Film Language
Sound

Our downloadable resources are designed to be used in conjunction with selected film titles, which are available free for clubs at www.intofilm.org/clubs

Welcome

Aims of the session

- To develop the ability to use and understand film language associated with sound.

- To demonstrate a variety of activities to help students gain deeper understanding of key sound terminology.

- To review and critique a range of film titles to illustrate how and why sound techniques are used.

- To facilitate understanding of theoretical concepts through practical filmmaking activities.

Learning outcomes

- To understand the meanings of key sound terminology.

- To explore the historical context of sound.

- To practically apply theoretical understanding of sound techniques.

- To identify the purpose of a range of sound techniques.

- To identify and recognise the features of key sound types.

Film Language prompt cards

- Key terms used in this session are featured in the **Sound** section of the prompt card pack you received today.

- This is yours to take back to class to use with students.

SOUND

Diegetic
Sound set within the world of the film, which characters within that world can hear.

Non-diegetic
Sound external to the film world, which characters within the film world cannot hear.

Sound FX
Sound other than speech or music made artificially for use in a film.

Foley Sound
Everyday sounds recorded for use in post-production to enhance audio quality.

Parallel
Sound that matches the mood or tone of the sequence.

Contrapuntal
Sound that strongly contrasts with the mood or tone of the scene.

- How many layers can you identify in the soundtrack?
- Explain why each element has been used, and what effect you feel it was designed to have on the audience.
- Which sounds are diegetic?
- Which sounds are non-diegetic?
- Is the sound parallel or contrapuntal to action of the sequence?
- Has a sound bridge been used to carry sound over from one scene to the next? If so, why has this choice been made?
- Are there any musical motifs or stings used in the film? When do they occur and why do you think they have been used?
- Does the sound fit the conventions of the genre to which the film belongs?
- How has sound been used to elicit a reaction from the audience?
- Does the sequence feature any heightened sound? Why has this technique been used?

INTO FILM

Into Film Literacy
Film language prompt cards

Film Language: Sound

What is sound?

- Sound is **everything** that can be heard in a scene.
- The key elements that make up sound in a film are:
  - Location sound
  - Musical score/soundtrack
  - Dialogue
  - Sound effects
  - Voiceover (if used).
- The absence of sound in a scene can be also be impactful.

The emotional impact of music

Music is used to heighten the emotion and drama of a scene. Audiences are experienced in decoding the style of music to interpret mood or genre, eg scary music when a villain appears.

Music can:
- o Determine the **mood** or **genre** of a film
- o Build up or release **tension**
- o Change the emotional or physical status of a **character**
- o Smooth out **transitions** in an edit to allow a film to flow/link the scenes together
- o Highlight or code a **theme or message**.

A brief history of film sound

The silent era

- When we think of early cinema we think of the 'silent era', which may be rather misleading as since the inception of film it has been inexorably linked with sound.

- In the early days, the technologies of the capture of moving images and sound recording were being developed in tandem but synchronisation took some time to perfect.

Evolution of film sound

- Thomas Edison, one of the early pioneers of cinema, is well known for his early film *Fred Ott's Sneeze* produced in 1894.

- He is perhaps less well know for inventing the first sound recording device, the Phonograph, years earlier in 1877.

Fred Ott's Sneeze (1894)

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
ABOVE TO PLAY CLIP

Film Language: Sound

Synchronising film and sound

- In 1895, Edison began working with the 'Kinetophone' – the aim of which was synchronised sound and vision.

- He engaged assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dickson who worked on a number of film sound experiments.

- During the mid 1890s, Dickson produced a range of short films with synced sound. Sadly only one remains.

Dickson Experimental Sound Film (circa 1894)

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Film Language: Sound

Emerging technologies

- The major difficulty faced during this period was achieving sound synchronised with on-screen imagery, so screening dens known as 'Nickelodeons' often accompanied screenings with live music.

- Inventors of the day were racing to be the first to create a method of matching moving images with reliable synchronised sound.

The era of invention

In 1900 at the world fair in Paris (Exposition Universelle), three new devices were exhibited:

- Phonorama
- Chronophone
- Phono Cinéma Théatre.

None were without problems, including the short recording time of the wax cylinders used (and later 12 inch discs), skipping and lack of sound amplification.

Developing projection

- Edison had originally envisaged film viewing as a private activity and his early inventions were housed firstly in penny arcades and later in nickelodeons (1905-1915) where they were often accompanied by live music.

- Cinemas really came into their own around 1915 when projection technology improved and films moved from nickelodeons to large 'movie palaces' which employed musicians to create music and sound effects to accompany films.

Amplification

- Significant technological developments were made in 1919 by German inventors, Josef Engl, Joseph Massole and Hans Vogt who developed synchronised sound printed directly onto the film strip, and Dr Lee de Forest who had in 1906 patented the **audion tube** which could amplify sound.

- In 1919 De Forest began to work extensively with film sound and in 1922 he opened the De Forest Phonofilm Company and produced a number of films with sound.

Selling to the studios

- De Forest offered his technology to Universal and Paramount who thought sound was a passing fad.

- In 1925, rival company Vitaphone also tried to sell to Hollywood with no success until relatively small studio Warner Brothers decided to lease the technology.

Premiering the 'talkies'

- Warner brothers launched a hugely successful premiere of Don Juan in 1926 which used the sound technology to accompany the film with synchonised music but it wasn't until 1927 that the first 'talkie' *The Jazz Singer* was created.

- *The Jazz Singer* slipped in and out of silent mode and still made use of title cards, but once audiences had experienced not only synchronised music but also synchronised dialogue, sound was here to stay.

The Jazz Singer (1927)

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Film Language: Sound

Film language: Sound

Dialogue

- The **words spoken by characters** within the scene.

- Dialogue can be used to establish character definition and relationships, and to provide a plot information and back-story.

- Both the content (words spoken) and the delivery (performance and mood) of dialogue is important for the development of characterisation and narrative within the film world.

Voiceover

- This is when an omniscient narrator or a character is heard talking over the images you are seeing on the screen.

- Voiceovers are often used to provide back-story and either a subjective or objective perspective of the story as it unfolds.

- They are usually recorded in a studio.

Voiceover -
Sunset Boulevard (1950)

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
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Film Language: Sound

Diegetic and non-diegetic sound

In film language, sound is divided into two terms:

- **Diegetic sound** has a physical origin in the film world (eg a character coughing or the radio playing)

- **Non-diegetic sound** has no direct origin in the film world (eg the soundtrack or the voice of a narrator).

Diegetic and non-diegetic sound

In a moment you will watch clips from *Gilda* and *Gravity*. As you watch each of them, consider:

- How many types of sound can you distinguish?

- Can you hear dialogue, sound effects, music or silence?

- Which of the sounds do you think may be **diegetic** (within the world of the film), or **non-diegetic** (external to the film world)?

Gilda (1946)

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
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Film Language: Sound

Gravity (2013)

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Film Language: Sound

Absence of non-diegetic music

- As non-diegetic music is very much associated with mainstream cinema and the overt and deliberate manipulation of audience emotions, some realist filmmakers chose to avoid it as much as possible.

- The absence of non-diegetic music can therefore be used to make scenes seem more realistic, such as in *The Blair Witch Project*.

The Blair Witch Project (1999)

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Film Language: Sound

Contrapuntal sound

- Contrapuntal sound strongly contrasts with the mood or tone of the scene.

- Can you think of any examples of film scenes that use **contrapuntal sound**? In what type of scene would this technique be most commonly used?

- Watch the film clip on the next slide - what impact does it have on you, as the audience?

Contrapuntal sound - *Brazil* (1985)

CLICK ON THE IMAGE ABOVE TO PLAY CLIP

Film Language: Sound

Parallel sound

- Parallel sound matches the mood or tone of the sequence.

Brazil (1985) – without sound

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
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Film Language: Sound

Brazil (1985) – with sound

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
ABOVE TO PLAY CLIP

Film Language: Sound

Exaggerated/Pleonastic sound

- Directors often use exaggerated sound to **heighten emotion or meaning** in a scene.

- Using sound in this way can suggest an incoming threat before the audience sees it.

- It can be used to reinforce a character's threatening nature when they are present on screen.

- It can also help to emphasise the emotional impact of a specific action taking place on screen.

Pleonastic sound – *Spider-man 2 (2004)*

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Film Language: Sound

Unmotivated sound

- Sometimes directors will use sound effects which don't logically match the actions on screen but do add to the emotional impact of a scene.

- A director might use a record scratching sound to suggest a sudden mishap in a comedy film.

- An unmotivated swooshing noise is also common to emphasise a character turning their head.

Unmotivated sound –
Who Framed Roger Rabbit? (1998)

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Film Language: Sound

Worldising

- Worldising, a term coined by sound designer Walter Murch, refers to the practice of recording production audio in a way which will best mimic how it might be heard in real spaces.

Worldising

For *American Graffiti* (1973), in which the events of an evening are linked by a radio broadcast to which the main characters are listening, Murch took a clean recording of the broadcast and re-recorded as it played out through external speakers.

He moved the recording microphone to and from the speakers to simulate the effect of sound spilling out from a car radio as it moves closer or further away.

Worldising– *American Graffiti* (1973)

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
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Film Language: Sound

Sound effects

Sound effects

- A sound effect is a recorded sound other than speech or music which is added the soundtrack to enhance the narrative or make a creative statement.

- A person who records sound effects is called a **Foley artist** or **sound designer**.

Sound effects

- Sound effects and background noises are integral in giving a sense of reality to the world depicted in a film (eg the sound of footsteps, rain falling).

- Sound effects can equally be used to increase mystery, suspense and disorientation for the viewer, in science fiction or horror films for example.
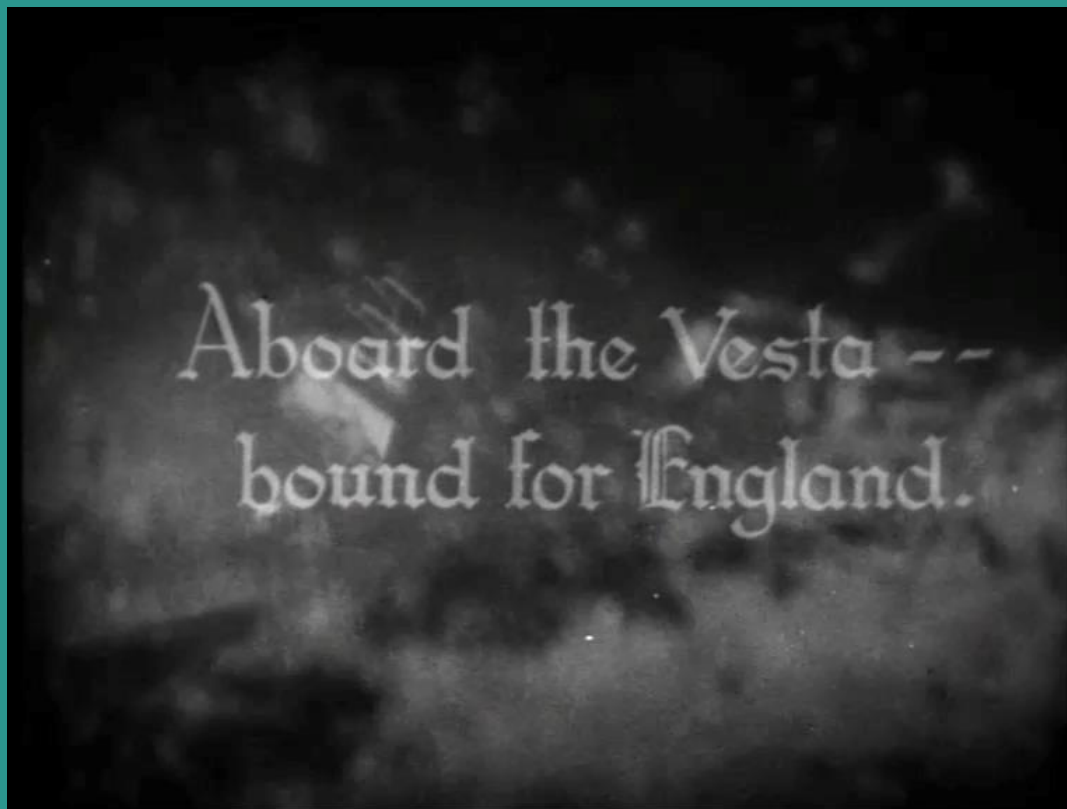
Foley sound

Foley sound takes its name from Jack Foley, a sound editor at Universal Studios.

Foley sound is live action sound recreated in a studio, using a variety of different everyday objects and surfaces.

The effects are recorded in the editing stage by Foley artists, using the moving image as guidance.

Foley Sound – *Dracula (1931)*

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
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Film Language: Sound

Foley Sound – *John Fewell Interview*

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
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Film Language: Sound

Foley sound – *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005)

CLICK ON THE IMAGE ABOVE TO PLAY CLIP

Film Language: Sound

Foley Sound Activity

In a few moments you will have 20 minutes to:

1. Choose between a choice of two film scenes which have been pre-loaded onto the iPads

2. Use the **Sound planning sheet** to decide what sound effects to add where

3. Choose your location and objects for recording Foley

4. Record your sounds into your iMovie soundtrack.

Top tips for recording film sound

Quiet on set!

- Use the term "Quiet on set!" in a loud, firm voice, every time filming is to begin. Absolute silence from the crew and actors before filming begins will mean the crew can hear instructions and is vital to ensuring the recorded sound in the scene is usable. Ask your crew to avoid whispering or fidgeting and to switch mobiles off during filming.

- If there is a sound problem, don't be afraid to say 'cut', go back to 'first positions' (the starting point of the scene) and begin again.

Location

- When planning your film, visit suitable locations in person in advance of filming, stop and listen carefully in each spot in which you plan to film.

- Is it close to a road, a crowded area, a flight path or humming electrical equipment?

- Select locations which minimise background noise.

Ambient sound

- Every location has its own unique sound, even if you don't notice it at first, this is known as ambient sound.

- With the crew and actors silent, it's a good idea to record 30 seconds of ambient sound in every location in which you film.

- This sound can then be used to 'patch' any blips in sound, eg a car passing etc. (Dialogue sequences will be trickier to patch and may need to be re-recorded.)

Handles

- Another top tip when recording footage is to let the camera roll for a few seconds before the actors begin to act in the scene. This gives you 'handles' which can be used to provide space in the narrative. Ensuring you have 'handles' of a few seconds before and after the actors finish speaking will give you more choices when you come to editing.

Microphones and positioning

- Unless you have a separate microphone such as a boom mic, radio mic or field recorder, the camera mic should be close to the source of sound. One top tip, if you don't have a separate mic, is to record all dialogue in 'close up' to keep the camera mic as close to the sound of the actor's voice as possible.

- Using additional sound recording devices such as a field recorder or mic will give you additional choices of shot, as you can place the recording device close to the actors and move the camera further away.

Enhanced Sound

- Professional films often use sound recording studios to enhance sound.

- They re-record and enhance many individual elements of the sound track such as the sound of footsteps or clothes rustling etc.

- Sometimes dialogue is re-recorded to improve the quality (this is known as ADR or dubbing).

- Carefully timed silence can also create a dramatic effect.

Sequence selection

Concealed

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
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Film Language: Sound

Talk It Out

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
ABOVE TO PLAY CLIP

Film Language: Sound

Short Films

The previous sequences come from our youth made shorts and each was a winner in our Film of the Month competition. You can view the full films here:

Concealed
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoWUuMDfNc8

Talk It Out
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXhDgjjNP_o

Foley Sound Activity

You now have 20 minutes to:

1. Choose between a choice of 2 film scenes which have been pre-loaded onto the iPads

2. Use the **Sound planning sheet** to decide what sound effects to add where

3. Choose your location and objects for recording Foley

4. Record your sounds into your iMovie soundtrack.

Share and Evaluate

- Share your film with another group. What effect was created by the sounds recorded?

Concealed

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
ABOVE TO PLAY CLIP

Film Language: Sound

Talk It Out

CLICK ON THE IMAGE
ABOVE TO PLAY CLIP

Film Language: Sound

Copyright

The theme of respect for intellectual property is a golden thread running through all Into Film's work. To explore a wealth of information and resources on respect for intellectual property visit https://www.intofilm.org/respectforip

For comprehensive information on a variety of copyright issues visit http://copyrightuser.org/ where you can also find award-winning educational animation *The Game is On!*

Coming soon! Into Film and Copyright User have partnered to create a series of interactive resources aimed at exploring copyright with students as part of film club sessions. Please check https://www.intofilm.org/respectforip in the autumn term.

Any questions?

Are you Into Film?

Resources

www.intofilm.org/resources

Into Film clubs

www.intofilm.org/clubs

The Into Film Festival

http://www.intofilm.org/festival

CPD

http://www.intofilm.org/training

Competition: Film of the Month

Don't forget to submit any films that your students have made in class to this monthly competition.

http://www.intofilm.org/filmofthemonth