



Area of Study

Creativity, Local and Global Citizenship

Overview

This unit focuses on analysing contemporary themes from modern culture as conveyed through soaps and aspects of cinematography. Students will develop critical thinking skills, and learn how to express opinions on topical issues while gaining an understanding of the genre and impact of soaps. This unit engages and develops students' creativity to a high level and encourages responsibility for learning through the project work.

Related learning

English, Religious Education, CSPE, SPHE, Geography, ICT

Outline of the unit

PART 1

Students view a selection of taped current and contemporary soap operas e.g. Fair City, Coronation street, Eastenders, Home and Away, etc.

- Concentrating on one example from the above, students (in pairs/groups) identify and select aspects of popular culture in one soap opera — setting, community values, wealth and money, power, role of women and issues raised in the example viewed. Students identify and discuss how the soap's themes link to/contrast with aspects of Irish culture.
- Students examine and identify story line, scenes, and aspects of plot, characterisation, stereotyping and use of stock characters.
- Students analyse the function of characters — how they carry particular themes and/or how they represent ethnic groups in society. They examine the associations between accent and class/intelligence/gender.
- Students identify and analyse how individual scenes are constructed — setting, length, transition devices to next scene, use of the "cliff-hanger" device to end episode.

Outline of the unit

- Students identify and analyse the soap openings and the importance of music and the visual to the genre and setting of the soap — the jazz music of Coronation Street reflects a nostalgic working class; Eastenders theme music is upbeat and modern and the visual is an aerial shot of the area. Theme music and visual combine to emphasise a sense of community.
- Through group work, students will simulate different types of scenes and convey themes through characters.
- Students will critique soaps as reflections of popular culture and for their entertainment value. How much do soaps reflect popular culture? Are they realistic? Are the events in people's lives believable? Can we empathise with characters? Why? What impression of popular culture do soaps convey? How can they be classed as entertainment? What is their entertainment value? Who is the target audience?

Some suggested titles for project work

- Compare *Fair City* and *Eastenders* under the following themes:
 - links to popular culture, cultural contexts, settings used in scenes, types of characters, functions of characters, openings of soaps, storylines and plots, cliff- hangers, use of music and sound-effects
- Compare *Fair City* and *Home and Away* through a cultural lens to gain an understanding of Australian culture. Consider: setting, power, wealth, status of women, men, religion, the status of children.
- Compare *Eastenders'* and *Emmerdale's* portrayal of urban versus rural life.
- Critically evaluate exaggeration in soap opera as portrayed in the dramatic comedy series *Ugly Betty*. How does the exaggerated soap depict Latino culture; hospital life?
- Analyse the development of American soaps from the early days — *Dallas* to modern soaps such as *Friends*.
- Survey students in class or a year group on soap opera popularity and relevance of themes. Design a questionnaire using ICT. Use Excel to display results.

Outline of the unit

Part 2

Production stage.

- Students produce, create and act in a mini soap.
- Students select title and theme music. They choose settings and themes that mirror aspects learned from the critique of soaps.
- Students learn how to use a digital camcorder, camera angles, and types of shots, sound techniques and scriptwriting.
- Students agree aspects of teenage popular culture to portray in soap.
- Students may use questionnaire or survey to get a range of themes that appeal to teenagers.
- Students may take a humorous/serious/ satirical/mock-serious approach.
- Students write scripts for a selection of scenes, audition for roles, assign tasks and roles to class, (e.g. actors, make up, props, setting, costume, camera operator, editing).
- Basic editing can be carried out on the camera or alternatively by using a computer-based movie editing programme.
- Students critique scenes from mini soap.
- Students arrange a screening of mini soap on the big screen using DVD player or straight from computer via data projector to an audience of their peers.

Options

- Teacher may enlist the aid of experts in scriptwriting/filmmaking/editing from outside agencies to help students with the production and editing process.
- Screening of mini soap in school may be held in aid of a chosen charity.
- Students can enter work in Film Competitions e.g. National Fresh Film Competition (see link in Resources).

Breakdown of the unit

It is difficult to allocate a specific amount of time to each activity. At least 15 hours should be allocated to planning and performing the soap opera.

Aims

This transition unit aims to:

- foster an awareness of the role of soaps in popular culture.
- develop the ability to critically 'read' soaps (style, genre, characterisation, etc).
- help students to understand the link between soap opera themes and themes of modern culture, such as love, revenge, work, family break-down, role of women, money and wealth, drugs, alcohol, teenage pregnancy, etc.
- introduce students to basic concepts related to cinematography.
- encourage whole class cooperation and teamwork skills

Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit students should be able to:

- analyse and critique a selection of soap operas
- compare and contrast different kinds of soaps
- identify and explain the meaning of community, setting, themes, storyline, plot, stereotyping, etc.
- investigate a number of different sources for coaching information
- create and write a selection of scenes typical of the soap opera genre (a mini soap opera)
- use a camcorder effectively to shoot a selection of scenes of a mini soap opera
- edit, analyse and critique own work
- work cooperatively and effectively as part of a team.

Key skills

How evidenced

information processing

viewing, analysing and comparing a range of soaps. Preparing and presenting written work; making and editing a video

critical and creative thinking

examining, analysing and making good arguments based on evidence; challenging assumptions on topics raised by soaps, such as family relationships, gender issues, social issues; designing a script and preparing a performance

communicating

taking part in class discussion; being able to reason, argue and assess different viewpoints on aspects of soaps; developing listening skills and learning to respect the views of others; taking part in role-play and acting out some themes in a mini-soap

working with others

taking part in pair work, group work and class discussion in analysing soaps; sharing responsibilities for project work; keeping to deadlines and reflecting on ones contribution to the group

being personally effective

taking a responsible role in the production of a mini soap; setting realistic goals; constructing a plan of work; being able to give and receive feedback on the project; showing persistence in competing the task; demonstrating awareness of limitations and strengths

Learning approaches

A wide variety of methodologies can be used, including class discussion, oral presentations, pair work, group work, Drama in Education Techniques (D.I.E), cooperative learning techniques, simulation, and improvisation.

Assessment approaches

- Student self-assessment of contribution to and participation in class.
- Teacher assessment of written work and class discussion.
- Teacher/peer assessment of contribution to production of mini-soap.

Evaluation methods

Continuous evaluation: Students and teacher will evaluate the learning and skills development as the work progresses. The success of the production of the mini soap will be evaluated through a class discussion and personal reflection sheets. This will include reflection on the individual role of each person and their contribution to the production. On completion of this unit students will be asked to evaluate the overall Transition Unit and suggest modifications for future teaching of this Transition Unit.

Resources

A collection of current taped episodes of *Fair City*, *Eastenders*, *Home and Away*, *Emmerdale*.

Teacher prepared worksheets on aspects of soaps

A selection of useful Internet links.

www.itv.com/page.asp?partid=90 Link to ITV Website on Soaps

www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders/ Link to Eastenders Site

seven.com.au/homeandaway/ Home and Away site

www.ifi.ie/ Irish Film Institute website

www.irishfilm.ie/downloads/typilot.pdf Report on pilot of TY Moving Image Unit

www.filmeducation.org Excellent site on all aspects of film studies

www.filmeducation.org/secondary/concept/index.html Online film concepts guide

www.bfi.org.uk/ British Film Institute Site

www.bfi.org.uk/education/ BFI Educational Site

www.corkfilmfest.org Cork Film Festival

www.freshfilmfestival.net/ National Film Festival and short film competition