

Lesson Plan

Subtext and Shot Choice

Needs Statement: A good director needs to understand the subtext of any given scene to make appropriate directorial choices. Making choices in relationship to the subtext will allow the director to effectively tell his/her story.

Learning Objective Statement: Given a short scene or portion thereof, one page or less, from a movie or play the student director will define, in writing, the subtext of the scene and choose one shot, including shot size (close up, medium shot, wide shot), shot type (single, two shot, over-the-shoulder), camera movement (static, moving) and lens choice (wide angle, normal, telephoto), that “relates” to the subtext. Evaluation will be by listening to the student’s presentation of his/her definition of the subtext and related shot choice and the explanation of that choice. Minimum standard is that the explanation of the shot choice reasonably fits the student’s definition of the subtext. Mastery is that the student can assign an alternative subtext to the same scene and another shot choice in relationship to the alternative subtext.

Student Preparation: The student will bring to class one page or less of a scene from a screenplay or theatrical play and several copies to distribute to the class.

Teaching tools and location: The instructor will bring to class a scene, or portion thereof, from a screenplay or theatrical play for the purpose of demonstration.

Lesson steps

All steps are to be lecture with demonstration.

1. Define “subtext”.
2. Read the chosen scene aloud.
3. Upon completion of the reading, with the students’ assistance, define the subtext of the scene.
4. From a written list of shot choices - Shot Size, Shot Type, Camera Movement, Lens Choice - create a single shot that relates to the subtext.
5. Explain the shots relationship to the subtext.
6. If time allows, assign an alternative subtext to the same scene and repeat steps 3 and 4.

Reinforcement Activities

Student Application Activities: Each student, with a classmate’s assistance, will read his/her scene aloud, define the subtext, indicate a related shot choice and explain.

Lesson Timing: Student preparation - 1 minute, Lesson Presentation 10 minutes, Application Activities - 1hour. Long Term - Whenever appropriate, have the students explain their shot choices in relationship to their understanding of their scripts.