

# Starter

Think of an alternative film title based on:



- Location
- Colour
- Props
- Hair and make-up
- Performance
- Costume.

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# INTO FILM

## Film Language Mise-en-scène

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](http://www.intofilm.org/clubs)



**Welcome**

# Film Language prompt cards



- This session uses the **Mise-en-scène** card in the prompt card pack you received today.
- This is yours to take back to class to use with students.
- A printable version is available when you download the conference materials from the BFI.

# MISE-EN-SCÈNE

## Location

Place or places in which the sequence is set.

## Colour

Predominant colour palette and tone used within a sequence.

## Props

Objects placed within a film sequence.

## Hair & make up

Hair and make-up design of the actors on screen.

## Costumes

Costume design of the actors on screen.

## Performance

Manner in which the actor portrays the on-screen character.

- Where is the action within the scene taking place and why has this location been selected?
- What is the tone of the footage? What atmosphere does this generate?
- Has the director used one or more predominant colours for props, costumes or setting? If so, what mood and atmosphere has been created?
- How do the costumes, hair, make-up and props contribute to our knowledge of the character or characters?
- What do the props contribute to the mood or atmosphere of the scene? Is there a particular connotation (suggested idea or feeling) attached to any prop?
- Does any of the action take place off screen? Do the characters know more than the audience or vice versa?
- How have the characters been positioned within the scene? How does this portray the mood or relationship between the actors?
- What does each character's stance and expression tell us about that character?
- Pick a character. What does the style of performance tell you about that character?
- Are any elements of the mise-en-scène used to symbolise or signify an additional or deeper meaning?

**INTO  
FILM**

Into Film Literacy  
Film language prompt cards

# Aims of the session

- To review and critique a range of film titles to illustrate how mise-en-scène is employed to convey meaning.
- To demonstrate a variety of learning activities to help students gain deeper understanding of key mise-en-scène terminology.
- To explore mise-en-scène in depth through a case study of *La La Land*.
- To make connections with the film and media studies specifications.

# Learning outcomes for students

- To understand the meanings of key mise-en-scène terminology.
- To explore the historical context of mise-en-scène and its impact on contemporary cinema.
- To link directorial intention and ideologies to a case study of *La La Land*.

# Why is mise-en-scène so important for students of film?

Through mise-en-scène, character and narrative development, themes, ideologies and aesthetics are conveyed to audiences through careful composition of the visual elements recorded by the camera.

Mise-en-scène is central to analysis work and pulls in understanding of narrative, values and themes. It aligns spectators' interpretations and responses.

Good understanding and analysis of mise-en-scène will result in effective creative practical outcomes.



# Why is mise-en-scène so important for students of film?

It is in the rubric for popular exam boards:

- Eduqas/WJEC – GCSE, AS level, A level (AO1, AO2)
- OCR – GCSE (AO1, AO2)
- BTEC
- CCEA MIA.

# What is mise-en-scène?

**'Putting in the scene'**

**'Placing on the stage'**

Or simply:

**'Everything you see on the screen'**

Mise-en-scène has its roots in theatre and is one of the key components within film language. It is used to describe how sets, locations, props, costume and make-up are used in film.

“In controlling the mise-en-scène, the director stages the event for the camera” (Bordwell and Thompson).

# What is mise-en-scène?

The definition can vary - some include camerawork and performance.

Bordwell and Thompson define it as setting, props, costume, lighting and acting.

For the sake of this presentation we will be exploring:

Location/setting, colour, props, costume, hair and make-up, and performance.

# What is mise-en-scène?

Méliès, an early master of mise-en-scène, made hundreds of short fantasy and stop-trick films in his Star Film studios, exercising control over every element in each frame.

His knowledge of theatre magic informed his filmmaking, often using oversized props to aid the narrative.

To get a feel for Méliès work, watch Scorsese's *Hugo* (2011) which is based on the life of this early film pioneer.

# Location and setting

- Set vs. location.
- The use of real urban settings can add a sense of realism to a drama, and danger and grit to a crime or thriller.
- Narrative exposition helps filmmakers reveal crucial details about characters and plot through visual means.
- Set dressing can tell us who characters are and what events might have happened in their past.

# Location and setting

Watch the following clip.

- How would you describe the environment?
- What can we infer about this character based solely on the location and setting?
- Is the location indicative of genre?
- What can you read from the mise-en-scène?

# Fish Tank clip



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# Location and setting

- How would you describe the environment?
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- Is the location indicative of genre?
- What can you read from the mise-en-scène?



# Props

- Short for 'property', much consideration goes into the strategic inclusion and positioning of functional objects to support the narrative - past, present, and future (sometimes recurring as a motif).
- Camerawork and lighting are integral to the effectiveness of props as meaning constructors.
- Props are used to indicate genre, as well as the era in which the film is set.

# Props

Watch the following clip.

- What do the props reveal about the character and the time leading up to this moment?
- Do any of the items have significant connotations or symbolic significance?
- Which props signify the genre (iconography)?

# 'Moon'



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# Props

- What do the props reveal about the character and the time leading up to this moment?
- Do any of the items have significant connotations or symbolic significance?
- Which props signify the genre (iconography)?

# Props

An item can be used in various settings to signify different things about the characters, depending on the context.

Select a prop you can recall within a film you have seen. Try to choose an object that is not too obvious, but is significant to the narrative or character development.

Eg the stuffed bird of prey in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. It sits behind Norman Bates as he talks to Marion Crane, and foreshadows her becoming his 'prey'.

# Props

Tell your partner what the prop is, but don't tell them what the film is or the character it belongs to.

See if they can accurately guess the type of person the prop belongs to and what it signifies about an on-screen character.

After 20 seconds, you can give further clues about what context it can be found in.

Did the additional context help your partner understand what is being conveyed about the character you selected?

# Costume

Characters' costumes (for example, emphasis on certain colours) have a huge impact on the meaning or tone of a film.

They can tell us who a character is, their attitudes and how they are feeling. Costume also show us how a character has changed over the course of a story.

The interaction between character, costume, props and setting may be complementary or jarring, working together to generate a specific emotion in the audience.

# Costume – *Attack The Block*

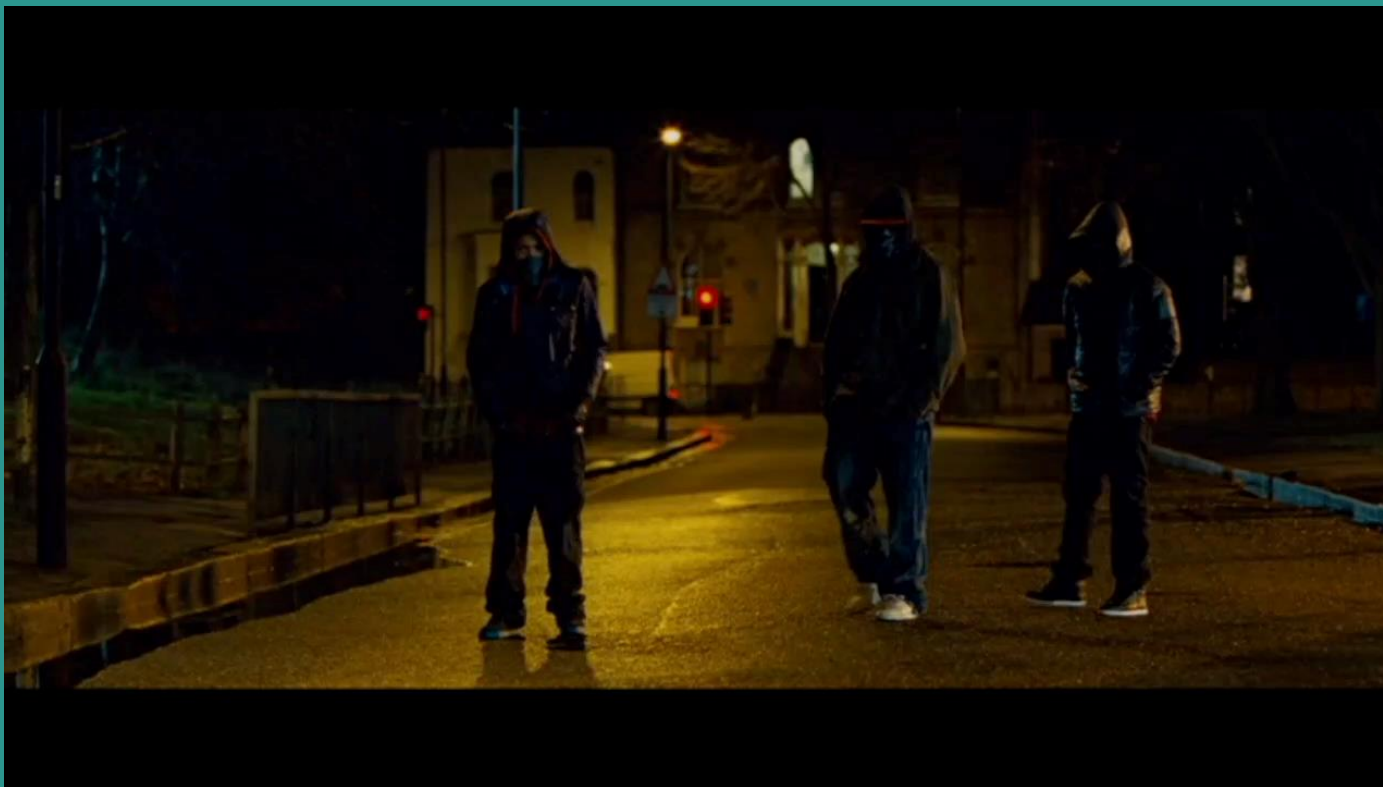
Look at Moses' costume. Which one comes first, middle and last in the narrative? What semiotic analysis do you draw upon to make you think this?



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# 'Moses'



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# Hair and make-up

"As a man's face reveals much that is in his mind and heart, I attempt to show this by the makeup I use" - Lon Chaney

Naturalistic vs. expressive (theatrical).

Used to draw attention to or emphasise certain features of a character's face, including facial expressions and therefore emotions and intentions (and consequently performance).

Special effects make-up may be used to dramatically alter appearance – ageing, horror, sci-fi etc.

# Hair and make-up

Watch the following three clips from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, which won multiple awards for hair and make-up.

As you watch, mark the areas of the head on the **Hair and make-up design** sheet that the hair and make-up artists would have concentrated on with each age transition. (Also making a note of any other areas of the body.)

Is this style naturalistic or expressive?

# *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*



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# *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*



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# *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*



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# Colour

Particular colours in a carefully chosen palette may be recurrent or contrasted throughout a film.

They can act as a trigger for a certain emotion or link to other important moments in the narrative.

It is strongly linked with lighting and will influence all areas of production design – props, costume, setting etc.

# Colour

Watch the following clip.

How has colour been used to create a nostalgic, melodramatic tone?

What does the rich saturated palette tell us about the interplay between the characters' emotions?



# *Far From Heaven*



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# Colour

How has colour been used to create a nostalgic, melodramatic tone?

What does the rich saturated palette tell us about the interplay between the characters' emotions?

# La La Land



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*La La Land* is a set text for WJEC and is celebrated as a 'return to mise-en-scène'. Filled with colour, and utilising precise blocking and shot composition, it provides a wealth of opportunity for semiotic analysis.

# La La Land

*La La Land* represents artists as individuals who struggle to reconcile their creativity and ambition with everyday life.

Ideological factors:

- Hopes and dreams
- Sacrifice
- Achievement
- Bittersweet superficiality
- Gain and loss
- Nostalgia vs. future
- Community vs. urban isolation

# Opening sequence

Watch the opening sequence.

Whilst sound is key to the scene, it is a rich tapestry of visual indicators to the film's key themes.

Using the ***La La Land* bingo sheet**, cross off the themes you identify through the mise-en-scène. Make a mental note of the evidence. There is space for you to add your own themes.

<http://www.lensflaretheory.com/establishing-shots-la-la-land.html>

# 'Opening sequence'



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# Opening sequence

- Which themes did you mark off?
- Did you add anything new?
- What evidence did you gather?

Frustration	Gain and loss	Aspiration	Urban isolation
Nostalgia	Sacrifice	Identity	Romance

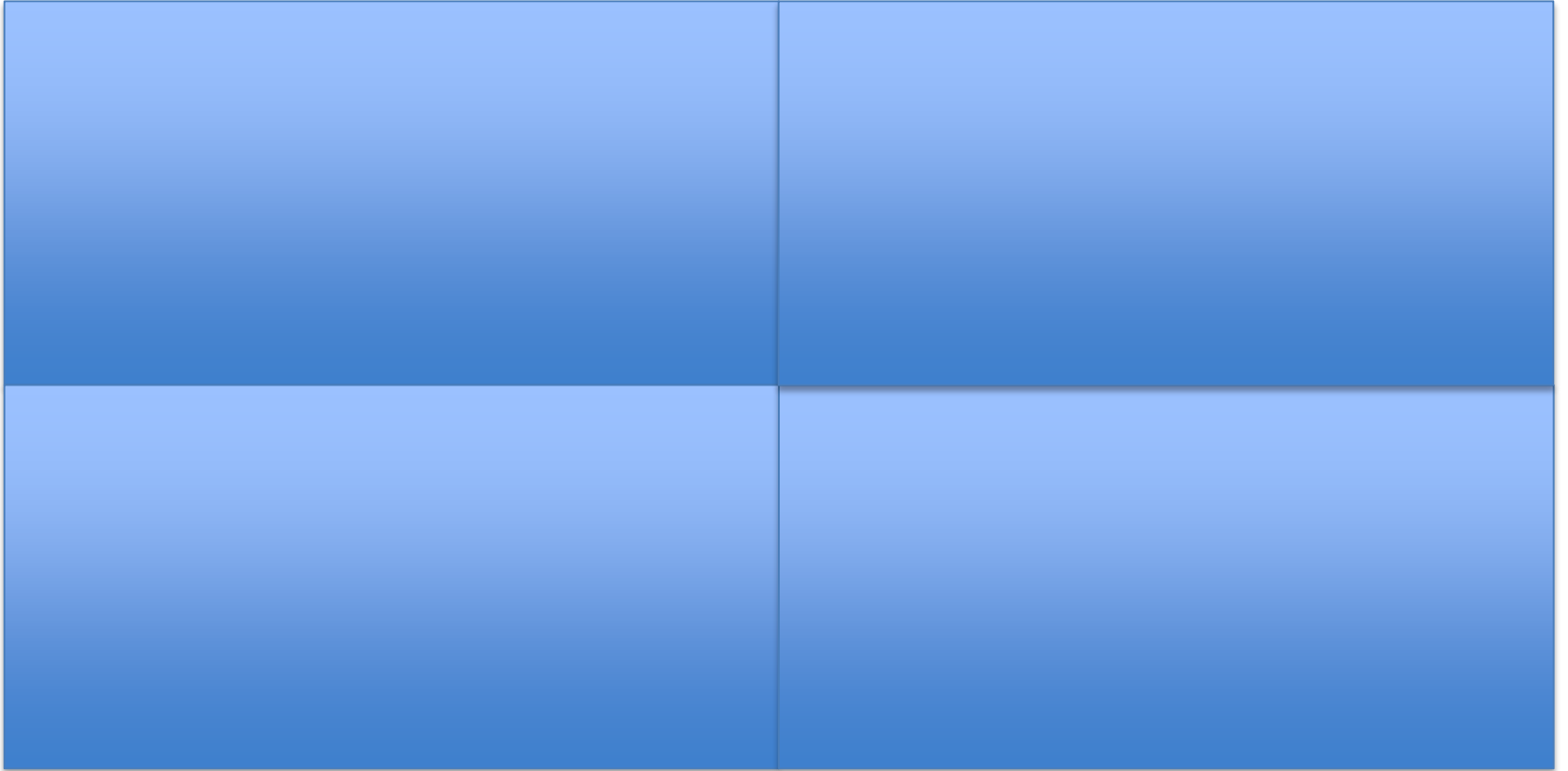
# Mise-en-scène reveal

For each of the following reveals, what are we being told through:

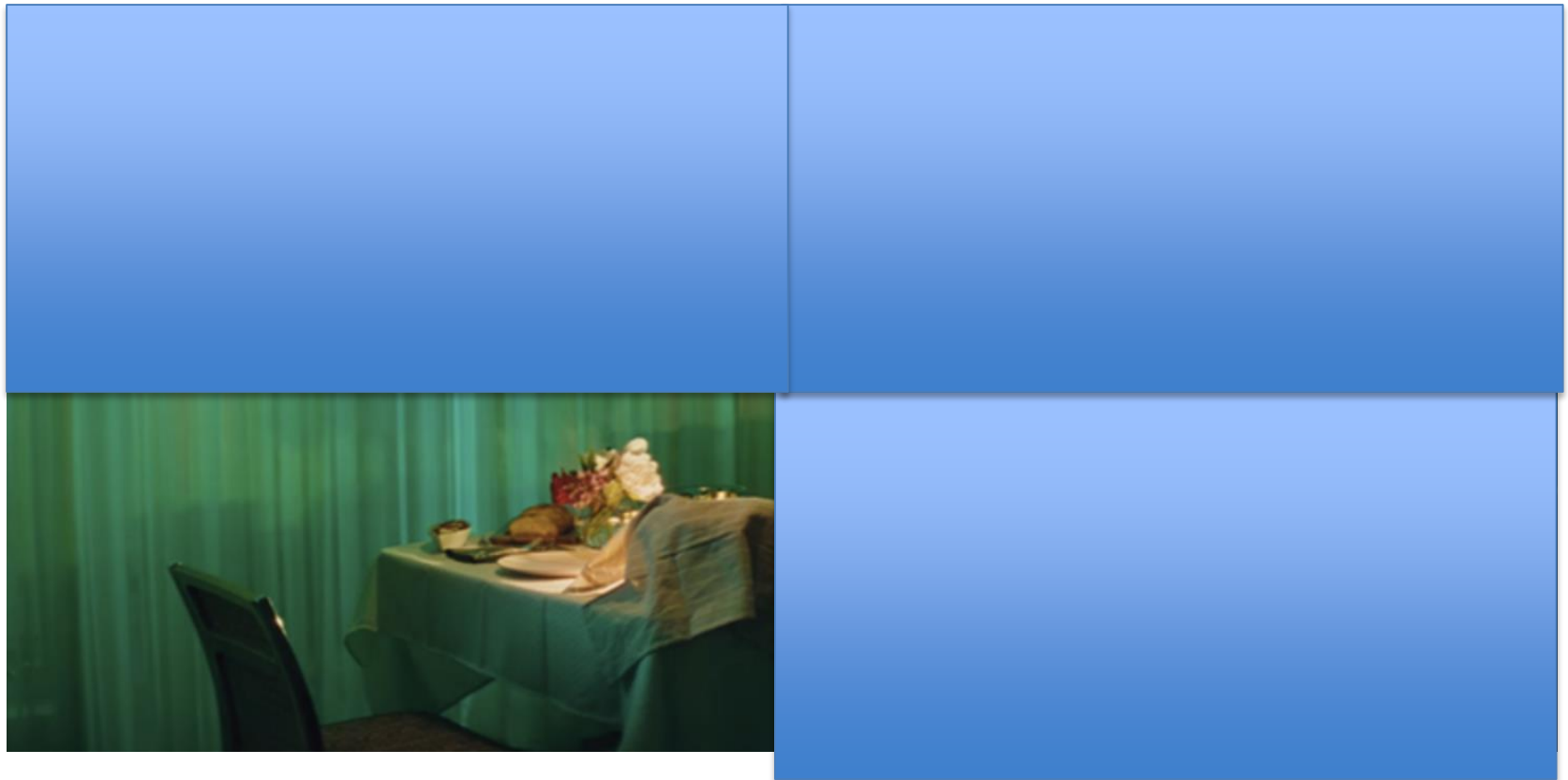
- The setting?
- Choice of props?
- Character performance, costume, hair and make-up (including the second, unseen/implied character)?
- Lighting and colour?
- Camera framing?



# Mise-en-scène reveal

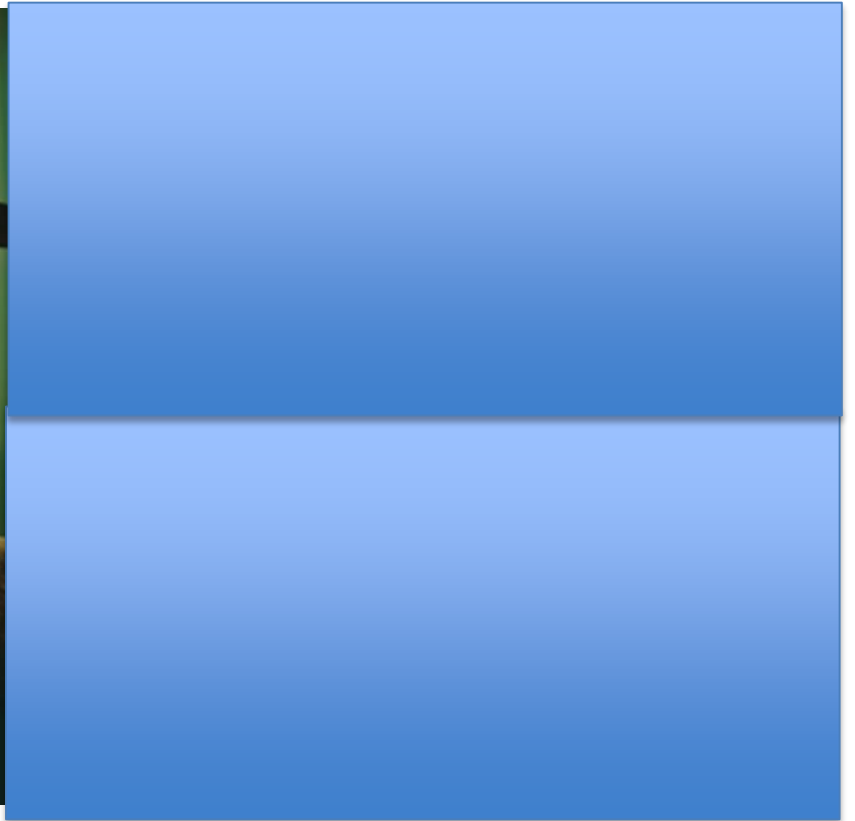


# Props focus



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# Colour focus



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# Costume and performance



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# Location focus



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# Mise-en-scène reveal

Ultimately, through semiotic analysis of the mise-en-scène, what emotion is evoked?

What ideological threads run through the shot?  
Any recurring from the opening sequence?

Consider the following questions...

# Mise-en-scène reveal



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What is the significance of the empty space?

Are there any connotations attached to the colour green?

# Mise-en-scène reveal



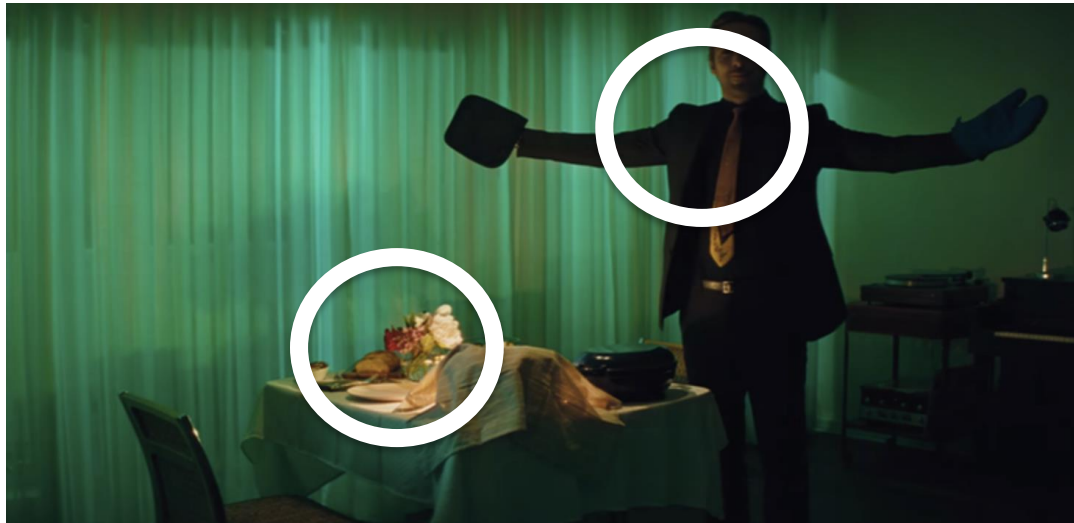
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What does the character's body language communicate about his thoughts and feelings?

What does his costume say about his life story at that time?



# Mise-en-scène reveal



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Why is the table lit whilst he stands in the shadows?

Where is the scene set? How can you tell?

# 'The dinner'



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## Extension activity (to take away)

As a new director on that same scene, make three amends to the mise-en-scène to change the meaning. Consider:

- Location/setting
- Colour
- Props
- Performance
- Costume, hair and make-up.

Share your changes with a partner. Were they able to correctly interpret your new scene?

# How can we help you?

**Film and Media Studies, and Moving Image Arts on  
intofilm.org**

**<https://www.intofilm.org/film-media-studies-mia>**

Resources - [www.intofilm.org/resources](http://www.intofilm.org/resources)

Into Film Clubs - [www.intofilm.org/clubs](http://www.intofilm.org/clubs)

The Into Film Festival - <http://www.intofilm.org/festival>

CPD - <http://www.intofilm.org/training>