

**Film and Reading Strategies
(Chapter 2)****Predicting**

When active readers are engaged with a text, they tend to ask themselves, “What is going to happen next?” We make guesses and we revise our predictions as needed. Predicting is easy. This is a strategy we learn early on as children and become proficient at as adults. Everyone can predict. The hard part, however, is to support your predictions with reasoning from the text!

***Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954)**

0:00:00 - 0:04:34

As the titles run we see the large windows of an apartment building and the blinds are slowly being raised by some unseen hand. There is a lively (**non-diegetic**?) jazz soundtrack playing. After the credits, the camera slowly **tracks** forward, toward and nearly out of one of those windows, which, we see now, looks out onto a middle-class apartment courtyard. (See the publicity still from the film on the back.) The camera **pans** across the apartment windows directly across from where we started and shows the neighbors getting ready in the morning to the tune of that jazz we heard from the credits. Slowly we come back inside the first apartment again to see a **close-up** of a man sleeping and sweating. **Cutting** to a thermometer, we see it’s over 90 degrees. Closer than the first time it did so, the camera again **pans** across the courtyard and now we can make out some detail. First we see a man shaving, and that song we had been hearing turns out to have been coming from his radio (so it was actually **diegetic**), which now plays a commercial. He switches stations and the new tune fills the courtyard. We see a couple sleeping on the fire escape and a young woman who dresses in front of her open window and makes coffee while stretching her legs. Returning another time to the first apartment, we now see that the man is in a wheelchair with a cast on his leg that reads, “Here lies the broken bones of L. B. Jefferies.” In a series of **close-ups**, the camera **dollies** and **pans** the wall, a framed picture of a woman seen in negative, and a stack of fashion magazines. Is it the same woman? It looks a little like the woman across the courtyard. No answers yet because the scene ends at that point with a **slow fade** to black.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why so many long shots? Why the use of only diegetic sound?
2. Who will be the main character, and how do you know this?
3. Who will the minor characters be, and what role do you think they will play?
4. What role will the setting play in this film?

Ghost (Jerry Zucker, 1990)

0:00:00 - 0:03:45

This film will challenge you to pay attention to the visual and sound elements in order to make good predictions. The word “GHOST” appears suddenly, flashes twice (punctuated by the **non-diegetic** music), and quickly disappears. The camera then moves through what appears to be an attic filled with dusty, forgotten items. The **lighting** is classic **low-key** with shafts of light coming through the walls, ceiling, and floor. It is rather disorienting, and the objects that the camera shows us are all somewhat indistinct: bundles of miscellaneous items, as well as wires and pipes, but nothing is clear. The camera then moves to an area of total darkness, which is suddenly punctured by a hole being smashed in what we now realize is the floor of the attic room we have been looking at. Three figures swinging sledgehammers at a wall, which goes down inside that room where we had been. When they move into the space, one of the men finds a jar with an “Indian-head” penny inside, which he proclaims as a “a good omen.” A woman responds, “You’re the good omen,” and give him a big hug. “It’s so great,” the woman says just at the end of the scene. Using the title, the atmosphere, and what preconceptions you have, you should be able to make some interesting, though perhaps incorrect, predictions.

Questions to Consider:

1. Listen again, and closely, to the music at the very beginning. Is it standard ghost-story music, or are there other elements?
2. What specific elements seem to be foreshadowing? What do you think they foreshadow? Be specific.
3. Why do you think the director started with us inside the attic? What is the effect of that choice?



Responding to the Text

We know that, in addition to making predictions about a text, active readers make a text their own. One of the best methods to do this is to keep a type of viewing / reading log (see below). When you respond to a text you should be thinking about your connection -- or lack of connection, which is just as important -- to the text. Your response to a text does not have to be analytical. Your response can be personal.

High-Interest Film: *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993)

0:45:56 - 0:56:20

In this sequence, a television weatherman, Phil, played by Bill Murray, has become trapped in some sort of twilight zone where he is forced to repeat the same day (February 2nd) over and over, though no one else is aware that it has been Groundhog Day again and again. Perhaps out of genuine interest or perhaps because he simply is bored, Phil tries to begin a romance with his producer, Rita, played by Andie McDowell. He is not at all successful at first, but, remember, he has day after day to improve his pickup lines. And she has no recollection of the previous night's date. Each little sequence within this scene moves Phil closer and closer to having Rita fall in love with him, but he always messes up something. At one point, while they are dancing, the **non-diegetic** song "You Don't Know Me" by Ray Charles seems to signal that Phil's attempts are shallow and ultimately unsuccessful. Toward the end of the scene, Rita turns him down in his hotel room, and the remainder of the scene recounts several repeated days of Phil's attempting just to get their date back to the hotel room. His attempts to plan and reinvent the spontaneity of the first night are quite pitiful, and, after a series of rapidly edited face slaps that happen earlier and earlier in the date, Phil finally gives up.

Questions to Consider:

1. When did you laugh the most? When did you feel sorry for either character?
2. If you could live one day over and over, what would you do with your time? Did Phil accomplish anything worthwhile during his repeated days in this sequence?
3. Would you get bored with life if you had to live like this? When did Phil appear to be bored?
4. How did the editing contribute to the humor of the scene?



Challenging Film: *Henry V* (Kenneth Branagh, 1989)

0:51:15 - 0:55:09

First of all, this scene is almost entirely in French. Emma Thompson plays Katherine, the daughter of the French King, who wants to learn English and asks Alice, her nurse, to teach her the English words for various body parts. There are no subtitles whatsoever, so unless you speak French, you have to figure out what you can from the context, the actions, and the heavily accented English words they do say. As Katherine and Alice practice the words, Katherine giggles and dances around like a schoolgirl. The scene ends as Katherine opens the door to her chamber, laughing at her new vocabulary, as her father, the dour King, walks by, obviously heavy with thoughts of the coming war with England.

Questions to Consider:

1. Have you ever seen a foreign film with subtitles? Did you expect this one to have subtitles? How did you feel when you realized that there were not going to be any?
2. What were the words that Katherine learned? Were these similar to or different from the first words that you learned in a foreign language?
3. When did you feel the most confused during this scene? When did you really feel like you understood what they were talking about? Do you think that you would understand even more if you were to see the clip again?



Questioning the Text

Once you have experience responding to a film text on a personal level, you are ready to move on to a greater interaction with the text. As a student, you answer questions all day long. What would happen if you start asking questions instead of just answering them? When you begin to question a text, you gain ownership of it, and become, in fact, an authority. In order for your questions to be as effective and relevant as possible, you will want to practice asking “leveled” questions. The main idea is that there are three levels of questions that can be asked about any text, and all three types of questions are essential to being able to construct meaning from the text. Below, we will practice answering some leveled questions over a piece of film. Then you will practice writing your own leveled questions over a different piece of film.

Level One: Questions of Fact

These questions can be answered with a word, phrase, or detail from the text. Imagine watching the movie *Finding Nemo*. A level one question might be, “What does Nemo swim out into the ocean to touch that his father, Marlin, tells him not to?” Sometimes these are basic recall questions to check on comprehension, but they are not always simple questions; in fact, at times they are essential to gathering support for an argument!

Level Two: Questions of Interpretation

These questions can be answered only by interpreting the facts given in or suggested by the text. Again from *Finding Nemo*: “What motivated Nemo to disobey his father and touch the object he wasn’t supposed to?” or “How would you characterize Nemo’s father Marlin at the beginning of the film?” These are the kinds of questions that we often talk about in class addressing such concerns as character, setting, and tone. They can also involve author/director intent in using a particular phrase, angle, lighting choice, or other technical element: “Why did the director use

Level Three: Questions Beyond the Text

These are questions that relate some aspect of the text to the real world. Answers to these questions are to be found not by looking within the text, but by examine society and the world at large. With *Finding Nemo*, a level three question might be, “Why do children often rebel against their parents?” or “Is there really such a thing as ‘you can do anything if you believe in yourself’ even when you are handicap or disabled?”

***Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997)**

0:55:39 - 1:03:00

This sequence in the first third of the doomed-boat film deals with third-class passenger Jack Dawson, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, when he is invited by first-class passenger Rose, played by Kate Winslet, to dinner in the main dining room. The scene begins as Jack is being dressed in appropriate attire by the kindly Molly Brown. When he enters the first-class section, Jack is initially awed and a little intimidated by the surroundings of the main foyer and the dining room, as well as by the gestures expected of a gentleman, which, as it is pointed out to him by Rose's fiancé, he is only pretending to be. Soon enough, however, Jack begins to gain confidence and, in fact, dominates the conversation at the dinner table with his rough eloquence. Notice the **cutaways** to Rose and Molly, showing their admiration. The scene ends as the guests at the table all raise their glasses to echo a statement Jack has made about "Making it count!"

Level One Questions:

1. How does Jack say that he got his ticket for Titanic?
2. What items at the dinner table does Jack have the most difficulty with?

Level Two Questions:

1. Why does the mother appear to be threatened by Jack? Why does Cal appear not to be threatened by him?
2. What does Jack seem to value most?
3. What does the director do to make us sympathize with Jack (be sure to use your academic vocabulary)?

Level Three Questions:

1. Do you think that there is as much a difference between the social classes today as there was in the time of the film?
2. What does it mean to "make it count"? Do you or people you know seem to live their lives like Jack does?



***The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, 1985)**

0:19:41 - 0:22:48

Very early on in this adaptation of Alice Walker’s novel, Celie is young but already married to a brutal man called Mister. Her sister Nettie has come to live with them, and the sisters become inseparable (as seen in the shot on the back of this page), though they know that Nettie will have to leave soon because Celie’s husband, played by Danny Glover, is looking at her in a way unbecoming of a brother-in-law. This clip begins when Nettie and Celie are talking about staying in touch somehow. When Celie says that they can write to each other, Nettie decides to teach her older sister to read by placing the names of things all around the house. Together they spell things like “jar” and “kettle”, but when Celie gets to “sky,” she spells “M-i-s-t-e-r” instead because her husband is suddenly there towering over them, glaring down at her. The scene continues as they run around like school children playing games and hugging each other, but it ends when Mister, not quite reading the paper he’s holding, eyes Nettie even more closely.

Level One Questions:

1. _____

2. _____

Level Two Questions:

1. _____

2. _____

Level Three Questions:

1. _____

2. _____