



***The Innocents* (dir. Jack Clayton, 1961)**

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Key Stage 3 English

A lesson where students begin to explore the motif so frequently used in Gothic stories where children act as the vehicles for evil or darkness. Their ideas are then used to recreate a marketing campaign for the film, using the original marketing campaign for inspiration.

Curriculum Links

- Links to Media Studies through the development of the understanding and creation of marketing campaigns.
- Development of knowledge of the literary and cinematic conventions of Gothic.

Lesson Objective

To understand the reasons why the use of children in the Gothic perpetuates fear in audiences, and to understand the purpose and form of film marketing. These two strands of understanding are combined in the final activity.

You will need...

- **Main Attraction:** Marketing posters; trailer (on BFI's *The Innocents* DVD)



Activities

TRAILER: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHILDREN AND FEAR?

The aim of this activity is to enable the students to link their future learning in the lesson to what they already know about how children are able to increase an audience's fear.

On the board/through discussion/mind mapping in groups, get students to come up with as many examples as they can of children that are used in films to add to fear. For inspiration, you could use the following prompt questions:

- What films or books can you think of where children themselves are evil?
- What films or books can you think of where children are used for evil by external forces (like other adults, ghosts, demons...)?
- What films or books can you think of where children are subjected to evil?

Give the students a few minutes to do this then take feedback. During this feedback, develop the students' understanding of **why** children are used in such a way in these stories; get them to link this back to *The Innocents*. Ideas to include may be:

- Children are seen as innocent, so when they are not the impact is even greater.
- Society has a duty to protect children, so when they are not protected audiences are both shocked and horrified.
- Everyone has been a child, or has their own children, so the idea of these children being corrupted or damaged by evil is even more horrifying.

Children are seen as powerless, so when they become powerful, particularly in suspicious circumstances, this is scary for adults (perhaps use the image of Miss Giddens kneeling before Miles towards the end of the film as a visual representation of this idea).



MAIN ATTRACTION: THE CONNECTION TO AUDIENCES

The Innocents is undoubtedly a film that centres on children and their innate 'innocence'. The original marketing, however, chose not to focus on this. Show students the original posters and trailers, and have a quick discussion of how effective they think these are as marketing tools (you may need to explain clearly the idea of trailers' and posters' purpose being to get audiences to go and see the film in a cinema).

Think about the ideas that are used in the trailer and marketing ideas – such as, 'Created for the Adult Movie Goer', the repetition of children laughing, and the focus on 'What is Fear'.

Tell the students that *The Innocents* is being re-released, and it is up to them to design a new marketing campaign, focusing this time on the children and what happens to them. Get students to one of the following:

- Write their own 'What is Fear/What is Evil' poem
- Design a new poster
- Storyboard a new trailer

Get students to share their ideas with each other, discussing what about their campaign would make audiences want to go and watch the film and why.

END CREDITS: THE CONNECTION TO MYSELF

The final activity of this sequence is aimed to allow students some time to think about the ideas behind the use of children in *The Innocents*. Ask the question,

- Which character in *The Innocents* is the most evil and why?

Give students some time to think about this question and create a written response. Encourage them to think about whether Miles' and Flora's taunting of Miss Giddens is an example of childhood cruelty or if the ghosts are in fact 'possessing' them and it is they who are evil? Is it perhaps the uncle who is evil for not properly looking after his wards.

Extras

Other Ideas

- If you wanted to do creative lessons on the topic of 'Scary Children' there are several activities you could do, depending on your class:
 - A short horror story that uses a child as a key character.
 - A short film based in a school, where students can take the roles of 'scary children'.
 - A script for a play that does the same thing.
- Another interesting angle for a lesson, or set of lessons, would be about the development of marketing within the film industry – looking at how posters have changed, trailers have changed, as has the multimodality of marketing: you could look at ideas such as Twitter, or viral, campaigns, in order to market films (the Dark Knight is a good example of this), or even get students to design their own viral campaigns.

Read

Books with scary children...

- *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, (1898)
- *The Wasp Factory* by Iain Banks, (1984)
- *Apt Pupil* by Stephen King, (1982)
- *The Orphan of Awkward Falls* by Keith Graves, (2011)

If you want to find out more about the film...

- Film review on screenonline - <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/456108/>
- *English Gothic: A Century of Horror Cinema* by Jonathan Rigby, (2007)
- *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales* by Karen Lury, (2010)

Watch

More films involving children...

- *The Orphanage* (dir. Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007)
- *The Omen* (dir. Richard Donner, 1976)
- *Village of the Damned* (dir. Wolf Rilla, 1960)
- *The Bad Seed* (dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1956)
- *Let the Right One In* (dir. Tomas Alfredson, 2008)