how it felt to be reduced to a single, often inaccurate, aspect of their identity, which marked them as different from the dominant population, the exercise can help students empathize with people who are similarly reduced to their race, culture, or nationality on a regular basis.

Beyond the racist stereotypes exhibited in the indigenous landscape and food in *The Temple of Doom*, the film also conveys problematic messages that portray colonial beliefs in a favorable light, as Jones eventually frees the children from their evil Indian captor, Mola Ram (Amrish Puri), restores the *Shivalinga* to its rightful place, and fulfills his duty as the village's white savior. This role, Hughey claims, perpetuates "what is truly the most dangerous myth of race—a tale of normal and natural white paternalism" (7). The ending shot of the film sees Jones surrounded, once again, by a sea of grateful indigenous people, literally applauding him for the return of their community's children and sacred stone. The brave Western hero has carried out his Kipling-esque duty—his "white man's burden"—of aiding and rescuing the subaltern foreign culture. In addition, as Kotwal argues, the film's conclusion further endorses the act of imperialism, as the narrative culminates with British troops assisting Jones's trio in defeating the native oppressors: "The colonials have ousted the real enemy, i.e. the renegade Indians, and hence have further legitimized their staying on in India as the colonizers and saviors of the more

‘civilized’ and ‘genteel’ Indians” (Kotwal). In short, the film legitimizes colonialism as a progressive, benevolent force, and depicts it as a necessary channel of action for harmony to occur in this wild, treacherous environment. In the classroom, students will hopefully recognize such a racist, condescending attitude, and can compare its presence to other recent popular films Hughey identifies with similar stances: *The Blind Side* (2009, John Lee Hancock), *The Last Samurai* (2003, Edward Zwick), and *Avatar* (2009, James Cameron) (Hughey 15). Such comparisons can lead to a discussion of how these films collectively produce ideologies that perpetuate the marginalization and disenfranchisement of minority cultures (Tyson 425).

Because the colonial issues in *The Temple of Doom* are so overt, the film presents itself as an easily accessible text for students to scrutinize through the postcolonial lens. Indeed, the film appears, at times, to be the cinematic embodiment of key concepts of Said’s *Orientalism*, one of the fundamental works of postcolonial theory. In his study, Said argues that the global understanding of the East—of the “Orient”—is constructed to create a positive self-definition for Western nations. Put another way, the West projects all the negative characteristics it does not want to believe exist among its own people onto the Orient, which produces an elaborate, fabricated image of exoticism, evil, seduction, thrills, and primitivism (9). As a result, civilizations as diverse as Arab, Persian, Indian, and Chinese are grouped together, with cultural plurality presented as if it were a monolith (Shohat 40). Over time, Said argues, these tropes have created a permanent impression of the region as subhuman, retrograde, and inferior to its Western counterpart. He writes, “As much as the West itself, the Orient is an *idea* that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West” (13, emphasis added). This “idea” mirrors the “African image” Achebe critiques in *Heart of Darkness* and is certainly also found in the “Indian image” of *The Temple of Doom*: the film argues that the Indian subcontinent is, and has always been, a hostile, wild landscape filled with savages and malevolence, ripe with the potential for dangerous adventure to those who enter it.

As Parker states in his overview of postcolonial theory, Said’s thesis—the Western “idea” of the Orient—remains quite relevant today: “The Orientalism that Said describes continues to shape economic, political, and military relations between the Anglo-American West and the East. . . . More broadly, it shapes relations between the colonialist or neo-colonialist world and the colonized or formerly colonized world” (295). Because of its status as an entry in a

canonized, extraordinarily popular cinematic franchise, *The Temple of Doom* contributes to this ideology by presenting viewers with an image of the East drenched in racist cultural tropes and contrasts this dehumanized portrait with a clearly Western protagonist: a hero who is able to both survive and conquer the threats of the exotic Orient. Because many of these stereotypes still resonate and are found throughout today's popular culture, the film has the potential to serve as an engaging resource to introduce students to critical concepts of postcolonial theory.

As previously mentioned, *The Temple of Doom* is typically regarded as the franchise's weakest entry. Several critical reviews of the film following its release even noted its problematic representations, such as the one written by *The Village Voice*'s James Hoberman, who labeled its content as both racist and sexist (Postone and Traube 12). In the decades since it premiered, Spielberg has even attempted to distance himself from the film, calling it "not...one of my prouder moments" and claiming that it contains "not an ounce of my personal feeling[s]" (Morris 149). Because of this, it would be possible to regard the film as an outlier—a misstep—in an otherwise consistently praised and respected series. However, the colonial ideology present in *The Temple of Doom* is not unique to the *Indiana Jones* series. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, the franchise's bookends and its two most critically-acclaimed and commercially-successful entries, also exhibit similar issues of racial and cultural stereotyping that dehumanize non-Western populations and landscapes, although much less explicitly. In both films, an undercurrent of this same colonialist philosophy—depicting indigenous cultures as nothing more than crude, stereotypical backdrops for the Western hero—exists in a manner that is significantly less noticeable to contemporary American audiences. Upon closer examination, however, the subtle racism of modernity presents itself within these motion pictures, hidden beneath more engaging and complex plotlines and the series' quintessential rousing action sequences. Much like the overt racism in *The Temple of Doom*, this content also makes these films a rich potential postcolonial teaching resource that can assist students in understanding the concealed and often-overlooked racial prejudices that pervade society today.

Similar to its sequel, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* contains many stereotypical images of Eastern ethnicity, although the problematic material is less overt because it serves as merely the background for the film's narrative, rather than a central plot point. Here, the dehumanized, vilified foreign culture is primarily Arabic: the film is set largely in 1936 Cairo, Egypt, and its portrayal embodies many facets of what Saheen terms as "Arabland" in his documentary, *Reel*

Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People. Arabland, like Said's definition of the Orient, is a Western creation of a foreign environment that resembles a "mythical theme park. And in it, you have the ominous music, you have the desert as a threatening place, we add an oasis, palm trees, a palace that has a torture chamber in the basement" (Saheen). *Raiders of the Lost Ark* envisions Cairo and Egypt in their entirety as representations of this bizarre, culturally monolithic "theme park"; upon Jones's arrival in the city, Lawrence Kasdan's script describes it as filled with "narrow, exotic streets, teeming with life: fierce-looking men in tattered galabiyas [traditional Arabic clothing], black-gowned women with veiled faces, ragged, barefoot children" (Kasdan 42). These stock characters exist purely as window dressing for Jones's chief quest: racing against Nazi soldiers to locate and secure the legendary Ark of the Covenant, buried within the Well of Souls, a mythical chamber found beneath the ruins of the ancient Egyptian city of Tanis.

Here, the film re-envisions history to enhance the foreignness of its backdrop: Jones remarks that the city was consumed entirely by a sandstorm, and its ruins have just recently been uncovered. In reality, Tanis was discovered over a half-century earlier than the film's setting, the ark has never been rumored to be hidden there, and the Well of Souls is traditionally considered to reside in Israel, not Egypt (Handwerk). The locale's exoticism is further amplified by the film's cinematography: the landscape surrounding Cairo and Tanis is portrayed as uninhabitable for the Western, civilized world by featuring extended shots of desert, sand dunes, and rocky terrain, a cinematic trope found in many films set in Middle Eastern regions. This common characterization, Blauvelt argues, serves as "a reductive signifier for Arab culture...the desert is harsh and violent; therefore, Arab characters are harsh and violent" (Blauvelt). Likewise, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* includes similar panoramas and editing throughout that juxtaposes—and accordingly, parallels—the punitive desert environment with the "villainous" and "violent" Arab culture as a whole.

The few Arabic characters that *do* manage to hold any significant screen-time in the film also certainly support Blauvelt's argument. Apart from the crowds walking about in Cairo's markets, the only noteworthy Arabic figures in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* are the local henchmen the Nazis enlist to assist them in their pursuit of the Ark. Almost uniform in appearance and purpose, these stock characters serve as easily conquerable foes for Jones to defeat in combat. In one of the film's most iconic scenes, Jones and an Arab warrior square off in the middle of the market crowd. Armed with a scimitar, the soldier elaborately brandishes his weapon in theatrical,

exaggerated preparation to strike at Jones. Jones, bemused, simply takes out his pistol, sighs, and guns the villain down on the spot. Spielberg films the scene as highly comical, but in doing so makes a joke of both the Arab's death and his culture, which appears as absurd, regressive, and clearly inferior to Western technology and society. Throughout the film, Jones has little difficulty outwitting and overpowering the seemingly endless multitude of Arabic combatants he encounters, leaving the viewer's impression of the two cultures, again, as operating in a cultural hierarchy, with the West reigning supreme.

This one-dimensional, stereotypical picture of the region's people, Saheen argues, is seen time and time again in Western popular culture: "All aspects [of it] project the Arab as villain. These are stereotypes which rob an entire people of their humanity" (Saheen). Not only are Arabs cast as villains in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but they are also portrayed as foolish, inept participants in a culture treated as obviously subordinate to the West. Again, the film presents itself as worthy of postcolonial study in the classroom: its canonized status as an "American" classic despite such problematic content demonstrates how social injustice and racial discrimination can come to be viewed as "normal" in society.

Like *The Temple of Doom*'s relatively overt endorsement of imperialist ideology, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, too, hints at the prospect of colonialism serving as a tool for good. In her analysis of what she terms American "raider archaeologist films," Weaver-Hightower posits that the film ultimately casts Jones—and, accordingly, Western philosophy—as "neo-colonizing a space...for the good of the natives" (117). Shohat argues further that Jones's successful efforts in Egypt "reproduce the colonial vision in which Western 'knowledge' of ancient civilizations 'rescues' the past from oblivion" (41). Because the movie concludes with Jones and the American nation retrieving the sacred Ark from foreign, villainous hands and, subsequently, housing it in a government warehouse, it can also be inferred that the United States is a more benevolent sort of colonial power than its opposing foes and also the appropriate home for such artifacts. Subsequently, the film's reinforced notions of colonial and xenophobic ideology, although less explicit than those of *The Temple of Doom*, work as a collective force to reduce and dehumanize Eastern culture, presenting it, once again, as distinctly inferior to its Western counterpart.

Almost thirty years after the release of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Spielberg's franchise returned to theaters for a fourth installment with 2008's *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Mirroring its predecessors, this new entry also staged its characters and plot against a foreign

backdrop, the Peruvian rain forest. Just as in *The Temple of Doom*, Jones once again treks through a menacing jungle on his way to reach a sacred landmark, and the environment is predictably painted with many of the same stereotypes seen in the series' past installments: it is dark and filled with dangerous creatures and people, certainly not compatible with the civilized, refined world of the West. Similar to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the film also blatantly ignores geographic and anthropological facts in an attempt to enhance the wildness and extremity of its setting, at times to culturally offensive results: it places Brazil's iconic Iguazu Falls in the middle of this Peruvian jungle, infuses the unique mythology of the Nazca lines with the legend of El Dorado, and uproots Mayan and Aztec culture from their historical ties to Mesoamerica and transports them to South America (Scorer). The region's people hardly fare any better: more than once on his journey, Jones encounters various indigenous people, but they only whoop and scream rather than speak, which further paints the entire region as barbaric and subhuman.

All of the colonial tropes are present as well: this time, Jones's "white savior" role finds him successfully completing a historical native quest—one unfulfilled by countless indigenous people over centuries of time, the film implies—by once again restoring a sacred ornament to its original place of worship. These issues are concealed by another escapist plot that frequently borders on the outlandish: here, Jones finds himself racing against the Soviet military in his pursuit, and the coveted object they both seek is a crystalline skull that belongs to an alien race from a distant galaxy. Predictably, the film also includes the series' trademark thrilling car chases and extensive action sequences, staged this time on the edges of sheer cliffs and amid threatening pits of snakes and herds of driver ants. But these fantastical elements merely divert attention from the fact that, yet again, the series has reduced and repackaged an entire cultural region in order to create an exotic stage for its Western hero to have his adventures.

Because this takeaway is so important for students, and because this content is relatively obscured by the film's overall narrative, resources like Appleman's "Basic Tenets of Post-Colonial Theory" and "Post-Colonial Lens Viewing Guide" will assist instructors in deconstructing the film's colonial undertones (178). Such tools help students further understand the subliminal elements at work in these films, despite appearing on the surface as simply "just a movie." In addition, pairing the film with a novel or text from the perspective of those marginalized by such films, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or Salman Rushdie's

Midnight's Children, will additionally help students recognize the difference between what is typically seen in Western popular culture of such peoples and what is also left unseen.

As canonized blockbusters of American cinema, the films of the *Indiana Jones* franchise present themselves as worthy of examination and analysis through the postcolonial lens. Their spectacle and lasting prominence in American popular culture further augment their potential as engaging subjects of analysis in media-focused English curriculum. For over thirty years, the series has continually perpetuated antique and dehumanizing racial stereotypes in its attempt to heighten the exoticism and excitement of its narratives. Staging their plots against a backdrop created with the same “Othering” tropes as the African continent in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, they demonstrate how little has changed in Western popular culture over the past 120 years. As these films continue to be made—with a fifth installment entering pre-production in early 2016, according to the series’ producer, Kathleen Kennedy—it is important that viewers recognize the harmful ideologies that lurk beneath their thrilling scenes of action and adventure (Masters). If, as Sam Wineburg asserts, film and popular culture should continue to be implemented in the classroom to help students understand the political and social infrastructures at work around them, then a postcolonial study of Spielberg’s franchise will assist instructors in making this objective a reality (Marcus et al. 9). Equipped with the essential concepts of postcolonial theory, students can then become more astute, careful observers of films and texts involving non-Western people and cultures.

CHAPTER 5: THE (WHITE) KING OF THE WORLD: PEDAGOGY, IMPERIALISM, AND POSTCOLONIAL (MIS)REPRESENTATION IN JAMES CAMERON'S *AVATAR*

"No one can teach you to see."

— *Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), Avatar (2009)*

"I'm the king of the world!" James Cameron bellowed as he accepted the eleventh, final Oscar *Titanic* (1997) received at the 70th Academy Awards (Argetsinger). The director's runaway blockbuster dominated box office charts for well over half of 1998, raking in an unprecedented \$600 million dollars domestically and more than \$2 billion overseas by the time it exited theaters. The film quickly became a popular culture icon, cementing its status as a landmark achievement in filmmaking by being named not only the world's most commercially profitable movie of all time, but also one of the most critically acclaimed. That the film succeeded so spectacularly was, by most accounts, unexpected; it was the most expensive film ever made at that time, and Cameron's fixation on historical accuracy frequently delayed shooting and caused production to balloon far over budget. In a now-infamous review of the film, *TIME Magazine* predicted that *Titanic* would arrive in theaters "dead in the water" (Corliss). In short, the film's triumph was astonishing—a feat unlike anything Hollywood had ever seen. But in the years following *Titanic*, Cameron immediately began work on an even more ambitious project that would eventually outperform his previous film's unabashed success—a cinematic concept originally envisioned in 1994, but shelved until the industry's technology was ready to bring it to reality (Marquardt).

The project was *Avatar* (2009), a science-fiction epic that would eventually re-shape the film industry's understanding of digital animation entirely. Serving as both its writer and director, Cameron devoted over five years to the film's pre-production, development, and editing, utilizing groundbreaking stop-motion animation technology to create its extraterrestrial environment, visual effects, and alien characters (Waxman). At its core, however, Cameron stressed that the film would be "an old-fashioned jungle adventure with an environmental conscience [that] aspires to a mythic level of storytelling" (Rampton). Debuting in theaters shortly before Christmas of 2009, the film instantly became a global sensation that eventually surpassed Cameron's previous monolith. *Avatar's* box office totals eventually topped \$2.7

billion dollars internationally, and shattered *Titanic*'s domestic record as well ("Box Office: *Avatar*). Like its 1997 predecessor, the film also proved to be more than just a commercial triumph, garnering nine Oscar nominations and ultimately winning three.

Avatar was praised by critics on a number of fronts, with many noting that—in addition to the film's breathtaking visual effects and cinematography—its narrative contained a convincing anti-imperial message and critique of current national and global environmental practices. Reviewing the film for *The New York Times*, Manohla Dargis lauded its story as "masterful" and thought-provoking, while others posited that its "powerful themes are so important to our modern world...extend[ing] far beyond the world of fictional cinema" (Dargis, Adams). *The Guardian*'s George Monbiot declared that the film's most striking aspect was its "chilling metaphor for [the] European butchery of the Americas," and Bolivian President Evo Morales, the nation's first indigenous president, applauded its message as a "profound show of resistance to capitalism and the struggle for the defense of nature" (Monbiot, "Evo Morales Praises 'Avatar'").

As these voices suggest, *Avatar* presents an overt, timely argument against colonialism and a call for humanity to reconsider its use of and impact on the planet. Clearly defined indigenous heroes and colonizing villains, coupled with a plot that presents Western capitalism and militarism as invasive, ignorant forces that wreak destruction the environment, help make this thesis visceral. As such, it is relatively easy to regard the film as a postcolonial triumph: a commercially successful, critically acclaimed work of cinema that emphasizes issues and concepts central to its theory and objectives. However, beneath this surface of colonial critique lies problematic content regarding areas of representation, cultural appropriation, and a consistent "Othering" of indigenous cultures and customs. Additionally, by creating a narrative in which a white outsider saves the film's native population, Cameron ultimately reinforces derogatory stereotypes of race, culture, and class—many of which resonate as elements of colonialism still at work today. Such issues expose the remaining depth and extent of colonial ideologies in society, regardless of the anti-imperial message posited on the film's exterior.

However, because of these concerns, *Avatar* presents itself as a metaphorical gold mine for postcolonial analysis in the classroom setting. Its narrative and surface-level critique of imperialism and environmental destruction provide students with a basic introduction to concepts integral to postcolonial study, while its subliminal issues offer opportunities for them to probe

deeply into a text and analyze complications that are often missed at first glance. As Greenlaw notes:

If students are taught the postcolonial deconstructive strategies which they need in order to examine critically how literary representations are constructed of multiple and conflicting discourses...they will have been given the opportunity to learn how and why racist stereotypical (mis)representations are produced and resisted.
(8)

As a result—and if we agree and assume, as Vetrie and others have argued, that film is as worthwhile as any other form of literary text for students to study in the secondary English classroom—*Avatar* is certainly a film that merits consideration for inclusion in the curriculum (Vetrie 41). Cameron’s blockbuster can provide a myriad of fruitful topics of study if viewed through the postcolonial lens: first as a vocal condemnation of colonial aggression and environmental destruction, and second, as a text riddled with problematic notions about cultural representation and identity that are exposed under a more critical analysis of the film. In doing so, educators will afford their students a chance to examine a phenomenally popular recent film in greater depth, thereby also allowing them to see how its arguments and ideas—controversial though they may be—resonate in the world outside its visual spectacle.

Avatar’s principal plot bears several recognizable hallmarks of earlier films dealing with similar issues of colonialism, including *Dances with Wolves* (1990, Kevin Costner), *Pocahontas* (1995, Mark Gabriel), and *The Last Samurai* (2003, Edward Zwick). In a previously unconquered landscape, a foreign imperial force enters and attempts to claim and subjugate the land’s indigenous population and resources. Here, the setting is Pandora, the lush moon of a distant galaxy, rich in water, vegetation, and exotic extraterrestrial wildlife. The film also takes place in the future, roughly a century and a half from the present day, and envisions Earth as a dying, overpopulated planet in desperate need of the resources it no longer is able to bear. On Pandora, the American-led Resource Development Administration (RDA) mines for “unobtainium,” an extremely powerful energy source that sells for a hefty price back home. However, a large deposit of this mineral rests beneath the sacred “Hometree” of the native Na’vi population. Enter Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), a paraplegic ex-Marine recruited to participate in the Avatar Project, a program designed to establish friendly contact with the indigenous people and convince them to evacuate their habitat, allowing the RDA to extract its resources. To

do so, the Project requires Sully to mentally occupy an artificial Na'vi body—an avatar, created by a mixture of both human and alien DNA. In this form, Sully infiltrates the local clan's inner circle—the Omaticaya—and studies their lifestyle, learns their culture, and eventually befriends them, all the while reporting his observations back to the military base.

Somewhat predictably, the corporation's plan unravels as Sully slowly forms an intimate bond with the native population and falls in love with the clan's princess, Neytiri (Zoë Saldana). As Sully learns from the tribe, he comes to recognize the importance of living in harmony with nature, and the environment's interconnectedness to all living things. Realizing the program's failure—the Na'vi will never give up their beloved home—the military attacks and destroys the Hometree outright, forcing Sully to empathize and side with the indigenous community in their fight back against the oppressive colonizing force. After an extended battle sequence, Sully and the Na'vi emerge victorious and send the humans back to Earth. The film concludes with Sully giving up his human form entirely and permanently merging with his avatar, thereby becoming an official member of the Na'vi.

Avatar's critique of colonialism is overt; the plot clearly divides characters into “heroes” and “villains” on opposite sides of imperial conquest. The heroes are the indigenous Na'vi, who value and emphasize harmony among all living beings, and who fight back when their homeland and way of life are threatened by foreign invaders. The oppressive regime is the RDA and its corresponding military force, which seek only the fiscally valuable minerals beneath the soil and disregard the cultural significance of the land they destroy or the value of the lives they slaughter. It is also worthwhile to note that the humans in *Avatar* are exclusively Americans, a trait that has led critics such as Naomi Wolf to assert that the film “questions U.S. actions and modern corporate imperialism for the first time ever in a Hollywood blockbuster—from the point of view of the rest of the world” (2). Only two members of the military force show any signs of sympathy or remorse for their action against the Na'vi: pilot Trudy Chacón (Michelle Rodriguez) and doctor Max Patel (Dileep Rao). As a whole, however, the military's deals with the indigenous population almost exclusively in violence: they bulldoze culturally significant trees and sacred grounds, use machine guns, poisonous gas, and air-fire to remove and destroy native habitats, and consistently refer to the Na'vi as “savages” and other debasing labels (Cameron 104). By the end of the film, the Na'vi have lost not only large numbers of their population due to the colonizers, but also numerous sacred sites of cultural and spiritual importance.

Heuston has previously noted that the film's anti-colonial message came at an especially sensitive time for American viewers. The film was produced and premiered during the waning years of the Global War on Terror, and Heuston posits that *Avatar* "rearranges prevailing American assumptions about so-called 'good guys' and 'bad guys,'" and argues that Cameron "positions an American-military complex as the film's source of malefactors...and repeatedly encourages audience members to cheer when American military personnel are killed in the film" (Heuston 2). James Fulford labeled the film as "a commercial for the Green Party...and a florid work of anti-war propaganda" (55). Cameron himself noted in interviews that the film contained specific references to American political and military involvement in Vietnam and Iraq, as well as the European colonial conquest of the Americas and Pacific nations: "we've got a history...of just kind of invading and taking what we need and forcing out and marginalizing indigenous cultures...to the point that we don't have that many truly indigenous cultures left in this world. So we have a terrible history with this" (Alford 192). As a result, much of *Avatar* reads as both a straightforward condemnation of imperialism as well as a defense of an oppressed people's right to resist such coercion.

The film presents and critiques imperialism in two ways: by the aggressive military force exerted on the Na'vi and by the neo-colonial strategies the RDA uses to supplement this action. The former, led by the bellicose Colonel Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang), is the most overt and represents the colonial violence enacted on indigenous populations who refuse to give up their homelands. Quaritch and the military regard the Na'vi as an inherently dangerous population that must be eliminated entirely, and instructs Sully to become familiar with their culture in order to later use such knowledge against them. He tells Sully, "I need you to learn about these savages, gain their trust. Find out how I can force their cooperation, or hit 'em hard if they don't," (Cameron 25). The military's continuous expansion into Na'vi territory forces the indigenous population into a compulsory removal, resembling the Trail of Tears that the American Cherokee, Choctaw, and Seminole tribes undertook in the 1830s because colonial settlers desired their land. In addition, Quaritch's violent, racist attitude stands in stark contrast to the relatively peaceful, welcoming response Sully receives overall by the Na'vi when he becomes part of their clan, further dichotomizing the two populations as one "good" and the other "evil."

The military's unconcealed colonialism is paired with the subliminal, neo-colonial ideologies that Parker Selfridge (Giovanni Ribisi), the RDA's head administrator, employs in a

similar attempt to manipulate and coerce the Na'vi into giving up their homeland. Through the seemingly benevolent extension of “gifts,” to the natives, including “blue jeans,” “lite beer,” and even schools designed to teach Na'vi children the English language, the RDA parallels historical American and other efforts to “assist” indigenous populations by introducing and imposing Western artifacts and culture on them (Good Fox 5). Like these real-life examples, the RDA's outreach is also merely a ploy designed to convince the Na'vi to agree to the corporation's colonial demands. In a video-journal entry, Sully, articulates the futility of this outreach: “They're not going to give up their home—they're not gonna make a deal. For what? There's nothing we have that they want. We're a horror to them” (Cameron 101). When their “gifts” are rejected, the corporation abandons this duplicity and uses military force to remove the Na'vi, thus exposing the true intentions of their “philanthropy” that were lurking all along. As a result, the film, although staged in the future, presents timeless reiterations of traditional colonial ideology through Western villains—militant, political, and corporate—that both ignore and destroy indigenous populations in pursuit of their own commercial gain.

In addition to illustrating the destruction wrought on the Na'vi people by the hands of the Western colonizers, the film also posits a vocal critique of the environmental damage that so often accompanies such imperial and neocolonial ideologies. Prior to the film's release, Cameron emphasized that *Avatar* was also constructed with an explicit message about environmental conservation: “I sort of extrapolated [the annihilation of indigenous cultures] even farther, to this idea of entitlement. We do the same thing with nature—we take what we need and we don't give back, and we've got to start giving back. We've got to start seriously and aggressively accepting our responsibility for stewardship of this planet” (Alford 192). As a result, the film advocates for and emphasizes the interconnectedness of all parts of a planet's ecosystem, arguing that respect and cooperation between all living things is the only way to sustain its habitability long term. Sully, again recording the Na'vi culture in his video journal, states, “They see a network of energy that flows through all living things. They know that all energy is only borrowed, and one day you have to give it back” (Cameron 79). When Sully first meets Neytiri, she rescues him from a herd of wolf-like creatures and slays one out of necessity. Immediately after, she kneels before the beast and prays, “Forgive me. May your spirit run with the Great Mother” (39). Sully is initially perplexed by this behavior, but after learning the Na'vi culture from Neytiri, he eventually embraces it, and recites a similar prayer after killing a different creature later in the

film. It is after this moment that Neytiri deems Sully “ready” to fully assimilate into Na’vi culture, as he—and, theoretically, the viewer—has come to a full understanding and respect for their beliefs and traditions. The Na’vi’s care and respect for the ecosystem contrasts sharply with the RDA and military’s blatant disregard for it, further causing the audience to view the film’s central conflict as a distinctly “good” versus “evil” battle against colonialism.

The film’s environmental message is further emphasized by xenobotanist Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver), the head of the Avatar project. Recognizing the true agenda the RDA has created on Pandora, Augustine pleads to Selfridge and Quaritch to forego the Hometree’s destruction: “You need to wake up, Parker. The wealth of this world isn’t in the ground—it’s all around us. The Na’vi know that, and they’re fighting to defend it” (Cameron 101). Augustine’s plea, of course, transcends the film as call to action for viewers as well for greater reverence for the planet’s endangered ecosystem. Such a philosophy fits well within the ever-expanding borders of postcolonial analysis; in their introduction to the most recent edition of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, editors Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin note that “the destruction of the environment has been one of the most damaging aspects of Western industrialization and ideology” (6). Plumwood likewise argues:

An encompassing and underlying rationalist ideology applying both to humans and to non-humans is...brought into play in the processes of colonization. This ideology...involves a form of anthropocentrism that underlies and justifies the colonization of non-human nature through the imposition of the colonizers’ land forms and visions of ideal landscapes in just the same way that Eurocentrism underlies and justifies modern forms of colonization, which see indigenous cultures as “primitive.” (504)

Plumwood’s words are embodied by Selfridge, who dismisses Augustine’s concerns about the destruction of Na’vi cultural sites: “They’re fly-bitten savages who live in a tree! Look around—I don’t know about you, but I see a lot of trees. They can move” (Cameron 101). For students, viewing this scene and others that underscore this message could lead to an examination of ongoing global ecological crises, connecting the perspectives of the film’s characters and groups to real-life activists and political figures.

Such an activity is vital for a variety of reasons, most notably because the film’s central message and plot have drawn parallels to current international conflicts. Cameron himself has

stated that he “hopes the environmental message in *Avatar* will move audiences to become active warriors, active defenders of our planet” (Schnaubelt). Similarly, Quiroz notes that the movie’s politics are distinctly reminiscent of ongoing struggles in South America and Africa:

Distant regions of green, tropical forests rich in beauty are in danger, due to their abundance in unknown treasures hidden behind human’s eyes. In order to get those resources needed by rich countries, multinational corporations are using governments, armed forces, paramilitary and guerillas to massacre and displace Indigenous peoples. (1)

Quiroz cites examples of neo-colonial injustice and oppression experienced by native populations in countries such as Peru, Colombia, Brazil, and Congo, and argues that, much like in *Avatar*, these people have suffered at the hands of seemingly benevolent Western forces. Likewise, Rao interprets the film’s graphic destruction of the Na’vi’s Hometree to be a direct reference to Israeli bulldozers demolishing homes in occupied Palestine, and that Sully’s defiance of the military mirrors the stance of activists like Rachel Corrie (3). Finally, Žižek makes a similar comparison of *Avatar’s* plot to the struggle of Dongria Kondh people, a population of the hills of southern India struggling to maintain sovereignty over their lands in the face of encroaching bauxite miners (9). To help students recognize the film’s powerful allusions, a valuable activity would have them select a conflict, such as those Quiroz, Rao, and Žižek identify, investigate its origins and opposing viewpoints, and write a reflection that compares their topic with the conflict in *Avatar*. In doing so, students will have the opportunity to become aware of ongoing, important international struggles, and also recognize how Cameron’s film—and others like it—are able to reflect and argue against such discrimination and destruction.

As the analysis and research indicate thus far, *Avatar* presents itself as a worthwhile topic of study because of its vocal critiques of imperialism and environmental abuse. However, an additional—and, perhaps, even more important—pedagogical characteristic of *Avatar* is that the film’s seemingly airtight postcolonial status is ultimately subverted by its *own* embrace of more subliminal—yet equally as damaging—colonial tropes and stereotypes. Because its characters so often fall into overly simplistic, clichéd roles, the film’s applicable postcolonial messages risk being seen as irrelevant or inconsequential. More significantly, the film presents two other distinct hallmarks of colonial ideologies. The first is a definite “Othering” of the Na’vi population, created from an arbitrary mixture of non-Western cultures and Cameron’s own

invention, which works to reinforce longstanding racist and demeaning stereotypes about indigenous populations. The second is the film's reversion to a traditional, overused narrative that puts its ultimate role of "hero" on the white protagonist, Sully, as it is through his leadership, tactics, and determination that the Na'vi are ultimately able to rise up and defeat the impending colonizers. In these ways, *Avatar* consequently remains a colonialist work as it fails to challenge the one-dimensional, detrimental ideologies that underpin its overt political stance. As a result, a closer examination of *Avatar* using a post-colonial lens will help student recognize these trademarks, and also come to a deeper understanding of how such images and ideas are perpetuated today in society at large.

Although the film's obvious message against imperialism is virtuous, the racist ideology the colonizers exert often reaches hyperbolic levels. In his review of the film, Justice writes, "The possibility of richly realized and multidimensional characters is tossed out in favor of stock heroes and villains. Cameron drives home the relevant political concerns with the subtlety of a sledgehammer; the good guys are very good, the bad guys are very, very bad, and there is little overlap between categories" (Justice). As a result, the film denies its audience the difficult work that actually accompanies struggles for decolonization, environmental justice, and peace. Because of the conflict's relative simplicity, *Avatar* fails to recognize, as Justice notes, that good—or seemingly good—intentions can be actually far more destructive to a people, and have much more lasting impacts, than simply shooting napalm onto a sacred site (Justice). Indeed, as Altbach underscores, modern-day neo-colonialism often manifests in seemingly benign, subtle forms that slowly work to destroy the traditional elements of indigenous culture (381). However, because *Avatar's* audience is distanced from complicity because of the film's colonial evils are so overt, it allows them to forego thinking critically about what would be required to enact genuine, lasting change in the real world.

Similarly, Cameron's dialogue has historically been maligned by critics for clichés and absurdities in most of his films, and the characterizations of the RDA and military in *Avatar* fare no better. Quaritch is a particularly one-dimensional character whose prejudices frequently border on farce. When Sully first arrives on Pandora, Quaritch leads an orientation session for the new recruits, asserting, "Out there beyond that fence, every living thing that crawls, flies, or squats in the mud wants to kill you and eat your eyes for jujubes. We have an indigenous population...who are fond of arrows dipped in a neurotoxin that will stop your heart in a minute.

They are very hard to kill” (Cameron 10). Quaritch brands the Na’vi as inherently dangerous, savage creatures, and while such racist ideology certainly exists in society today, his remarks come across as superficial or unrealistic to viewers because he supports them by literally attempting to exterminate those he hates.

The film also offers no serious explanation for why Quaritch and the rest of his platoon would harbor such ill will toward a seemingly peaceful tribe like the Na’vi. As a result, and as Cox and Levine argue, because Quaritch’s racism is so distinctly “hot” in its nature—an irrational, unexplainable hatred for another group or culture—Cameron’s anti-colonial message risks being undervalued by audiences because its conflict seems entirely fictional and inapplicable to today’s world (120). Once again relating the plight of the Na’vi to their real-life Indian counterparts, Žižek likewise posits that “this film enables us to practice a typical ideological division: sympathizing with the idealized aborigines while rejecting their actual struggle. The same people who enjoy the film and admire its aboriginal rebels would in all probability turn away in horror... dismissing them as murderous terrorists” (Žižek). Educators teaching the film could help mend this oversight by fostering a class discussion focusing on a psychological analysis contemplating not only Quaritch’s underlying motives, but the attitudes and perspectives of the film’s other characters as well, a modification of a pedagogy tactic Pentolfe Aegerter asserts can help students “find identification between their own lives” and those represented on the page or screen (143).

However, much more problematic than the poor writing and character development of the film’s main figures is *Avatar*’s seemingly arbitrary reconfiguring of stereotypical tropes to create its indigenous culture. Constructed to be a “representational synthesis” of Native Americans, Africans, Maoris, Aborigines, and South East Asian nationalities and cultures, Cameron’s Na’vi are almost uniformly homogenous and collectively propagate Oriental and indigenous stereotypes that have been perpetuated by Western nations for centuries. Said, one of the pioneers of postcolonial theory, argued that the West’s perception of the exotic Orient and its inhabitants was a construction of its own design:

The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire... The Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear the figures whose role it is to

represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be...a theatrical stage affixed to Europe. (102)

On Pandora, the Na'vi embody much of Said's articulation of the Orient—they are exotic, athletic, muscular, attractive, and openly spiritual. Because their presence on the screen is entirely digital, the responsibility for their appearance and representation falls squarely on Cameron's shoulders. It is also worthwhile to note that all of the Na'vi are voiced by non-white actors, and each character speaks with a dialect and language constructed from a combination of non-English languages (Fritz 78). Turner notes that another trademark of Orientalism is the West's romanticized view of the East as a land of "promise, sensuality, and pleasure," and Cameron's creation of both Pandora and the Na'vi certainly fit this description: the film's Academy-Award winning visual effects create a landscape populated by floating mountains, beautiful luminescent plants, and adorable creatures and wildlife (Turner).

As a result, Pandora serves as a sort of surreal playground for its human characters and viewing audience to explore. So idealized was the film's setting that some viewers even reported experiencing "post-Avatar depression" because their lives paled in comparison to the luminous intensity of Pandora (Grabiner 160). Likewise, the Na'vi's physical appearance is hyper-sexualized and exoticized: they are long-legged, the women have tiny waists, and Cameron even admitted to augmenting the female Na'vi's breasts in order to further heighten the sexuality of their appearance (Rebello). As a result, the film can be interpreted as a twenty-first century recreation of the Orient, a fact made all the more significant because the film ironically strives to present a critique of imperialism.

Cameron's Na'vi culture recalls other racial and cultural stereotypes the West has attributed to native and indigenous cultures. For example, as Lubber notes, recent trends in popular culture have not only depicted Native Americans as wild savages, but also offers a romanticized notion of such cultures as peaceful "little children of the forest" (41). The Na'vi's intimate connection to the environment and their familiarity with its features—a point Cameron and the film emphasize repeatedly—helps propagate this image of indigenous people serving as representatives of nature. Fritz argues that the film presents the Na'vi as the embodiment of "the Ecological Indian," an image created and often used by the West in order to propel environmental messages (67). Whereas the Na'vi revere and respect the landscape and its creatures, "the Earthlings, however, lack this basic ability and thus only through the Na'vi can

the Earthlings learn about and stop themselves from destroying the environment” (Fritz 79). Because the Na’vi are reduced to this role in the film, *Avatar* perpetuates stereotypes that somehow indigenous cultures are inherently more connected with nature than their Western counterparts. This image, as Krech has argued extensively, is “patently false,” and distorts true representations of native cultures because it imposes environmental concepts such as ecology, conservation, and preservation on populations and makes them seem monolithic (23).

One goal of teaching the postcolonial lens is to help students learn to recognize and resist such generalizations. Educators can help make this possible by pairing excerpts from Said’s *Orientalism* with the film’s viewing, as well as connecting its cultural stereotypes to the modern day. For example, Conklin notes that the Ecological Indian image has been rejected by certain South American indigenous populations: “In Amazonian eco-politics... non-Indian spokespersons have come to promote an idealized image... Amazonian Indians are represented as guardians of the forest, natural conservationists whose cultural traditions and spiritual values predispose them to live in harmony with the earth” (713). Students could consider such images and others found in American popular culture that present native cultures as inherently eco-friendly and discuss how and why this idea continues to be perpetuated. In doing so, students will hopefully come to a better understanding that much of society’s perception of other cultures is constructed: an image that is both created by and reinforces stereotypes and inaccuracies about a peoples’ beliefs, values, and lifestyle.

Not only are the Na’vi ultimately portrayed as essentialized iterations of the one-dimensional Ecological Indian, their plight is ultimately saved by the film’s white protagonist, Sully. Personifying many of the tropes what Hughey deems as the cinematic “White Savior,” Sully not only assimilates into the indigenous culture, but also becomes their de-facto leader in the fight against the RDA and military. This role, as Hughey articulates, casts white characters as the “redeemer of the weak, the great leader who... rescues people of color from poverty or disease, or leads Indians in battles for their dignity and survival,” thus perpetuating historical myths about white supremacy and paternalism that still resonate today (15).

Sully’s role as *Avatar*’s white savior is obviously problematic for a number of reasons, perhaps none more significant than the fact that, as an outsider with no previous knowledge of the Na’vi culture, he quickly learns, masters, and even *exceeds* the tribe’s people in their traditional customs and demonstrations of skill. The most blatant example of this is his

conquering of the fabled “Toruk Makto,” a menacing flying creature that, we are told, has only been tamed by five previous Na’vi warriors in their entire history. The people view the beast as a deity of sorts, and Sully’s (relatively easy) subjugation of it officially brands him as a “messiah” figure for the Na’vi and assists him in uniting the clan with neighboring tribes for their climactic battle. Similarly, it is Sully who plots the insurgent’s plan of attack and leads them against the corporate and military forces. As a result, Sully’s character is cemented as the people’s—and subsequently, the film’s—white savior, demonstrating that, ultimately, his presence and knowledge are more valuable than that of the indigenous. This motif has been used in countless other films, including *Gran Torino* (Clint Eastwood, 2008) and the previously mentioned *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last Samurai*. Collectively, such films suggest that “whiteness is welcome anywhere and everywhere” and work to perpetuate the myth of a great white savior whose benevolent paternalism over people of color is not only the way things have been, but *should* be (Hughey 21).

Sully’s white savior status is further problematized by the fact that he enacts this role as an *artificial* Na’vi, operating the avatar’s body remotely via his mind. As Newitz argues, this act is a modern reiteration of the idealized concept of “going native,” a way of absolving oneself of inherent white guilt by attempting to embrace and assimilate into a different culture and race (6). However, as she posits, Sully “never really knows what it is like to be a Na’vi because he always has the option to switch back into human mode,” meaning that although he is able to embody and learn the culture’s lifestyle, Sully can always opt out of it and resume his position of privilege as a member of the Western colonizers—a possibility that, of course, the Na’vi do not have (6). A recurrent theme in *Avatar* is the idea of “seeing” someone—of looking beyond surface observations of a person and truly understanding their values and perspective. Neytiri tells Sully early on in the film that “no one can teach you to see,” implying that his status as an outsider prohibits him from coming to this level of empathy (Cameron 41). By the film’s conclusion, however, Sully stresses to Neytiri that he does, in fact, “see” her, and its final shot is of Sully, fully transformed into his avatar form, opening his eyes, again indicating that not only does he understand the culture, he is now a permanent, official part of it. Accordingly, the film seems to advance a hypocritical message, implying that although the colonial presence among indigenous cultures can result in devastation, it can also, ultimately, serve as its redemption and a force for good. Writing for *The New York Times*, David Brooks asserts that the film argues that “Natives

can either have their history shaped by cruel imperialists or benevolent ones, but either way, they are going to be supporting actors in our journey to self-admiration” (3). Thus, *Avatar* once again perpetuates colonial ideology in a subliminal manner, by allowing the film’s native population to defeat the invade imperial force, but only under the leadership of a Western hero.

To help students understand the significance of these issues of representation, and to assist them in forging connections to the world outside the classroom, educators could have students consider postcolonial theorist Spivak’s landmark essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” after viewing the film. By studying Spivak’s thesis and considering the implications of its titular question, as well as her answer to it—that, no, marginalized people are unable to represent themselves—students could participate in a discussion of other films and popular culture narratives that misrepresent and distort images of historically disenfranchised groups. By doing so, students will hopefully come to an understanding that what Spivak and other postcolonial critics argue that it means to “speak” for and represent one’s self is often times drastically different than what the dominant culture presents these marginalized populations as. Such an activity will provide students with the chance to explore and discuss this important issue in greater depth and become more critical, astute observers of similar content in films, television, and other elements of popular culture in the future.

As Good Fox writes, “We have all seen *Avatar* before” (1). The film’s plot, messages, and ideas—both intentional and subliminal—resonate on a global stage in such a way that makes the film a rich, valuable topic for exploration in the classroom. On its surface, the film is a popular culture icon: it is the highest grossing movie ever made, and one that also presents a vocal anti-colonial argument with a timely environmental message for its viewers. The film’s central conflict echoes real-world scenarios of imperialism and neo-colonialism that threaten the existence and humanity of indigenous and marginalized cultures. But below this, however, lie problems and complications related to issues of cultural representation that are revealed through the postcolonial critical lens, which extend beyond the film’s plot, reflecting similar struggles in society at large. Nevertheless, these issues simply make the film’s pedagogical value that much more significant and fruitful for educators looking to bring relevant texts into their curriculum that challenge students’ understanding of the world around them. And so, although set in the (perhaps not-so distant) future, on a planet located many galaxies away, *Avatar* can help students consider and make sense of the conflicts and problems that populate their own.

CHAPTER 6: CURRICULUM DESIGN

Curriculum Narrative

The ten lesson plans included in this thesis project seek to provide educators with introductory activities and assessments to assist them in beginning a unit on film and postcolonial theory. What follows is a guided narrative that extends these initial lesson plans and articulates how their overarching goals, learning objectives, and assessments can tie not only to each other, but also to additional literary texts.

Film Analysis (Lesson Plans 1-5)

The first five lesson plans serve as a “crash course” in film analysis. Over the course of five sixty-minute class periods, students will have the opportunity to become familiar with some of the basic tenets of cinema: editing, cinematography, and mise-en-scène, as well as other thematic elements—such as the difference between a film’s explicit and implicit meaning—that will allow them to think critically about the films screened in class, instead of simply “watching” them.

Almost all of the five lesson plans on film analysis conclude with a mini-assignment that tasks students in applying the concepts and material discussed in the course textbook and class period onto a film of their own choosing. A supplemental, culminating activity that could, if desired, tie all of these shorter assessments together would be to have students construct a detailed “storyboard” for a short film of their own creation. They would describe and justify their strategic decisions in terms of lighting, framing, production design, and other elements studied in the previous class periods. By allowing students to “practice” the thought-process that filmmakers themselves experience on actual productions, students will develop a deeper understanding of how such decisions are essential toward creating the finished product, as well as how those choices ultimately impact the interpretation or impression the film has on its viewers.

Certainly, the “crash course” could be expanded to additional class periods, if desired. Not discussed in these lesson plans are the topics of film sound, acting methods, as well any sort of work regarding film history or genre development. While those are important and engaging topics of study for students to be exposed to, their connections to the specific goals of this

curricular design were not as vital, which is why they are absent here. However, for instructors who do wish to expand on these initial class periods, I recommend considering not only the chapters devoted to these topics' exploration in Barsam and Monahan's *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film*, but also those found in Golden's *Looking at Movies* and Costanzo's *Great Films and How to Teach Them*, as all provide valuable resources and lesson ideas to help instructors fully integrate introductory film analysis into their curriculum. Specifically, the three films explored in the following lesson plans focus on *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and *Avatar* (2009).

***Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Lesson Plans 6-7)**

Specifically, the films examined in this curricular unit focus on teaching concepts central to postcolonial critical theory. *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, the first film studied in lesson plans six and seven, is valuable for its overt, surface-level issues of representation regarding cultural debasement and stereotyping. The Viewing Guide draws students' attention to this content to make them consider it more thoroughly, particularly in regards to how the film actively works to "Other" the Indian culture by contrasting it with the American protagonists, making it seem evil and retrogressive as a result. In addition, it requires students to recall the film analysis concepts discussed in the previous class periods, thus providing a bridge for learning and place for application of past learning objectives. Pairing the film with a chapter from Stuart Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* provides a critical and theoretical lens for students to examine the film through in the future class periods. An activity hinted at in Lesson Plan 6, the introduction to this film of study, is for students to create a list of characteristics or stereotypes that popular culture has taught them about Indian culture. As students watch *The Temple of Doom*, they could mark or identify such traits—or expand to their existing list. At the conclusion of the film, students could "fact check" these moments of cultural representation by researching Indian traditions from the regions and time period the film is set in, and then write a response illustrating both this new insight as well as a reflection of *why* the film fabricated or distorted such heritage.

A culminating activity for the film's study would be for students to select one of the features mentioned in the brief *Master of None* opening scene, view the film or a few episodes of the television series, and write an essay that explores how the culture is similarly reduced or

marginalized by such a portrayal. There are, certainly, other films that would work for such an assignment, and instructors could extend these parameters by opening up the possible topic list to include films that reduce other cultures and ethnicities from around the world.

***Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Lesson Plan 8)**

The eighth lesson plan in this curriculum design is an introduction to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and although it bridges from the previous study of *The Temple of Doom*, it could be taught in singularity. Here, the film is paired with an excerpt from Said's *Orientalism*, one of the foundational texts for postcolonial critical theory. A Viewing Guide encourages students to consider issues of representation and "Othering,"—particularly, the Orientalizing of the local Egyptian culture—throughout the film's screening. Future class periods could also include assigned readings such as short chapters from Keim's *Mistaking Africa*, which details the various ways the continent's countries are misperceived and distorted by popular culture. Educators could modify the assignment detailed in the preceding paragraph and incorporate it during or after the study of this film, encouraging students to consider some of the titles Jack Saheen lists in *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People: Aladdin, The Mummy, Gladiator, True Lies, Patriot Games, 24* (television series), as well as others.

Finally, for instructors seeking to focus their classes specifically on the issues of Orientalism, there is, perhaps, no more valuable resource than *Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual Approaches and Pedagogical Practices* by Hoeveler and Cass, which includes not only a brief sampling of essays by critical theorists on Said's argument, but also provides case studies and examples of texts and activities that have aided actual instructors in making his ideas understandable and engaging for students from a spectrum of academic levels.

***Avatar* (Lesson Plans 9-10)**

The final two lesson plans serve as introduction to James Cameron's *Avatar*, and the unit emphasizes examining the film on two levels. First, it considers its overt, intended critique of imperialism and environmental destruction. The second is to illuminate the problematic issues of stereotyping and "Othering" that the film constructs with the indigenous Na'vi culture. The Viewing Guide questions focus students on these sorts of concerns, and the larger assignment—

focusing on the film's environmental justice message—challenges students to draw parallels between non-fiction research and a fictional story that mirrors real-world events.

Additional class periods could focus, alongside the film's screening and analysis, on students reading short excerpts of post-colonial theorists who deal directly with issues of identity, power dynamics, and representation, such as Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak" and Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders." Abbreviated versions of the fundamental postcolonial texts are found in the most recent edition of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* and provide students with an accessible, digestible version of their theses. Likewise, the issues Wainana raises in her short essay "How to Write About Africa" illuminates the overused tropes and stereotypes found in literature set on the continent that have, over time, helped shape the Western perspective of the real people and communities living there. Other texts for consideration during the film's screening would be a short chapter or two from Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*, a text that similarly reduces key critical theory concepts to make them more comprehensible for students.

Additional Texts

Film study could fit well within other curricular units not exclusively devoted to film analysis. Two texts that come to mind are Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Conrad's novel is often regarded as one of the landmark literary critiques of imperialism. In the introduction to the 2012 Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition of the text, author and historian Adam Hochschild remarks that it is "the most scathing portrait of colonialism in all of Western literature" (xviii). Similar to Cameron's film, however, *Heart of Darkness* has also been criticized for its dehumanized, one-dimensional portrait of its Congolese people. Perhaps most notably, Achebe himself critiqued the novel in his address, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," ultimately declaring that the novel cannot be considered a work of "great literature" because of its problematic and racist subtexts (1789). Pairing either or all of the three films with Conrad's novel into a single unit under the umbrella of "representation" or a similar topic would allow students to see how these issues transcend both time and genre, and still resonate viscerally today.

Similarly, Achebe's own *Things Fall Apart* would provide a useful counter-point to the representation of indigenous cultures in each of the films. Both Spielberg and Cameron's

productions view such people through their white male protagonist, therefore denying the natives their own opportunity to truly “speak.” Achebe’s novel attempts to bring this representation back to the center, as it illustrates life before and after colonialism in a remote Nigerian village. Here, the colonial invasion is seen through the eyes of the indigenous people, providing a useful alternative perspective to that found in the films. Again, the novel could be read before or after one or all of the films discussed in this thesis project, and would provide students with an additional opportunity to see how other authors and artists grapple with issues of identity and representation. Both novels are taught and studied at the secondary level, and there are dozens of teaching resources designed and published to help instructors teach the texts specifically to draw awareness to issues and concepts related to postcolonial analysis, including: Lindfors’s *Approaches to Teaching Things Fall Apart*, Hawker’s *Colonialism in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart*, Ogbaa’s *Understanding Things Fall Apart: A Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*, and Davis’s critical essay on Conrad’s novel, “The Value of Teaching From a Racist Classic.”

Demographic Study

For the purposes of this project, the unit, lesson plans, activities, and assessments pertain directly to the twelfth grade English and Language Arts classes at Apply Valley High School. Located in the city of Apply Valley, Minnesota, a suburb located roughly fifteen miles south of Minneapolis and St. Paul, the school is a member of Independent School District 196, as well as the South Suburban Conference. However, the curriculum unit described herein is also designed for schools of a wide variety of sizes and demographic make-ups to use. With some minor modifications in scope, sequence, and materials, it can be implemented in practically any learning setting.

In the immediate surrounding community, there are four other public high schools, two specialized private high schools, six middle schools, and eighteen elementary schools. Apple Valley High School itself has a total enrollment of 1,900 students in grades 9-12. Sixty-four percent of the school’s demographic make-up is Caucasian, 16% is African-American, 10% is Hispanic, and 5% is Asian. A small number of students are American Indian or a member of another minority. The school’s gender make-up is 54% male and 46% female.

The academic standard of the school is rigorous, as evidenced by students’ average ACT score of 28. The school offers over 300 required and elective trimester courses, allowing students

a vast array of opportunities and challenging educational experiences. There are Advanced-Placement courses in Studio Art, Language and Composition, Literature and Composition, European History, American History, Biology, Chemistry, Calculus, Statistics, Spanish, and Macro Economics. The media center is an extension of the school and provides students with technology and research indexes. It has been named by *Newsweek Magazine* as one of the best American high schools on multiple occasions.

Each classroom in the school is designed to hold approximately twenty-three desks and workspaces. The school employs “1:1” technology in the classroom, with each student receiving a school-issued laptop or tablet, depending on the grade level. There are seven class periods each day, with each lasting sixty minutes long. Of the school’s entire student body, approximately 8 percent have diagnosed special educational needs and are able to take Special Education courses. Approximately twelve percent of the student body also takes additional English Language Learner (ELL) courses. Most of the student body is comprised of highly gifted and talented students—for example, the average GPA of the sophomore class is a 3.65, with the median at a 3.75. Due to its location in the heart of the Twin Cities suburban region, much of the school’s student body falls into the middle class socio-economic range. Thirty-four percent of the student body is on free or reduced lunches, compared to the national average of fifty percent.

The school’s student body is well served by a unit focused on film. The educational setting with its emphasis on accessible technology makes it a natural environment for activities and assessments involving multimedia. In addition, the school’s progressive curriculum and high level of academic standards similarly positions it as an ideal candidate for an exploratory unit weaving film and traditional literary texts together, such as the ideas posited by this thesis project and curricular design.

Instructional Commentary

Central to the implementation of a successful literary unit is the utilization of a wide variety of educational theories and instructional strategies during the preliminary planning processes. If students are to successfully master the content and ideas presented in the unit, then the instructor must also plan and develop a variety of ways to teach, prompt, and measure their subsequent growth and achievement.

As I devised these lesson plans of study and their culminating assessments, I wanted to give students of multiple learning styles the chance to demonstrate their understanding of the key

concepts expressed here. As a result, the culminating alternative assessment (in which students are allowed to choose one of a variety of suggested project options that each play to different skills and strengths an individual may have) draws heavily on the research of Howard Gardner and his theory of multiple intelligences. His work has emerged from cognitive research and "documents the extent to which students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways" (1991). Some examples of the different intelligences students may exhibit include visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and linguistic.

The alternative assessment allows for students to utilize their multiple intelligences by selecting a project option of their choice. Some sample examples that students may select from include an analytical essay, a film review, a personal narrative, or a creative component. Each of these projects plays to different learning styles and mindsets and will allow students to find one that fits their preferences and have a better chance of succeeding in reaching the learning objectives of the assignment.

Discussion is another key component in these lesson plans. After each text or film has been read or viewed, students will engage in either a small group or whole class discussion that corresponds. For each of these talks, the instructor has prepared a list of possible discussion questions and prompts, many of which closely follow the pyramid construction of Benjamin Bloom's classification (or taxonomy) of levels in intellectual behavior. Bloom's taxonomy details the movement from the most basic intellectual levels (remembering and understanding) to the more complex (evaluating and creating). Questions that ask students to remember the content in a text focus primarily on duplicating or recalling information read, whereas questions or prompts that ask them to create or evaluate encourage them to interpret or create a new product or point of view on the content (Schultz).

Bloom's taxonomy is evident in the discussion prompts the instructor creates. For example, the first week's "crash course" in film analysis features discussion questions and activities that not only are rooted in the *Looking at Movies* textbook, but challenge students to *apply* these concepts on films with which they are already familiar. In addition, each film's corresponding Viewing Guide includes questions that range from asking students to recall basic facts from the film to critical inquiries that challenge them to think deeply about how the film's construction impacts audience's perception on certain cultures and people.

One final educational theorist whose work was heavily considered when designing these lesson plans is Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky popularized the educational notion of scaffolding a student's learning to allow them to independently achieve success. Much of this depends on the instructor being aware of each student's zone of proximal development—where the student is functioning now, where the student should be at the end of the course, and how the instructor can assist the student in mastering more complex skills and concepts. According to Vygotsky, the most effective instruction is the kind that is aimed not at the child's level of independent performance but is instead aimed within this zone of proximal development (Lui).

I apply Vygotsky's notion of this zone of proximal development, as well as his emphasis on scaffolding, at numerous times in the following lesson plans. For example, in Lesson Plan 9, the class follows the instructor in defining, discussing, and applying the first Principle of Environmental Justice from the handout. After this modeling, students break into small groups to perform a similar activity on the remaining principles and later informally present their work to the class as a whole. In addition, many of the first week's lessons culminate with mini-assignments that ask students to apply the concepts discussed from the previous chapter in *Looking at Movies* onto a film of their own choice. The mini-assignments follow in-class activities that model the analytical thought process necessary to successfully complete the assignment. As a result, these assignments and activities not only scaffold students' ability to closely read a text, but they also help the instructor account for students' zones of proximal development by having them work on a project of their own choosing.

In addition to the above overarching examples of educational theory integrated into this curricular design, the daily activities and assignments are rooted in instructional strategy and purpose, in order to assist students in developing greater meaning and connection with the texts. Regardless of whether students are writing, creating, discussing, or reflecting, the designed activities reinforce and extend the key concepts explored in each class period.

At various times in the lesson plans, students are asked to write journal response entries to opening response prompts after viewing an image or film clip. Some of the entries are directly prompted by the instructor, while others are open-ended and simply free-writes after the conclusion of a text or discussion. In Zemelman and Daniels' *A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School*, they note that journal writing allows for students to become more emotionally attached to their writing (101). In addition, not all of these journal

entries are graded, but they *are* responded to. They note, “When we respond to journals, all we do is read them as another human being, receiving the writing and the ideas and reacting naturally” (101). If students are going to be as honest and open as the instructor would like, then refraining from conventionally grading the entries allows for a release of pressure on the student’s end and allows for this open writing to occur.

I believe that a classroom filled with active learning means that, occasionally, the teacher must step down from the stage and let others helm the wheel. In his definitive guidebook, *The English Teacher’s Companion: A Complete Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*, Burke details the act of reciprocal teaching—where students teach each other smaller texts, repeat, and then ask questions of the “instructors”—questions of both surface and deep levels. He writes, “When one reader or group concludes their portion of the text, the other summarizes and asks questions of what was read as a way of transitioning to the next section or story and orienting the previous reader” (100). In this design, reciprocal teaching is demonstrated in Lesson Plan 10, where students read different portions of articles related to environmental justice and James Cameron’s *Avatar*, and then jigsaw together to present their sections and learn from others. By having students “teach” the material to one another, they will come to a more thorough understanding of the content, as well as become more comfortable speaking and leading larger groups in future class periods.

As a result of these instructional tactics, and others throughout the lesson plans, students are given multiple opportunities to create and express the knowledge gained in class. A wide variety of theories and resources utilized allows for students of every learning style to feel comfortable in class and hone their skills. Finally, continued reflection on the part of the teacher regarding which instructional strategies prove themselves to be most effective and successful in achieving their goals will allow for high levels of students’ success in their classrooms in the years to come.

Minnesota State Standards

The following Minnesota State Standards are specifically addressed in the lesson plans included in this thesis project:

11.5.1.1 *Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.*

11.7.4.4 *Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.*

11.9.1.1 *Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.*

11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*

11.9.7.7.b *Examine the intersections and conflicts between visual and verbal messages.*

11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

The following standards are addressed specifically by the culminating assessment options:

11.7.1.1 *Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics of texts, using valid reasoning and relevant, sufficient evidence.*

11.7.3.3 *Write narrative and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.*

11.7.9.9 *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

Other standards that *could* be incorporated or attached to lesson plans extending from these introductory designs, as outlined in the curriculum narrative:

11.5.2.2 *Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact or build on one another to provide a complex analysis.*

11.5.6.6 *Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.*

Unit Objectives

The purpose of the following lesson plans and curricular design is to assist instructors in helping students become familiar with analyzing film. In particular, it also emphasizes the value of teaching critical theory lenses as a tool for student to apply to a myriad of literary “texts” in order to enrich their understanding and interpretation.

As a result of this curricular design, students will:

- Become familiar with and gain an appreciation for the basics of film analysis by recognizing the components and elements that make up a film’s overall design, including mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing.
- Apply their understanding of film design components by analyzing movies of their own choosing to reveal the design decisions that ultimately impact the viewer’s response.
- Develop critical thinking, reading, and viewing skills through the screening of recent popular films, selected clips, and movie trailers.
- Articulate the basic tenets of postcolonial critical theory, and discuss how its ideas and concepts relate to popular culture.
- Apply a postcolonial lens to a variety of printed and multimedia text in order to examine how their intended and subliminal messages are complicated or changed from a closer analysis.
- Actively participate in classroom discussion and whole-class analysis by experiencing a variety of opportunities to assess their learning of key concepts, ideas, and skills explored in the unit.
- Research and read non-fiction texts with the intent of comparing their accounts to their fictionalized versions or works that are rooted or inspired by their events.
- Organize and develop their reactions to literary texts in a variety of forms including written, oral, and visual communication projects.

CHAPTER 7: LESSON PLANS

Unit Lesson Plan 1: Introduction to Film Analysis

Main Idea/Theme: Introduction to film analysis and fundamental cinematic concepts.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Discuss** the difference between passively watching movies and actively viewing them, as well as how and why most of the formal mechanisms of a movie remain invisible to casual viewers.
- **Explain** how shared belief systems contribute to hidden movie meaning, and consider the relationship between viewers' expectations and filmmakers' decisions about the style and form of their movies.
- **Differentiate** between implicit and explicit meaning and understand how the different levels of movie meaning contribute to interpretive analysis.
- **Recognize** the difference between formal analysis and the types of analysis that explore the relationship between culture and movie.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 - *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition* (Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan) – textbook and eBook edition (<https://digital.wwnorton.com/3800>)
 - Projector/SmartBoard & PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 - Introductory Film Analysis Checklist (1.1)
 - Introduction to Film Analysis Review Questions (1.2)
 - Film Glossary Sheet

- Student
 - *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition*
 - Binder/Notebook and Writing Utensils

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

The teacher will provide guided instruction by orally presenting an overview of the day's agenda via direct lecture (supplemented by a visual aid in the form of a PowerPoint slide show, assisting visual learners in following along with the material). The instructor will also lecture and expand on concepts from Chapter 1 of *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film (LAM)*, which benefits students who learn via print instructions and written directions. For those who learn collaboratively and kinesthetically, students will work in small groups to examine, discuss, and summarize different perspectives of formal analysis that may be performed on a film like *The Hunger Games* (2012). They will also view selected clips from *Juno* (2007) and the *Harry Potter* series (1999-2011), which will help them further recognize and understand some of the basic concepts of cultural and formal film analysis. Since students have the opportunity to work with films of their own previous experience, it will assist students of different learning backgrounds in making connections with the class objectives and material. Finally, the class will engage in a whole class discussion of viewer expectations regarding actors, film genres, and directors, with questions that represent a range of Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid, encouraging students of a variety of learning levels to participate and contribute.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Opening Question: *What's your favorite movie—and why?* Have students write down a brief a response, share their answers with one or two people near them, and then ask a few to offer their responses to the class as a whole.
- Transition this favorite movie discussion to central concept of pp. 2-3 of *LAM*: *"Motion pictures are much more than entertainment. They shape the way we view the world around us and our place in the world."* Ask students if they can recall a time that watching a movie changed their thinking or attitude toward an issue, topic, or group of people?
- Underscore to students a fundamental concept for this unit: *to come to a basic understanding of cinematic language, which will help them understand movies on*

multiple levels: as narratives, artistic expressions, and as a reflection of the cultures that produce and consume them.

- Help students understand the difference between the concepts/stigma of “film” (*a motion picture that critics/scholars consider to be serious or challenging*), “movies” (*motion pictures considered less so, and designated to entertain a wide variety of viewers*), and “cinema” (*works of film that are also considered works of art*). Ask students to think of examples of each that they might have heard of or seen (Sample examples: *Boyhood* (2015), *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Under the Skin* (2013).
- While working through the concepts on pp.3-10, and using the examples of each from the text, have students record bolded terminology in their Film Glossary sheets. Emphasize how certain features help distinguish films from other media: theater, novels, painting/photography, protagonist, etc.
- Use the *LAM* eBook example analysis clips to demonstrate the concepts of cutting on action and continuity in *Juno*. *How does each one assist the viewer in making sense of the film’s action?* Describe the difference between explicit (*available on the movie’s surface*) and implicit meaning (*lying below the surface—an association or inference*). Provide an example of each from *Juno*, using the text’s sample on p.12. Emphasize that the implicit meaning is an *argument*—an interpretation of the film’s message.
- On the slide show, display a sample of movie posters from the past year (*The Revenant* (2015), *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), *Trainwreck* (2015), and *The Martian* (2015)—or others). Discuss what expectations they would have of such films based solely on their advertisements. *What will they expect when they walk into the theater to see this film?* Transition into discussion of p.13’s “Viewer Expectations” content.
- *Optional Supplemental Activity, if time:* project a slide of famous actors: Brad Pitt, Adam Sandler, Meryl Streep, Seth Rogen, Jennifer Lawrence, Will Smith, and Sandra Bullock. *What expectations would you have of a movie featuring one of these actors? Regarding directors: which of the ones students are familiar with seem to have a set “style” or trademark, and how does that effect their expectations when viewing one of their films?*
- Discuss the principal concepts of formal film analysis, guiding students through the concepts on pp.15-19. Show the clip from *Juno* (18:04-18:49) demonstrating the analysis the authors perform on the abortion clinic waiting room scene.

- Briefly define and clarify the additional analytical approaches often taken to films like *Juno*, as defined on p. 19-22. In addition, have students view the eBook clip of a cultural analysis of the *Harry Potter* film series
- Break students into groups of 4 and have each take a separate cultural analysis paragraph of *The Hunger Games* (pp.22-32). In groups, they should work through and discuss the unique analytical approach their section of text advocates. After roughly five minutes, bring students back as a whole and have each group briefly explain the scope and significance of their cultural/formal analysis of the film.
- Distribute the Introductory Film Analysis Checklist (1.1) and read briefly discuss its role as an overarching perspective for students to consider and utilize when watching films throughout not only the unit, but also outside of class as well.
- Distribute the Introduction to Film Analysis Review (1.2) questions. For tomorrow, students are to review the concepts of Chapter 1 and answer the prompts by classtime.

Summary/Closure

To conclude, ask students to revisit their initial writing prompts from the beginning of class. Consider: what features of today's class period could apply to their articulation of their favorite film, as well as their explanation for such a selection? More specifically, what do they think a cultural or formal analysis of their favorite film could reveal? Have students briefly write a second response underneath their previous one, and then turn the sheet in for the instructor to review.

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to review Chapter 1 of *Looking at Movies* and complete the review questions. (Handout 1.2)

Assessment

Through class discussion of the textbook and the additional activities, teachers will evaluate the lesson objectives and gauge student understanding of the material. In addition, the "exit slip" written response also provides feedback regarding whether or not students have grasped the day's objectives. Finally, the assignment for the next class period provides further evidence of students' mastery of the basic elements of film analysis.

Introductory Film Analysis Checklist (1.1)

As we said in class, one of the primary goals of this unit is to help you graduate from being a spectator of movies—from merely watching them—to actively and analytically **looking** at them. The lessons that follow will provide specific information about several major formal components of film, information that you can use to write and talk intelligently about the films you view not only in class, but elsewhere.

As we move through this unit, you will acquire a specialized vocabulary for describing, analyzing, discussing, and writing about the movies you see. But for now, you can start by looking at movies more analytically and perceptively. You can easily say more than “I liked” or “I didn’t like” the movie because you can list and understand the cinematic techniques and concepts the filmmakers employed to convey story, character state of mind, and other meanings. What’s more, by cultivating an active awareness of the meanings and structures hidden under every movie’s surface, you will become increasingly capable of recognizing the film’s implicit meanings and interpreting what they reveal about the culture that produced and consumed it. The checklist below gives you a few ideas on how to start this process:

Be aware that there are many ways to look at movies. Are you primarily interested in interpreting the ways in which the movie manipulates formal elements such as composition, editing, and sound to tell its story moment to moment? Or are you concerned with what the movie has to say in broader cultural terms, such as a political message?

Whenever you prepare a formal analysis of a scene’s use of film grammar, start by considering the filmmakers’ intent. Remember that filmmakers use every cinematic tool at their disposal; very little in any movie moment is left to chance. So before analyzing any scene, first ask yourself some basic questions: What is this scene about? After watching this scene, what do I understand about the character’s thoughts and emotions? How did the scene make me feel? Once you determine what information and mood the scene conveyed, you’ll be better prepared to figure out how cinematic tools and techniques were used to communicate the scene’s intended meaning.

Do your best to see beyond cinematic invisibility. Remember: a great deal of a movie's machinery is designed to make you *forget* you are experiencing a highly manipulated, and manipulative, artificial reality. One of the best ways to combat cinema's seamless presentation is to watch a movie more than once. You may allow yourself to be transported into the world of the story on your first viewing. Repeated viewings will give you the distance required for critical observation.

On a related note, be aware that you may be initially blind to a movie's political, cultural, and ideological meaning, especially if that meaning reinforces ideas and values you already hold. The greater your awareness of your own belief systems (and those you share with your culture in general), the easier it will be to recognize and interpret a movie's implicit meaning.

Ask yourself how expectations shaped your reaction to this movie. Does it conform to the ways you've come to expect a movie to function? How did what you'd heard about this movie beforehand—through the media, your friends, or your professor—affect your attitude toward the film? Did your previous experience of the director or star inform your prior understanding of what to expect from this particular film? In each case, did the movie fulfill, disappoint, or confound your expectations?

Before and after you see a movie, think about the direct meanings, as well as the implications, of its title. The title of Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), for example, is a specific geographic reference, but once you've seen the movie, you'll understand that it functions as a metaphor for a larger body of meaning. Try to explain the title's meaning, if it isn't self-evident.

Introduction to Film Analysis Review Questions (1.2)

Please demonstrate your understanding of the core concepts from our lesson by answering the following questions.

1. What do you think of when you hear the word “movie?” To what extent has that perception changed after today’s lesson?
2. How is the experience of seeing a movie different from watching a play? Reading a book? Viewing a painting or photograph?
3. In what ways do movies minimize viewers’ awareness that they are experiencing a highly manipulated, artificial reality?
4. What do we mean by *cultural invisibility*? How is this different from *cinematic invisibility*?
5. What is the difference between *implicit* and *explicit* meaning?
6. What are you looking for when you perform a formal analysis of a movie scene? What are some other alternative approaches to analysis, and what sorts of meaning might they uncover?

Unit Lesson Plan 2: Mise-En-Scène—Part I

Main Idea/Theme: Part I of an introduction to and overview of mise-en-scène.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Define** mise-en-scène as a concept and in terms of its constituent parts, and identify its effects on a film’s characters, narrative, and themes.
- **Describe** the role of the production designer and other personnel involved in constructing a film.
- **Articulate** the significance and impact the design elements have on a viewer’s sense of a film’s characters, narratives, and themes.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.b *Examine the intersections and conflicts between visual and verbal messages.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 1. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition* (Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan) – textbook and eBook edition (<https://digital.wwnorton.com/3800>)
 2. *Gravity* (2013, DVD)
 3. Projector/SmartBoard
 4. PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 5. Mise-en-Scene Assignment Sheet (2.1)
- Student
 - *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition*
 - Binder/Notebook and Writing Utensils
 - Film Glossary

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

The teacher will provide guided instruction by orally presenting an overview of the day's agenda via direct lecture (supplemented by a visual aid in the form of a PowerPoint slide show, for the benefit of students who learn visually). The instructor will also lecture and expand on concepts from the first half of Chapter 5 of *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film (LAM)*, to assist students who struggle with reading comprehension. For those who still struggle with the new material, students will collaborate and work in small groups to further examine, discuss, and summarize different elements of film design, and then informally present their findings to the class. They will also view the opening scene from *Gravity* (2013), which will help them further recognize and understand some of the basic concepts of mise-en-scène and cinematic design. The assignment asks students to apply the lesson's concepts to a scene from a movie of their own choice, allowing students from a variety of backgrounds to forge genuine connections with the new material. Finally, the class will engage at various points in a whole class discussion of viewer expectations regarding the chapter and its films' content, with questions designed from various levels of Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid, thereby challenging students of a variety of learning levels.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Greet students and use the class directory to mark for attendance. Have them turn in their Introductory Film Analysis Question responses and redistribute their responses from yesterday's opening prompt with feedback.
- Students will view the opening scene of *Gravity* (2013) and take notes on what elements on screen make them feel as if the scene is realistic. Pre-Viewing Question: *What about the scene makes it not just tell us what it's like to be lost in space, but show us?* Have students share their response with one or two peers around them, and then engage in a whole class discussion.
- Connect students' responses to the concept of mise-en-scène on p. 165. Have them record new cinematic terminology in their Film Glossary. Discuss how the concept relates to design and composition properties. Emphasize that the elements of mise-en-scène are intentional—carefully selected and constructed by the film's director—in order to give the film its overall sense of meaning.

- Ask students to construct a brief list of films they can recall with obvious, distinct elements of mise-en-scène (sample examples—each should have a slide of a screenshot from the film: *Titanic* (1997), *The Matrix* (1999), *Midnight in Paris* (2011), *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014)). Discuss how each scene contributes to a certain “look” or “film,” and ask students to consider why the director might want to evoke such a response from the viewer.
- Reiterate for students that mise-en-scène develops characters, plots, themes, and meaning. Its creation is always the product of detailed planning of each in the movie. Have students read through the first full paragraph on p. 172 to further emphasize this point.
- P. 173 deals with design principles; break students into groups of 4 and have them come up with a list of films that fall into each of the following categories: realistic, fantastic, Western, film noir, and horror. Have them include a short rationale for *why* each film appears under each heading: *what genre/tropes are evoked to place the film under that category?*
- Briefly define the role of a production designer and have students record its duties in their glossary (pp.173-174).
- Divide students into three groups and have each read a different section of the “Elements of Design”—setting/décor/properties; lighting; costume/make-up/hairstyling (pp.177-187). Give each group fifteen minutes to read their section, create an outline detailing its main points, terminology, and examples, and then select two members to present the group’s findings to the class as a whole.
- As groups present, add or expand on their findings from pp.177-187. Have them note, too, how certain design elements have changed or evolved over recent decades.
- Project the eBook activity that demonstrates the effects and significance of lighting. Modify the lighting from soft, to hard, to other gradients and discuss with students how their understanding or reaction toward the shot changes as a result.
(<https://wwnorton.com/college/film/movies5/interactives/lighting/direction.aspx>)
- Before the conclusion of class, distribute the Mise-en-Scène Assignment (2.1) and read over the instructions with students, clarifying any questions that might arise.

Summary/Closure

To conclude the lesson, have students revisit their initial notes from the opening scene of *Gravity*. Have them consider: what features of today's class period were they able to identify before a more focused study on mise-en-scène? Considering the content examined in class, what elements could they have added to their answer to the initial response prompt?

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to review the first part of Chapter 5 of *Looking at Movies*, as well as complete the Mise-en-Scène Assignment (2.1).

Assessment

Through both class discussion and the end-of-class writing activity, instructors will be able to evaluate the comprehension students have with the new material. In addition, the assignment for next time directly tests their understanding of the new material, and asks them to apply the concepts from class into a movie of their own choice.

Mise-en-Scène Assignment (2.1)

For tomorrow, I'd like you to re-watch the opening scenes (15:00-20:00) of one of your favorite movies. As you do so, record notes on the elements of mise-en-scène (including setting, décor, properties, lighting, costumes, make-up, and hairstyling) that you find, and jot them down below.

After you've done this, please write a two-paragraph (at the minimum) response that synthesizes these elements and explains their significance, and in which you answer this question: How does the mise-en-scène construct or reinforce the characters, place, and time period of its narrative? In other words, what impression does it all add up to for you, the viewer?

Setting:

Décor:

Properties:

Lighting:

Costumes:

Make-Up:

Hairstyling:

Unit Lesson Plan 3: Mise-En-Scène—Part II

Main Idea/Theme: Part II of an introduction to and overview of mise-en-scène.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Articulate** how framing and composition in film differs from that of static images such as paintings and photography.
- **Describe** the relationship between on-screen and off-screen space and explain why films rely on both forms of shots.
- **Distinguish** between the two basic types of cinematic movement: figures within the frame and the frame itself, and draw connections to the literary concept of subjective and omniscient point of view.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.b *Examine the intersections and conflicts between visual and verbal messages.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 6. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition* (Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan) – textbook and eBook edition (<https://digital.wwnorton.com/3800>)
 7. Projector/SmartBoard
 8. PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 9. Introduction to Film Analysis Review Questions (with feedback)
 10. Mise-en-Scène Activity Handout (3.1)
 11. 4 still photos from *The Hunger Games* (2012), *The Social Network* (2011), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012)
- Student
 - *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition*
 - Binder/Notebook and Writing Utensils

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

The teacher will provide guided instruction by orally presenting an overview of the day's agenda via direct lecture (supplemented by a visual aid in the form of a PowerPoint slide show to assist visual learners). The instructor will also lecture and expand on concepts from the second half of Chapter 5 of *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film (LAM)*, which will aid struggling readers in comprehending some of the texts more difficult concepts. To further allow students of all skill levels to engage with the material, they will collaborate with a partner to create a storyboard of the classroom, as well as a paragraph pitch of a scene framed by two unique points of view. Students will view clips from relevant films to help them further understand cinematic concepts such as framing, spacing, and point of view. Finally, students will work in groups to analyze still shots from a recent film, in an attempt to further understand the significance and impression of *mise-en-scène*.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Greet students and use the class directory to mark for attendance. Redistribute their responses to the first chapter response questions with feedback.
- Have students share their responses to the *Mise-en-Scène* Mini-Assignment with one or two peers near them, and then allow a few students to offer their responses to the class as a whole. *How did their films create an overall look or a sense of tone in their first few minutes?*
- Starting on p. 196 of *LAM*, begin to work through the next key concept: *composition* – how the film is visualized and planned by its production team. Students should record bolded terminology in their Film Glossaries.
- To come to a better understanding of composition and framing and to recall elements of *mise-en-scène* discussed in class on the previous day, have students work with a partner to create a storyboard/sketch of what a still shot of the classroom would look like currently, as seen from its doorway (p.196). Allow several students to voluntarily share their responses with the class as a whole group.
- To demonstrate framing (p.197), show students the trailer for *Vantage Point* (2008), and distinguish between subjective and omniscient points of view. Have students work with the same partner to create a paragraph pitch for a scene (a cafeteria food fight, for

example) from both perspectives. Have several students share their work with the class as a whole.

- Using the examples from *LAM*, discuss other concepts of framing, including off-screen and on-screen space (using the brief clip from *Chinatown* (1974) to illustrate) (p.198). Draw special attention to the chart on the bottom of p.199 that describes the difference between an open and closed frame, and use a visual slide to show examples (Open frame = *Black Swan* (2010), Closed Frame = *Les Miserables* (2012)).
- Discuss the differences between movement of figures within the frame and movement of the cinematic frame itself (pp.202-203). *What is each one used for? How does their presence create a different response for the film's viewer?*
- Walk through the text's example of a mise-en-scène analysis of *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) by using the images from the text projected onto the slide show (downloaded from the text's eBook version) (pp.204-208).
- Place students in groups of 5 and distribute sets of 4 still photos/screen shots from the following films: *The Hunger Games* (2012), *The Social Network* (2010), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *The Perks of Being A Wallflower* (2012). Using the checklist as a guide, have students examine the four images, identify elements of their mise-en-scène, and come to a conclusion about how the elements work together to create an overall “look” or “tone” for the film. Have groups then share their findings with the class as a whole.

Summary/Closure

To conclude the lesson, have students revisit their previous responses to the Mise-en-Scène Mini-Assignment. Have them consider: what features of today's class period could also be incorporated into their analysis of the scene? How does today's content complicate or extend their previous analysis of the opening scene of their favorite film? Have students write a brief paragraph reflection underneath their current work, and then collect the assignment.

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to review the entire Chapter 5 of *Looking at Movies*, as well as their glossary terms.

Assessment

Both the class discussion and framing exercise will allow instructors to assess student comprehension and mastery of the lesson's objectives. In addition, the small group activity further demonstrates understanding of the concept of mise-en-scène, as students will directly apply the lesson's lecture points onto films they are already familiar with.

Mise-en-Scène Analysis Checklist (3.1)

These past two lessons have introduced the major elements that together form any film's mise-en-scène. By now, you should understand that the term mise-en-scène denotes all of those elements taken together—the overall **look** and **feel** of the film—and that mise-en-scène plays a crucial role in shaping the mood of the film, as well as the viewer's interpretation of it. Using this knowledge, characterize the mise-en-scène of your assigned screen-shots in precise terms, referring to the framing, the composition in depth, the lighting, the setting, the design and use of objects, and the placement and appearance of characters. Use the following checklist below as a guide for your analysis:

- As you watch the film or clip or examine the screenshot, be alert to the overall design plan and mise-en-scène and to your emotional response to them. Are you comforted or made anxious by them? Are your senses overwhelmed or calmed by what you see on-screen? Identify the elements of the mise-en-scène that seem to be contributing the most to your emotional response.
- Be alert to the framing of individual shots, and make note of the composition within the frame. Where are figures placed? What is the relationship among the figures in the foreground, middle ground, and background?
- Does the use of light in the scene draw attention to itself? If so, describe the effect that it has on the composition of the shot.
- Does the movie's design have a unified feel? Do the various elements of the design (the sets, props, costumes, makeup, hairstyles, etc.) work together, or do some elements work against others? What is the effect either way?
- Does achieving a look similar to reality appear to be important to the design of this scene? If so, have the filmmakers succeeded in making the overall mise-en-scène feel real, or verisimilar? If not, what do you suspect the filmmakers **were** attempting to accomplish with their design?

And finally, for films we examine throughout our unit of study, keep these thoughts in mind: How does the design and mise-en-scène in this scene or clip relate to the narrative? Is it appropriate for the story being told? Does it *reinforce* the narrative and development of characters? Does it *determine* the development of narrative and characters? Does it render the narrative secondary or even overwhelm it?

Unit Lesson Plan 4: Cinematography

Main Idea/Theme: Introduction to and overview of cinematography and its importance in cinema.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Describe** and discuss the basic characteristics of cinematographic properties of a film: shot, setup, a take, film stock, and lighting.
- **Define** any shot in a movie by identifying its proximity to the subject, the angle of the camera, the nature of camera movement, and the speed and length of the shot.
- **Articulate** the importance that the role of director of photography plays in film production.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.b *Examine the intersections and conflicts between visual and verbal messages.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 - 12. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition* (Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan) – textbook and eBook edition
(<https://digital.wwnorton.com/3800>)
 - 13. Projector/SmartBoard
 - 14. PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 - 15. Mise-en-scène Mini-Assignment Feedback
 - 16. Cinematography Checklist (4.1)
 - 17. Cinematography Assignment (4.2)
- Student
 - *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition*
 - Binder/Notebook and Writing Utensils
 - Film Glossary

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

The lesson features instructional methods designed to assist visual and verbal learners (via visual aids) as well as struggling readers through expanded lecture and supplementary handouts. Whole class discussion is structured around a variety of questions that promote varied levels of thinking and engagement with the material, to assist and challenge students of different learning levels. Finally, the lesson includes multiple opportunities for students to apply the concepts from the textbook to actual film clips, thereby allowing students to further practice and become familiar with its components.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Opening Question: *What’s a particular scene from a movie that you’ve found to be “beautiful?” How about one that’s “scary?” “sad?” What about the scene made them feel that way?* Have students write down responses in their notebook, and then share their thoughts with one or two students sitting around them. Solicit a few volunteer answers for the whole class.
- Transition into the concept of *cinematography: the process of capturing moving images on film*. Instruct students to get out their glossaries, and begin working through pp.212-214, taking note of the terms “shot,” “take,” and “setup.” Underscore the description of the director of photography’s role in orchestrating these elements.
- Project a slide showing still images from black and white films: *The Artists* (2012), *Schindler’s List* (1993), and *Raging Bull* (1980). Contrast these images with those from color films: *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), *Life of Pi* (2012), and *The Martian* (2015). Ask students: *How does the presence or absence of color affect our response or reaction to a scene or a film as a whole?*
- Pull up the eBook edition of the textbook and project it for the class to consider. <https://digital.wwnorton.com/3800>. Work through the color-grading tutorial and ask students how each different filter makes them interpret the still shot differently. *Ask students to recollect other areas of popular culture where similar effects are used (Instagram filters/Snapchat filters) and why.*
- Next, discuss lighting and the concepts defined on pp.222-232. Have students define new terminology in their glossary: three-point system, key light, fill light, lighting ration, low-key lighting, high-key lighting, and the backlight. Project examples of each—*The*

Avengers (2012), *Fight Club* (1999), and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)—and ask students to consider other examples from recent films that have used the same technique. *Ask: How does the different type of lighting affect your mood or interpretation of the film's plot or tone?*

- Again, project the eBook resource re: lighting and manipulate the image of the actress for terms of light direction, exposure, quality, and ration. *Have students discuss how the shot changes in terms of mood or tone with each shift in lighting.*
- Finally, work through the concept of framing: *the process by which the cinematographer determines what will appear within the borders of the image during a shot* (233). Use the examples on p.237 from *The King's Speech* (2010) to demonstrate the different types of shots: extreme long, long, medium long, medium, medium close-up, close-up, and extreme close-up.
- Show the eBook clip from *The Hurt Locker* (2008) (0:59) to demonstrate different types of shots in a single scene in real time. Have students tally the different shots they see on a sheet of paper (*there are 16*). Briefly define other famous shot types: high-angle, low-angle, Dutch-angle (tilted), and aerial-view.
- Introduce the assignment for tomorrow: students are to view one of three clips (available on the class website via YouTube) and record the different examples of cinematography properties they witness. Once done, they are to write a brief paragraph explaining how these elements come together to give the scene an overall feeling, mood, or tone. Distribute the Cinematography Analysis Checklist (4.1), which serves as a review and guide for them throughout the assignment.

Summary/Closure

To conclude the lesson, have students revisit their initial answer to the opening question. What properties of cinematography can they recall about one or two of the scenes they listed, and how did their presence make these scenes as memorable as they were? Students should write a brief reflective paragraph before leaving class.

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to view one of the three clips available on the class website and complete the corresponding Cinematography Assignment (4.2).

Assessment

Class discussion will allow instructors to get a sense of instant student understanding of the new concepts discussed in class. In addition, students' concluding written responses will further demonstrate proficiency in the new material. Finally, the Cinematography Assignment will ask students to directly apply their new familiarity with the chapter's concepts by connecting them to clips from a recent popular film: *Skyfall* (2012).

Cinematography Analysis Checklist (4.1)

Today's lesson provided an overview of the major components of cinematography—the process by which a movie's mise-en-scène is recorded onto film or some other motion-picture medium. More than just a process, however, cinematography is very much a language used by directors and their collaborators (most notably, the directors of photography) to convey meaning, transmit narrative information, and influence the emotional responses of viewers. Now that you know something about the basic cinematographic tools available to filmmakers, you can pay greater attention to the particulars of this language while looking at movies. The checklist below includes a few helpful hints to assist you in that viewing process:

- Determine whether the cinematographic aspects of the film—the qualities of the film stock, lighting, lenses, framing, angles, camera movement, and use of long takes—add up to an overall look. If so, try to describe its qualities.

- Take note of moments in the film when the images are conveying information that is not reflected in characters' action and dialogue. These moments are often crucial to the development of a movie's themes, narrative, and meaning.

- Are special effects used in the film? To what extent? Are they appropriate to, and effective in, telling the story? Are they effective in making something look real when it isn't?

- Also keep track of camera angles other than eye-level shots. If there are high- or low-angle shots, determine whether they are POV shots. That is, is the high or low angle meant to represent another character's point of view? If so, what does the angle convey about that character's state of mind? If not, what does it convey about the person or thing in the frame?

- As you evaluate crucial scenes, pay attention to the composition of shots within the scene. Are the compositions balanced in a way that conforms to the rule of thirds, or are the elements within the frame arranged in a less “painterly” composition? In either case, try to describe how the composition contributes to the scene overall.
- Can you determine whether the colors of a shot or scene have been artificially manipulated through the use of color filters, different film stocks, or chemical or digital manipulation to create a mood or indicate a state of mind?
- Pay attention to camera movement in the film. Sometimes camera movement is used solely to produce visual excitement or to demonstrate the filmmaker’s technological virtuosity. At other times it is playing an important functional role in the film’s narrative. Be alert to these differences, and take note of meaningful uses of camera movement.

Cinematography Assignment (4.2)

Step 1: On our class website are links to three different clips from *Skyfall* (2012), an Academy Award Nominee for Best Cinematography (Roger Deakins) in 2013. All are also available on YouTube. Select **one** of these clips, watch it, and record your observations about the properties of cinematography on display here—film stock, the use of color, lighting, and shot styles.

Step 2: Construct a paragraph in which you state **why** these specific design decisions help create an overall mood, tone, or feeling in this scene. Be sure to identify which clip you select, as well as articulate **what** this overall impression is before describing Deakins's intent in staging it as so.

“Shanghai Art Collector” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQKSOFXIB8s>

“Macau Casino” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcA9_bPfFuU

“Motorbike Chase” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHRLX8jRjq8>

Film Stock:

Color:

Lighting:

Shot Styles:

Unit Lesson Plan 5: Editing

Main Idea/Theme: Introduction to and overview of editing and its significance in film.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Describe** the film editor’s creative and technical responsibilities and explain the way that editing establishes spatial and temporal relationships between shots.
- **Demonstrate** how editing is used to create rhythm in a movie and articulate its significance.
- **Articulate** the major types of transitions between shots and describe how they can be used to either maintain continuity or discontinuity in film.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.7.4.4 *Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.*
- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 - 18. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition* (Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan) – textbook and eBook edition
(<https://digital.wwnorton.com/3800>)
 - 19. Projector/SmartBoard
 - 20. PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 - 21. Editing Checklist (5.1)
 - 22. Editing Assignment (5.2)
- Student
 - *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film, 5th Edition*
 - Binder/Notebook and Writing Utensils
 - Film Glossary

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

Audio and visual learners will be assisted through the use of visual aids. Selected clips from recent films will aid struggling readers who need extra assistance understanding the editing techniques discussed in the chapter. The editing checklist provides students with a concise summary of the chapter's content and will aid ELL students and other struggling readers in grasping the new material. Finally, students will be assigned in groups for the activity and the instructor will place advanced learners in each group to help others work through the concepts.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Begin class by projecting the epic car chase scene from *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) (3:30) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCIM8YvNljo>. Ask students to describe what the emotion or impression of that scene was—and how did they come to this conclusion?
- Connect responses rooted to previous lessons to the new concept of editing: *the process of selecting, arranging, and assembling the essential components of a movie to tell the narrative in a unique way* (318).
- Work through the basic components of editing, beginning on p. 323. Discuss how it enables films to manipulate spatial relationships (how large an area or set is—*Titanic* (1997)) and temporal relationships: flashbacks, flash-forwards, and ellipsis. Provide examples of each: *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Cold Mountain* (2003), and *Erin Brockovich* (2000) on p.327. Ask students to share other examples from previously seen films.
- On p. 329, discuss and define the concept of “rhythm” and “duration” for a shot. Transition this into continuity editing: *telling the story as clearly, efficiently, and coherently as possible*. Most films fall into this category. (333)
- Use the example clip from *Casablanca* (1942) on pp.334-335 to demonstrate what this looks like, and then contrast this scene with the concept of discontinuity editing, which *seeks to achieve transitions between shots that are not smooth, continuous, or coherent*. http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xmiz26_rick-s-cafe-american-from-casablanca-1942
- Contrast this clip with the doorbell scene from *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts1x6uADFtM>
- Ask students to reflect on the structure of each of the clips and to note how each was strategically constructed to create a different impression on the viewer. Pull up the eBook

site of the textbook, and use the interactive editing tutorial to allow students to practice manipulating the order of events in a scene. <https://digital.wwnorton.com/3800>

- Separate students into six groups, and assign each unit a different type of editing technique from p. 342-352: shot/reverse shot, match cut, parallel editing, point-of-view editing, jump cut, fade/dissolve, and split screen. Have students read through their assigned section, note the examples provided by the textbook, and prepare to briefly present this piece to the class. Allocate roughly 6-8 minutes for students to discuss and work through their concept in groups, and then return to the class as a whole. Allow students to use laptops to help them come up with additional examples from other films that incorporate their technique, too.
- Each group shares their assigned editing technique and examples with the whole class, and add additional commentary to their research, if needed. While each group presents, students should write down the definition for different techniques in their glossary.
- Distribute the final assignment of the unit that focuses on editing (5.2). Briefly cover the instructions with students and ask if they need any further clarification. Inform students that they may choose a clip of their choice for the assignment, but that the scene must be between two and three minutes in length.

Summary/Closure

To conclude the lesson, have students read through the Editing Checklist (5.1) and review the key concepts. Double-check for clarity if any questions still remain on this final cinematic concept. Remind students that these elements will be used to help analyze and interrogate the films studied over the next few weeks.

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to complete the Editing Assignment chart (5.2).

Assessment

Student achievement of the lesson objectives will be demonstrated by the thoroughness and accuracy of discussion and question and answer and will also be seen through the group activity and their presentations to the rest of the class. The assignment for the next class period will allow instructors to evaluate once again understanding of the editing concepts, as it will ask students to directly apply the techniques discussed in class into an analysis of a scene from a movie of their choosing.

Editing Analysis Checklist (5.1)

When we watch a movie, we see the *mise-en-scène*, design, and acting; we hear the dialogue, music, and sound effects; but we feel the editing, which has the power to affect us directly or indirectly. Good editing—editing that produces the filmmakers' desired effects—results from the editor's intuition in choosing the right length of each shot, the right rhythm of each scene, the right moment for cutting to create the right spatial, temporal, visual, and rhythmic relationships between shots A and B.

As a viewer, you can best understand the overall effects of an editor's decisions by studying a film as a creative whole. But you can most effectively analyze an editor's contributions to a film by examining individual scenes, paying attention to the ways in which individual shots have been edited together. Indeed, the principles of editing are generally most evident within the parts that make up the whole. As we begin viewing films in class over the semester, keep these helpful reminders in mind when thinking about the overall construction of specific scenes.

- Does the editing overall seem to create continuity or discontinuity? If the editing is mostly creating continuity, are there nonetheless moments when the editing creates discontinuity? What is the significance of those moments?
- As each shot cuts to the next shot in the movie or clip, tap your finger on a tabletop or other surface to get a feeling for the rhythm of the editing. How would you describe that rhythm? Does it stay constant, or does it speed up or slow down? How does the rhythm affect your emotional response to the movie?
- Keep track of the types of transitions from shot to shot. Does the editor use one transitional effect more than others? Are the transitions seamless and nearly unnoticeable, or do they call attention to themselves?
- Look for the different types of match cuts in the film. What sort of visual or narrative information is each match cut conveying?

- Are there any moments in the movie in which the traditional conventions of Hollywood continuity editing—including use of the master shot, the 180-degree system, shot/reverse shot, match cuts, and parallel editing—are violated in some way? Describe how these moments appear on-screen. What do you think is the significance of these moments in the film?
- Does the editing seem to indicate what the filmmakers want the audience to feel? What is that intended feeling? Do you feel it? Is it an appropriate feeling for the narrative and themes of the movie?

Editing Assignment (5.2)

For this assignment, you may select a film of your own preference. From there, choose a scene of at least two minutes, but no more than three. Using the chart below, summarize and annotate the scene according to the cinematography and editing techniques discussed over the last two class periods. Be as specific and detailed as possible. Note the example used in the textbook on p. 355 and follow its lead.

Title of Film:			
Summary of Scene:			
Shot	Description	Length (seconds)	Type of Shot
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			

Glossary (Student Copy)

For each term, please write a brief definition that demonstrates your understanding of its purpose and significance in film.

Chapter 1: Looking at Movies

Cinematic Language:

Editing:

Cut:

Close-Up:

Fade-out/Fade-in:

Low-Angle Shot:

Cutting on Action:

Protagonist:

Implicit Meaning:

Explicit Meaning:

Formal Analysis:

Theme/Motif:

Point of View:

Eyeline Match Cut:

Chapter 5: Mise-en-Scène

Mise-en-Scène:

Design:

Composition:

Setting:

On-Location:

Décor:

Properties:

Chiaroscuro:

Costume:

Make-Up Artist:

Chapter 6: Cinematography

Cinematography:

Shot:

Film Stock:

Three-Point System:

Key Light:

Lighting Ratio:

Low-Key Lighting:

High-Key Lighting:

Lens:

Rule of Thirds:

Shooting Angle:

Eye-Level Shot:

High-Angle Shot:

Low-Angle Shot:

Dutch-Angle Shot:

Chapter 8: Editing

Flashback:

Flash-forward:

Ellipsis:

Montage:

Continuity Editing:

Discontinuity Editing:

Shot/Reverse Shot:

Match Cut:

Point-of-View Editing:

Jump Cut:

Fade-in/Fade-out:

Dissolve:

Freeze-Frame:

Split Screen:

Glossary (Instructor Copy)

For each term, please write a brief definition that demonstrates your understanding of its purpose and significance in film.

Chapter 1: Looking at Movies

Cinematic Language: the accepted systems, methods, or customs by which movies communicate. Cinematic conventions are flexible; they are not “rules.”

Editing: the process by which the editor combines and coordinates individual shots into a cinematic whole; the basic creative force of cinema.

Cut: a direct change from one shot to another as a result of cutting; that is, the precise point at which shot “A” ends and shot “B” begins.

Close-Up: a shot that often shows a part of the body filling the frame—traditionally a face, but possibly, a hand, eye, or mouth.

Fade-out/Fade-in: transitional devices in which a shot fades in from a black field on a black-and-white film or from a color field on a color film, or fades out to a black field or color field.

Low-Angle Shot: a shot that is made with the camera below the action, and typically places the observer in a position of inferiority.

Cutting on Action: a continuity editing technique that smoothes the transition between shots portraying a single action from different camera angles. The editor ends the first shot in the middle of a continuing action and begins the subsequent shot at approximately the same point in the matching action.

Protagonist: the primary character whose pursuit of the goal provides the structural foundation of a movie’s story.

Implicit Meaning: an association, connection, or inference that a viewer makes based on the given (explicit) meaning conveyed by the story and form of a film. Lying below the surface of explicit meaning, implicit meaning is closest to our everyday sense of the world *meaning*.

Explicit Meaning: everything that a movie presents on its surface.

Formal Analysis: analysis that examines how a scene or sequences use formal elements—narrative, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound, etc.—to convey the story, mood, and meaning.

Theme/Motif: a shared public idea, such as a metaphor, an adage, a myth, a familiar conflict, or personality type.

Point of View: the position from which a film presents the actions of a story; not only the relation of the narrator(s) to the story, but also the camera's act of seeing and hearing. The two fundamental types of cinematic point of view are omniscient and restricted.

Eyeline Match Cut: an editing transition that shows the audience what a particular character is looking at. The cut joins two shots: the character's face, with his or her eyes clearly visible, then whatever the character is looking at. When the second shot is of another character looking back at the character in the first shot, the resulting reciprocal eyeline match cut and the cuts that follow establish the two characters' proximity and interaction, even if only one character is visible on-screen at any one time.

Chapter 5: Mise-en-Scène

Mise-en-Scène: also known as staging; the overall look and feel of a movie—the sum of everything the audience sees, hears, and experiences while viewing it.

Design: the process by which the look of the settings, props, lighting, and actors is determined. Set design, décor, prop selection, lighting setup, costuming, makeup, and hairstyle design all play a role in shaping the overall design.

Composition: the organization, distribution, balance, and general relationship of stationary objects and figures—as well as of light, shade, line, and color—within the frame.

Setting: time and space in which a story takes place.

On-Location: shooting in an actual interior or exterior location away from the studio.

Décor: color and textures of the interior decoration, furniture, draperies, and curtains of a set.

Properties: (props) objects used to enhance a movie's mise-en-scène by providing physical tokens of narrative information.

Chiaroscuro: the use of deep gradations and subtle variations of lights and darks within an image.

Costume: clothing worn by an actor in a movie; sometimes called wardrobe, a term that designates the department in a studio where the clothing is made and stored.

Make-Up Artist: responsible for using makeup to enhance or alter an actor's appearance.

Chapter 6: Cinematography

Cinematography: the process of capturing moving images on film or some other medium.

Shot: one uninterrupted run of the camera.

Film Stock: celluloid used to record movies. There are two types: one for black-and-white films and the other for color.

Three-Point System: perhaps the best-known lighting convention in feature filmmaking, a system that employs three sources of light—key light, fill light, and backlight—each aimed from a different direction and position in relation to the subject.

Key Light: also known as the main light or source light. The brightest light falling on a subject.

Lighting Ratio: the relationship between illumination and shadow—the balance between key light and fill light.

Low-Key Lighting: lighting that creates strong contrasts; sharp, dark shadows, and an overall gloomy atmosphere. Its contrast between light and dark often imply ethical judgments.

High-Key Lighting: lighting that produces an image with very little contrast between darks and lights. Its even, flat illumination expresses virtually no opinion about the subject being photographed or filmed.

Lens: the piece of transparent material in a camera that focuses the image on the film being exposed. The four major types of lenses are short-focal-length, middle-focal-length, long-focal-length, and zoom.

Framing: the process by which the cinematographer determines what will appear within the borders of the moving image (the frame) during a shot.

Rule of Thirds: a principle of composition that enables filmmakers to maximize the potential of the image, balance its elements, and create the illusion of depth. A grid pattern, when superimposed on the image, divides it into horizontal thirds representing the foreground, middle, and background planes, and into vertical thirds that break up into additional elements.

Shooting Angle: the level and height of the camera in relation to the subject being photographed.

Eye-Level Shot: a shot that is made from the observer's eye level and usually implies that the observer's attitude is neutral toward the subject being portrayed.

High-Angle Shot: a shot that is made with the camera above the action, and typically implies the observer's sense of superiority to the subject being photographed.

Low-Angle Shot: a shot that is made with the camera below the action, and typically places the observer in a position of inferiority.

Dutch-Angle Shot: a shot in which the camera is tilted from its normal, horizontal, and vertical positions so that it is no longer straight, giving the viewer the impression that the world in the frame is out of balance.

Chapter 8: Editing

Flashback: a device for presenting or reawakening the memory of the camera, a character, the audience, or all three. The action cuts from the narrative present to a past event, which may already have appeared in the movie either directly or through inference.

Flash-forward: a device for presenting the anticipation of the camera, a character, the audience, or all three. The action cuts to a future time, when the camera reveals directly or imagines what is going to happen.

Ellipsis: an omission of time—the time that separates one shot from another—to create dramatic or comedic impact.

Montage: the sequence of shots showing a condensed series of events.

Continuity Editing: seeks to achieve logic, smoothness, and sequential flow. It ensures rhythm from one shot to the next, and tells a story as clearly and coherently as possible.

Discontinuity Editing: joins two separate shots in ways that upset the viewer's expectations and cause momentary disorientation or confusion.

Shot/Reverse Shot: parallel editing between shots of different characters, usually in a conversation or confrontation.

Match Cut: a transition that preserves continuity between two shots.

Point-of-View Editing: editing different shots together so that the resulting sequences makes viewers aware of the perspective of a particular character or group of characters. Most frequently, it starts with an objective shot of a character toward something outside the frame and then cuts to a shot of the object, person, or action that the character is supposed to be looking at.

Jump Cut: the removal of a portion of film, resulting in an instantaneous advance in the action—a sudden, disorienting ellipsis between two shots.

Fade-in/Fade-out: a transition in which a shot fades in from a black field on a black-and-white film or from a color field on a color film, or fades out to a black field.

Dissolve: a transition in which a shot gradually appears over a separate shot and begins to replace it midway through transition. Usually, it is used to indicate the passing of time.

Freeze-Frame: a still image within a movie created by repetitive printing of the same frame, so that it can be seen without movement for whatever length of time the filmmaker desires.

Split Screen: a method of telling two stories at the same time by dividing the screen into two different parts.

Unit Lesson Plan 6: Representation & *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*

Main Idea/Theme: Introduction to postcolonial theory and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Define** postcolonial terminology—including representation, “Othering,” stereotype, and binary—and describe how its concepts resonate throughout popular culture, but specifically in film.
- **Analyze** movie posters and trailers through the postcolonial lens, in addition to films themselves.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.5.1.1. *Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 - 23. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Stuart Hall)
(or photocopied reproductions of Chapter 4: “The Spectacle of the Other”)
 - 24. Projector/SmartBoard
 - 25. PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 - 26. Cinematography Assignment with Feedback
- Student
 - *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*
 - Binder/Notebook and Writing Utensils

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

Visual and aural learners' needs are addressed through the use of visual images including posters and a Slide Show, in addition to expanded lecture and discussion of the textbook material. Class discussion is focused on application, allowing students to directly connect the new concepts to their own lives and experiences, which provide students of all reading abilities with the chance to engage with the text on a more meaningful level. The opening writing prompt allow students from a wide variety of academic and personal backgrounds to freely construct a response that instantly ties to the new material, once again creating a bridge for both familiarity and student interest.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Begin class by having students answer the following writing prompt in their binders: *when was a time you felt marked or categorized because you were different? In other words, when was a time you were reduced to a single aspect of your identity, instead of being treated as a unique individual?* Allocate roughly 6-8 minutes for students to answer the question.
- Define the concept of a “stereotype” for students: *a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing* (249). Ask students to think with a partner of certain cultural stereotypes they are familiar with either from their own experiences or those that they have seen on television, in movies, advertisements, etc. Record these answers on the board.
- Once a list has been generated, ask students to recall specific moments of popular culture where they have seen these images perpetuated. *(As an example: “Arabs are violent,” could be drawn from films such as American Sniper (2014), Aladdin (1992), as well as television series such as 24 (2001-2010))*
- Beginning on p. 239 of the Hall textbook, starting with the header “Racializing the ‘Other’” work through the concepts discussed as part of the text’s introduction to postcolonial theory. Have students record definitions for “representation,” “Other,” and “binary,” and relate these concepts back to the previous examples of stereotypes students have generated.

- Pause on p.241 to discuss the historical advertisements included in the text: “Huntley and Palmers Biscuit Tins,” “Pears’ Soap: The White Man’s Burden.” Ask students: *what larger messages do these advertisements appear to suggest about race or culture?*
- Pause again on p.248, with the historical paintings of slave/master relations in the 19th and early 20th century American south. Again, ask: *how do these images present different races or cultures? What messages do they seem to imply?*
- Separate students into four groups and give each a different, unique poster from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). Have students model the same critical thinking process from the past two activities to examine these new artifacts. Have them consider, too: *Who is the “hero” of this story? How do you know? Who or what appears to be the villain? Again, how do you know?*
- On the projector, pull up the trailer for *Temple of Doom*, available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOwWfns4qqw>.
- After watching, ask students: *what details about the film’s plot can you already identify? Much like the posters, who appear to be the heroes or villain? How are they portrayed?*
- Provide a brief contextual overview of the film: *sequel to Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981), part of the ongoing Indiana Jones series, Walt Disney World attraction*. Note, too, that the film, although it is technically the second installment in the franchise, is the chronological starting point for the series—as a result, the movie serves as both “prequel” and “sequel,” in some sense. Over the next few class periods, students will watch and analyze this movie, using the film analysis concepts discussed in the previous week, as well as viewing the film through this postcolonial lens to examine its portrayal of different races, religions, and cultures.
- Introduce the assignment for next time: to read pp.249-257 in the Hall textbook. Students should take notes on new concepts and examples, and should look up and define any unfamiliar, bolded terminology.

Summary/Closure

Placing the textbook aside, ask students to collaborate with a few partners to create a list that describes everything they know about Indian culture. In addition, at the bottom of the list, have them note *where* they have learned or become familiar with these traits. Have students save this list—they will return to it in a future class period

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to read pp.249-257 in the Hall textbook, and record notes on the new concepts, examples, and terminology discussed.

Assessment

Student mastery of the lesson objectives is demonstrated through the class discussion of the text's content and corresponding application of its terms on the analysis of the text's images and well as the film's posters and trailer. Through both small group and whole class participation and responses, instructors will be able to gauge whether students are understanding the new ideas and concepts put forth by the Hall text, which are vital to analyzing and interpreting the film in the upcoming class periods.

Unit Lesson Plan 7: Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom Part I

Main Idea/Theme: Continued work on issues of representation in popular culture and initial viewing of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Analyze** a film from a critical lens in order to examine the portrayal of different cultures and regions.
- **Describe** and discuss historical cinematic stereotypes of different regions, ethnicities, and cultures.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.5.1.1. *Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.b *Examine the intersections and conflicts between visual and verbal messages.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 - 27. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Stuart Hall)
 - 28. *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984, DVD)
 - 29. *Masters of None: “Indians on TV”* (Netflix)
 - 30. Projector/SmartBoard
 - 31. PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 - 32. Editing Assignment with Feedback
 - 33. *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* Viewing Guide (7.1)
- Student
 - *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*
 - Binder/Notebook and Writing Utensils

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

A combination of verbal discussion and written replies allow students to respond to both the written text and the film screening in the class period, providing different styles of learners

with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and analysis of the material. The viewing guide assists students in focusing their attention during the film’s screening to look for content and issues relevant to the unit’s objectives on postcolonial analysis. In addition, the viewing guide is structured to solicit responses that challenge students on different levels of critical thinking, according to Bloom’s Taxonomy.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Project the first two minutes of *Master of None* Season 1, Episode 4 (“Indians on TV”) (available on *Netflix*) until the episode’s title appears. This opening scene is a montage of Indian stereotypes and representations on film and television over the past fifty years, including characters from *The Simpsons*, *Saved by the Bell*, and *Johnny Quest*, among others. Ask students to think of other famous Indian characters that *could* have been included in this montage.
- Ask students to reconstruct the list of Donald Bogle’s “five main stereotypes” of minority characters in American popular culture on a sheet of paper: (*Toms, Coons, The Tragic Mulatto, Mammies, and Bad Bucks*—p.251).
- Have students also write down the traits often associated with these types of characters, as well as the historical examples from film and literature that the textbook provides. This activity serves as a review of the assigned reading, as well as an important bridge into the film analysis that will take place later in the class period.
- After this, assign students into five groups, and appoint each to look up modern-day examples of these categories—encourage them to limit their scope to the past fifteen years for both film and television. Allocate roughly 8-10 minutes for students to do this, and have them record their new examples on their sheet of paper.
- Have students share their answers with the group as a whole. After this concludes, ask: *Why are these representations so dangerous? What can they lead to?* Have students write a final response to this prompt at the bottom of the page, and allow a few students to posit their thoughts to the class as a whole. When finished, collect the responses as a means of assessing student understanding of the assigned reading material.
- Distribute the viewing guide for *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (7.1) and briefly walk through its contents. Underscore to students that this resource will assist them in keeping a focused purpose for viewing the film.

- Begin showing *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Monitor students during the screening to ensure that they are taking notes in their viewing guide.
- Pause the film for the day at 28:08 (Indiana Jones, Willie Scott, and Shorty ride out of the Indian village on elephants toward the palace while the local crowd cheers behind them)
- For the remaining ten or fifteen minutes of class, discuss the viewing guide questions and topics covered thus far in small groups and as class as a whole.
- Introduce the assignment: “Stereotyping as a Signifying Practice” (pp.257-269) from the Hall textbook. Students are to read this section and take notes on unfamiliar concepts.
- Pivot back to the discussion about representation from earlier in the class period. *Based off of our brief encounters with the different cultures in the film—Chinese and Indian—what assumptions or takeaways can be made about their people or values? How does this representation contrast with the portrayal of the Americans—Jones and Scott?* Have students write a response to the question in their viewing guide, and then solicit a few volunteers to share their thoughts with the class as a whole.

Summary/Closure

The end of class writing prompt serves as a means of tying the class period’s earlier texts and the film together and wrapping up the previous discussion and activities. Although not collected at the end of this specific class period, the response is recorded in the students’ viewing guide—a packet that will be assessed at a later period.

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to read p.257-269 in the Hall textbook, and record notes on the new concepts, examples, and terminology discussed.

Assessment

The lesson objectives are assessed through the quality of the class discussion of the text’s content and corresponding application of it to the film screening. Through both small group and whole class participation and responses, instructors will be able to gauge whether students are understanding the new ideas and concepts put forth by the Hall text, which are vital to analyzing and interpreting the film in the upcoming class periods. In addition, responses to the questions posed in the viewing guide will allow instructors to assess whether or not students are thinking critically throughout the film and applying a postcolonial lens, or just simply “watching” it.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom Viewing Guide (7.1)

Use the following questions and prompts to assist you in focusing your attention during the film's screening.

1. The film begins in Shanghai, China. Describe the mise-en-scène of the opening scene at the nightclub.
2. What are your initial impressions of Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) and how does he contrast to the Chinese gangsters?
3. What accounts for this contrast? Consider the costumes, lighting, and dialogue.
4. Describe the editing and cinematography of the airplane landing and toboggan ride sequence. How do they enhance the overall action and thrill of this scene?
5. Based off of our “tour” of the Indian village, what conclusions can be made about the people and their way of life? How does it contrast to Jones and Willie Scott (Kate Capshaw)?
6. According to the film, why do the villagers select Jones as their savior for their plight? How do they react to his presence—an outsider—in their community?
7. How does the film envision the Indian jungle and wilderness? What specific traits of it does the film highlight?
8. We've arrived at the Palace of Pankot. What follows is one of the most iconic scenes of the entire franchise. First: what does the palace look like on its interior? How does the film create this “exotic” experience? In other words, what is the mise-en-scène of the setting?
9. How do Jones and Scott differ in their reactions to the local “noble” culture? What impression does that leave on the viewer?
10. Ah, the dinner scene. What's on the menu? How does the film portray these supposedly local “delicacies?”
11. List some of the cinematographic elements at work in the sacrifice scene. If you could pick three adjectives to describe the region's culture based off of this scene and those prior to it, what would they be?
12. After drinking the “Blood of Kali,” Jones becomes hypnotized. How is he able to “break” the curse of being under this—to quote the film—“savage spell?”
13. Who comes to save Jones, Scott, and Shorty (Jonathan Ke Quan) at the bridge?
14. The film ends with our trio returning to the village. Describe the mise-en-scène of this final shot. How do the locals greet them? What, as a result, is the takeaway for the viewers?

Unit Lesson Plan 8: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* Part I

Main Idea/Theme: Introduction to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and Edward Said’s theory of “Orientalism.”

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Articulate** central components of Edward Said’s “Orientalism” and discuss how its thesis permeates popular culture still today.
- **Examine** a film using a critical lens in order to discuss the subliminal messages and ideology it puts forth.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.5.1.1. *Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.*
- 11.9.1.1 *Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.*
- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 - 34. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1984, DVD)
 - 35. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* trailer (available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkkzKHCx154>)
 - 36. *Orientalism* (Edward Said, *excerpt* from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 24-27)
 - 37. Projector/SmartBoard & PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 - 38. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* Viewing Guide (8.1)
 - 39. Orientalism Artwork Assignment (8.2)
- Student
 - 40. *Orientalism* (Edward Said, *excerpt* from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 24-27)
 - 41. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* Viewing Guide

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

The instructor will assist struggling readers and those needing additional clarification through a guided lecture of Said's essay, and will engage students by presenting them with three opportunities to build connections to his argument's main ideas. In addition, students will work in groups to help them grapple with this new content by collaborating with peers. Finally, considering the essay's excerpt in light of popular culture artifacts helps students further connect his ideas to the modern world.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Begin class by projecting still images of the Sahara desert, or give a still image to students in small groups of no more than four. Have them write a brief paragraph that describes these scenes: *what do they see?* Share several student responses aloud with the group as whole, but eventually pivot back to this question: *what do we typically associate with this region of the world?*
- Introduce Edward Said, and provide a brief background of his early life in Palestine, his education abroad in Europe, and his eventual production of *Orientalism*. Underscore that this work impacted the fields of literary theory, cultural studies, history, and other disciplines in significant ways.
- Distribute copies of the excerpt from this text, and separate students into groups of four. Have students read through the piece together, and ask them to stop periodically and annotate places of confusion or to underline terms that need further clarification.
- Return to the whole class discussion and work through the areas that need additional support. Specifically, clarify his distinction in the definition between: *the Orient* ("Eastern" culture) and the *Occident* ("Western" culture) (p.25).
- Ask students to make two columns on a sheet of paper, one with "Orient" and one labeled "Occident." Using both Said's texts and their own familiarity with these broad categorizations in popular culture, ask them to generate traits or characteristics that frequently fall under each label.
- In addition, ask students to list at the bottom of the sheet, which films, novels, television series, or other elements have helped them to reinforce some of these beliefs. After approximately ten minutes, have students share some of their responses out loud. Collect their responses when finished.

- Posit to the entire class: *what is Said's overall concern in this piece? How is the Western idea of Orientalism "dangerous?"*
- Introduce *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and place it in context with the previously screened *Indiana Jones* film. Project both the poster and the trailer for the film on the slide show: *what seems similar to Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom? What appears to be different?*
- Distribute the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* Viewing Guide for students (8.1), and emphasize that these questions will help focus their analysis of the film over the next several class periods, but they should also feel free to jot down notes about other moments or scenes that they find interesting, problematic, or significant for discussion.
- To conclude class, direct to students to the following link on their laptops: <http://www.artcyclopedia.com/subjects/Orientalism.html>. Ask them to search the list of classical Orientalist paintings and artists and find *three* works of art that they feel, *specifically*, embody the ideas and concepts Said illustrates in this excerpt.
- Have them save these images or bookmark them for later. For tomorrow, they are to type a brief response to the artworks, explaining how and why they are accurate embodiments of the "Oriental" image Said accuses the West of constructing and perpetuating. Make sure they list both the work of art's title, its composer, and that they include a picture of the image in their document, too.

Summary/Closure

If time allows, students may share their selected artworks with one or two group members around. Before dismissing the class, however, ask one or two students to volunteer one of their images for the class as a whole to consider. Emphasize how the work ties back to Said's earlier remarks, and note that this imagery will also be considered in the upcoming film the class watches over the duration of the week.

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to complete the Orientalist artwork assignment (8.2) and bring the *printed* document of it to class.

Assessment

The two lesson objectives are fulfilled via students' discussion and response to the excerpt of Said's critical work and also by the closing activity that directly asks them to apply his ideas to a work of their choosing. Viewing the film's trailer and posters similarly encourages students to think critically about more modern works that reflect and embody the theoretical concept of Orientalism, and student discussion during this analysis demonstrates their comprehension of this new material.

Raiders of the Lost Ark Viewing Guide (8.1)

Use the following questions and prompts to assist you in focusing your attention during the film's screening.

1. Compare and contrast your first impressions to these four main characters: Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford), Marion Ravenwood (Karen Allen), Dr. René Belloq (Paul Freeman), and Sallah (John Rhys-Davies). How are they introduced?
2. Who are the villains—both main and supporting—in the film, and how does the film contrast them with Indiana Jones?
3. The film takes place largely in 1936 Cairo, Egypt and its surrounding landscape. How does the film “recreate” this setting? What does it reveal of the culture? Include *specific* details in your response.
4. Let's break down, perhaps, the most infamous scene of the film: Jones shooting the sword-wielding Arab warrior in the village market square. How is this scene created, and what does it seem to imply about the two opposing cultures?
5. In addition to this scene, what scenes or moments in the film seem to imply an “East vs. West” dynamic that is related to its central conflict?
6. Choose *one* of these other “iconic” scenes from the film and break it down on a cinematic level: *the Egyptian market chase, digging in the desert, the plane fight, truck chase, and the unveiling of the Ark of the Covenant*. Discuss the following elements of film analysis: framing, camera angles, lighting, editing, and mise-en-scène.
7. Critics such as Jack Saheen have argued that this film operates, on some levels, as a modern-day representation of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. What moments or aspects of the film seem to support this claim? Be specific.
8. What clichés from “Western” films, comics, or other television series seem to be portrayed in this film?
9. Overall, how is the role of archaeology presented in this film? Provide some specific examples.
10. Why does Jones pursue the Ark of the Covenant so incessantly? What seems to be his motivation?

***Orientalism* Assignment (8.2)**

For tomorrow, select *three* examples of Orientalist artworks from the following website: <http://www.artcyclopedia.com/subjects/Orientalism.html>. Include both the actual image of the work and also its artists and title. For each, write a brief response that describes why that work of art represents the ideas Edward Said advances in the excerpt from *Orientalism* we discussed in class.

Note: we will come back to these images and your arguments later in this unit and find additional modern-day examples of this type of imagery that also represent Said's thesis.

Unit Lesson Plan 9: Avatar Part I

Main Idea/Theme: Introduction to *Avatar* and Environmental Justice.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Identify** and discuss the principles of environmental justice, and discuss how they are related to postcolonial theory.
- **Analyze** a film using a critical lens in order to examine both its intended and unintended, subliminal messages.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.b *Examine the intersections and conflicts between visual and verbal messages.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 - 42. *Avatar* (2009, DVD)
 - 43. “The Principles of Environmental Justice” (www.ejnet.org/ej)
 - 44. “Green Imperialism” (Richard Grove, *excerpt* from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 498-500)
 - 45. “Palestinian Protestors Dress as *Avatar* Characters” (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/02/12/palestinian-protesters-po_n_460560.html)
 - 46. Projector/SmartBoard & PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 - 47. *Avatar* Viewing Guide (9.1)
- Student
 - 48. *Avatar* Viewing Guide
 - Binder/Notebook and Writing Utensils

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

The teacher will provide guided instruction as well as facilitate whole and small group discussion of the different articles and materials examined in class. Visual aids including film

clips and still images will further assist students in understanding the core concepts of the lesson. Finally, students will have three distinct, different activities to respond and create meaningful connections with the material.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Begin class by projecting parallel images of Palestinian activists dressed and painted as characters from *Avatar* found [here](#). Pair these pictures next to still photographs of the Na’vi in *Avatar* to highlight their similarities. In addition, show footage from their demonstrations via YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Chw32qG-M7E>.
- Provide a brief bit of context for the demonstrations and this event by having students briefly skim through the article from *The Huffington Post*, “Palestinian Protestors Dressed as *Avatar* Characters.”
- Have students write a response to this opening prompt: *Why would activists choose to represent and promote themselves through fictional characters? What could be gained by this embodiment?* Solicit a few students to present their answers to the class as a whole.
- Introduce *Avatar* and the context surrounding its production and release, its reigning status as the highest grossing film of all time, its in-development sequels, and the recent construction on its upcoming attractions at Walt Disney World. Note specifically, too, that the film contains a complicated, problematic message of anti-imperialism and environmental conservation that their analysis will explore in the upcoming class periods.
- Distribute the *Avatar* Viewing Guides (9.1) and briefly go over the questions and concepts it prods students to consider during the upcoming screening. Emphasize that although these questions will help focus their analysis, students should feel free to jot down thoughts or moments from the film that they feel are significant and worthwhile to discuss as a whole.
- Provide an overview of the film’s plot or, if time, show the film’s trailer, available on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZNHIU3uHT4>. Ask students to provide their initial impressions or their recollections if they have seen the film previously.
- Distribute “The Principles of Environmental Justice” handout. Define and discuss the first principal: *Environmental Justice affirms ecological unity and the interdependence of all*

species and the right to be free from ecological destruction. Ask students: *Put this in another way—what does this look like? How does it relate to postcolonial theory?*

- To further illustrate, connect the example back to the previous article from *The Huffington Post*. *How are the protestors here promoting this principle?*
- Place students into eight groups and divide up the remaining sixteen principles, two per unit. Have students: 1) define each principle in their own words, and 2) describe a real-life example of what the principle looks like in action, or an example that demonstrates what the *absence* of it look like. Encourage them to use laptops to briefly research real-world events that connect back to their principles.
- Allocate roughly eight to ten minutes for the research activity.
- Have each group briefly present their thoughts to the class as a whole. For each, again, ask the class to *consider the importance of each principle, and to think of the world they work to envision as a whole.*
- Introduce the assignment for tomorrow: to read “Green Imperialism” (Richard Grove, excerpt from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 498-500). Students are to define concepts that are unfamiliar to them and annotate areas that they find particular significant or that need further clarification.

Summary/Closure

Before students exit, have them write a brief response that articulates which of the environmental justice principles they believe is most critical for twenty-first century citizens to be concerned about. Have them justify their answer by citing moments of discussion or research from today’s class period. Collect the responses as students leave.

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to read the article by Richard Grove: “Green Imperialism” and annotate as they work through the text.

Assessment

Student mastery of the learning objectives can be gauged by their discussion and responses, both written and oral, to the group research activity. In addition, the questions posed by their Viewing Guide directly applies several of the concepts discussed in class, allowing students to directly apply the material to the film screening in future periods.

***Avatar* Viewing Guide (9.1)**

Use the following questions and prompts to assist you in focusing your attention during the film's screening.

1. Describe the Earth's environment as the film opens. What does it look like? How does the mise-en-scène contribute to that perception?
2. For what purpose is Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) selected to visit Pandora?
3. What is an "avatar?" What is their official purpose?
4. How do the Americans view the Na'vi people? How do these views compare between the scientists, the military, and the business people?
5. *Avatar* was praised for its groundbreaking visual effects. What are some of the most spectacular ones the film exhibits and why do you think Cameron invested so much effort into their creation? Be specific.
6. The Na'vi greet one another with the phrase "I see you," and this line is repeated throughout the film. What message might be meant by its repetition?
7. How does the Na'vi relationship with the environment contrast with that of the Americans?
8. Describe the transformation Sully goes through over the course of the film. How does he change? What accounts for this change?
9. How do the Na'vi people receive Sully when he first meets them? How does their perception of him change over the film? Why does this change occur?
10. What are the American's motives for attacking the Na'vi? How does the film vilify these actions through cinematography and editing? Not specific moments to justify your response.
11. Who does the film present as its overall "hero?" Why? How does the film allow you to reach this conclusion? Finally: do you agree?
12. How does Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver) attempt to befriend the Na'vi? Why are her efforts at outreach rejected?
13. The film's final shot returns to the ongoing idea of "seeing." What has just happened? And what's the significance of it? In other words, why end the film like this?
14. Cameron admitted that his film was constructed to raise messages about environmental conservation and justice. Which scenes make these objectives most clear, and how are they created to impact the film's viewers?

Unit Lesson Plan 10: *Avatar* Part II

Main Idea/Theme: Initial viewing of *Avatar* and discussion.

Instructional Objectives:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- **Connect** nonfiction texts and critical theory to a fictional film in order to draw parallels between genres.
- **Analyze** a film using the postcolonial lens in order to both identify and complicate its intended message.

Minnesota State Standards

- 11.7.4.4 *Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.*
- 11.9.7.7.a *Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain.*
- 11.9.7.7.b *Examine the intersections and conflicts between visual and verbal messages.*
- 11.9.7.7.c *Recognize how visual techniques or design elements carry or influence messages in various media.*

Materials Needed

- Teacher
 - 49. *Avatar* (2009, DVD)
 - 50. *Orientalism* Mini-Assignment with Feedback
 - 51. “Green Imperialism” (Richard Grove, *excerpt* from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 498-500)
 - 52. “*Avatar* is Real: Pandora is located in Central and South America and Africa” (Carlos A. Quiroz article, linked below)
 - 53. Projector/SmartBoard & PowerPoint/Prezi Slide Show (if desired)
 - 54. *Avatar* Viewing Guide (9.1)
 - 55. “*Avatar* and Environmental Justice” Assignment (10.1)
- Student
 - 56. “Green Imperialism” (Richard Grove, *excerpt* from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 498-500)
 - 57. *Avatar* Viewing Guide

Differentiated Instruction Tactics

A variety of whole-class, small group, and individual responses are used throughout the lesson, providing students with a myriad of ways to demonstrate mastery and create connection with the material. In addition, the jigsaw activity allows students to be mixed with those of a variety of backgrounds and academic abilities, allowing struggling readers to be paired with those who master the material quite easily.

Instructional Procedure & Notes of Emphasis

- Screen the first five minutes of *Avatar* (pause the film at 5:08, Sully waking up on the space station).
- Have students write an initial reaction to this opening scene that answers the following question: *What does Earth look like, and what does the film imply has happened to it?* Solicit a few volunteers to share their responses with the class as a whole.
- Putting the film aside for now, ask students to assemble in small groups of no more than five and respond to these two questions stemming from the Grove essay excerpt: 1) *How has colonial expansion often coincided with ecological destruction?* 2) *How has the response to this destruction (reforestation, conservationism) also, at times, been used as an oppressive colonial force?* Have the groups record their thoughts on a single sheet of paper, and then share their thoughts with a neighboring unit.
- Allow groups to share their responses with the whole class, and then discuss other points of confusion or significance raised by students' annotations of the text.
- Distribute copies of Quiroz's article and break it up into sections based on the ongoing international socio-environmental crises he discusses: Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Congo. Assign each group one national issue: have them read the article's section on it, and then use laptops to briefly investigate the event further. In addition, instruct students to note what features of the conflict Quiroz identifies as relevant to the premise and plot of *Avatar*.
- Designate roughly 6-8 minutes for groups to complete the activity. Then, have students jigsaw: one student from each group forms a new group composed of those from other circles. Students share their work in these new groups, thereby informing each other of the content they haven't yet read.

- Pass out the assignment overview for “*Avatar* and Environmental Justice” (10.1) and walk through the instructions with students. Highlight their ability to choose a topic of their own interest, and note the benchmarks and requirements they must fulfill along the way.
- Introduce the assignment for tomorrow: students must select the topic they will consider and research alongside *Avatar*’s screening and write a one-paragraph rationale for why they feel this topic might work for the major assignment.
- For the remainder of class, resume the screening of *Avatar* and monitor that students are continuing to take notes in their Viewing Guides.

Summary/Closure

At the conclusion of the class period, have students return to their initial responses to the film’s opening scene. Have them write an additional paragraph that expands on their thoughts but also addresses the following: *How have the ideas and topics discussed in today’s class altered your interpretation of the film’s message thus far?*

Assignment

For the next class period, students are to create a topic proposal for the “*Avatar* and Environmental Justice” assignment that identifies not only the subject they plan on researching, but also a justification for why such a topic could work.

Assessment

Student discussion and written responses to Grove’s article and the opening scene from *Avatar* will demonstrate the extent of their comprehension with the ideas discussed in the excerpt. By observing participation in the jigsaw activity, instructors will further be able to gauge the understanding students have with the concepts and ideas discussed thus far, as well as their comprehension of Quiroz’s article and how it relates to the premise of *Avatar*.

***Avatar* and Environmental Justice Assignment (10.1)**

Over the course of the next few class periods, we'll be watching *Avatar* (2009) and examining it through the postcolonial critical lens. One of the elements we'll be considering is the film's environmental message. The film's director, James Cameron, has remarked in interviews that he created the film in part to draw awareness to environmental conflicts plaguing nations around the globe. As a result, many authors and journalists have noted similarities in the film's central conflicts with potential real-life counter parts.

For this assignment, I'd like you to choose **one** of the environmental justice parallels raised by **one** of the following writers in their respective articles. You **may** select an issue that these authors don't mention, but appears to fit their mold—just have a conversation with me first. You'll research the issue by consulting a minimum of five sources and, as a result, find out what's at stake in the conflict. Who are the opposing sides? What are they arguing over? Then, as we screen the film, I'd like you to consider what parallels you can draw between Cameron's fictional intergalactic tale and your authentic, Earth-bound saga. What's similar? What's different—and why? At our next class period, you'll turn in a topic proposal to me that: 1) identifies which environmental conflict you'll be investigating for this assignment, and 2) justifies **why** this topic will be a strong fit for its objectives. By the end of the week, you'll submit the links to the five sources you're examining for the project.

The end product for this assignment will be a brief oral presentation (no more than 5 minutes, no less than 3) that provides the class with an overview of your research and the connections you made with the film. You may use a visual aid if you'd like, but remember to keep within the time parameters. In addition, you'll submit an outline that summarizes this information and formally articulates the insights gained by this analysis. The goal of this assignment will allow us to place Cameron's film in its present context, allowing us to see how he constructed a real, relevant social message in a film that, on its surface, could be read as just a "science-fiction" adventure.

Article links (choose **one** of the issues the author finds parallels to in *Avatar*):

- "Avatar is Real: Pandora is Located in Central and South America" (Carolos A. Quiroz) <http://www.alborada.net/quiroz-avatar-latinamerica-indigenous-030110>
- "Avatar: Return of the Natives" (Slavoj Žižek) <http://www.newstatesman.com/film/2010/03/avatar-reality>
- "Anti-Imperialism in 3-D" (Nagesh Rao) <http://socialistworker.org/2010/01/07/anti-imperialism-in-3D>

Unit Culminating Assessment Directions

Over the past several weeks, we've both read and viewed examples of films that can be complicated or scrutinized by examining them through a critical theory lens: postcolonialism. For the final project of this unit, I'd like you apply the critical thinking skills and analysis demonstrated during our study of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom*, and *Avatar* and direct it toward a film or television series of your own choice.

You have several different options for how you might complete this objective. My suggestion? Choose the project that best matches with your individual strengths as a writer, reader, and analyzer of popular culture. Listed below are the possibilities; by the end of the week, you'll select one and submit a topic proposal to me that briefly explains **what** you will be examining, and **how** you intend on completing this project.

Option 1: *Postcolonial Film Review*. For this option, you'll select a film from the following options (if you have an idea of one that isn't listed, run it by me first) and construct a 3-page review of it that pays specific attention to the concepts related to postcolonial theory we've discussed in class. To that end, you'll consider the portrayals of different cultures in this film and articulate the overall impression the film provides of this society through its cinematic elements: mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing.

Possible titles include: *Aladdin* (1992), *True Lies* (1994), *24* (television series, 2001-2010), *American Sniper* (2014), *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971), *The Mummy* (1998, or any of its sequels), *The Blind Side* (2009), *Dances with Wolves* (1991), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *The Last Samurai* (2003).

Option 2: *Comparing Perspectives*: For this option, you'll watch two films that deal with the same issue or historical and write a 3-page essay that discusses how the films differ in their interpretation of these events. Similar to the previous review, you'll pay special attention to the film's cinematic construction, but you'll also discuss how the motion picture represents or portrays the *people* the event concerns. Again, there are certainly other possibilities than the films I've listed below, just have a conversation with me first before selecting something else.

Possible titles include: *Pocahontas* (1995) and *The New World* (2005), *Dances with Wolves* (1991) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *American Sniper* (2014) and *The Kingdom*

(2007), *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001) and *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008).

Option 3: *Narrative*: Here, you'll think about *your* own culture and traditions, and write a 3-page essay that describes your identity in relation to its possible representation to others. Much of our discussion in class has focused on representation in popular culture. For this option, I'd like you think about how *you* would want to be portrayed in film or on television. What aspects of your background or values would be important for the creators to consider? *Why*? In short, you can think of this option as a "suggestion" to potential filmmakers: if they're making a movie or television series about *you*, what are the traits, beliefs, and elements of your life that they absolutely need to know in order for the representation to be considered "accurate."

Option 4: *Creative Component*. There are certainly possibilities in this assignment to go beyond or outside the parameters of the 3-page essay. If desired, the project could be converted into a creative work, such as a presentation, short film, or some other construction that differs from the traditional essay format. Again, I'm quite open to approving these possibilities, but have a conversation with me first before doing so. If you're interested in pursuing this option, provide a clear rationale in your topic proposal as to why *this* format will be preferable for expressing your ideas instead of a written essay.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Analysis of Research Questions

1. To what extent can the study of film serve as a pedagogical tool in the secondary English classroom?

This thesis argues that films are just as worthy of inclusion in the secondary English and Language Arts curriculum as traditional print texts. The literature review, critical theory section, and the subsequent lesson plans serve as testament to making the classroom a multimedia-focused environment that develops and hones students' critical thinking and media literacy skills. Such abilities are becoming increasingly necessary for citizens to possess in the escalating digital world outside schools, and this thesis emphasizes, accordingly, the advancement of students' ability to analyze and discuss film, television, and other media artifacts. As both the thesis's literature review and lesson plans demonstrate, however, these skills need not be limited to the study of film, but can also be transferred and applied to the classroom's traditional printed texts.

2. What strategies and concepts can instructors use to make the study of film in their classrooms a reality?

This thesis includes a preliminary film analysis "crash course" week of lesson plans that provide educators with instructional resources to assist them in weaving film into their curriculum. First, each of the first five lesson plans includes prompts, activities, and assessment methods that introduce students to the principal elements of analyzing films. Printable handouts are included to provide educators with classroom-ready supplies for such a unit. Each lesson plan also provides detailed instructions and discussion questions, which further allow educators to seamlessly integrate the curricular design into their own classrooms. Although designed for sixty-minute class periods, the activities, discussions, and assignments could also be extended or reduced based on different educational environments or learning objectives.

3. How can the study of film be used as a means of teaching postcolonial theory?

The films selected for examination in the thesis's lesson plans and curricular design all focus around the idea of teaching students some of the basic concepts and theorists of postcolonialism. Paired with textbooks and short essay excerpts on topics such as representation, Orientalism, identity construction, and environmental justice, the films and lesson plans help

students see how these issues continue to manifest themselves throughout popular culture. In addition, each film's viewing guide challenges students to look for content related to the critical theory by asking questions that blend both film analysis *and* postcolonial analysis together. Finally, the culminating unit assignment asks students to once again apply basic postcolonial criticism onto an additional film or to construct a narrative that links its concepts to their own life.

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