Film Language: Sound
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“How and why different spectators interpret the same use of sound differently” (educas)

- What is the mood/atmosphere created by the sound?
- Is it largely diegetic or non-diegetic?
- Are there any characters present? Who are they?
- How would the narrative develop from this point?
The Orchestra

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Film Language: Sound
Film Language: Sound
‘A whistle stop tour of sound in film through theory and practical production’
Welcome
Who are Into Film and what do we do?

- 11,423 Film Clubs*
- 195,556 teaching resources downloaded*
- 17,432 teachers trained*
- Into film Awards (March) & Festival (November)

*2016-2017
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 explore the historical context of sound.

• To identify and apply key sound terminology in film.

• To practically apply theoretical understanding of sound techniques.
Film Language prompt cards

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

- This is yours to take back to class to use with students.
**Film Language: 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?
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.

- 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 and to provide ‘codes’ for the audience. e.g. scary music when a villain appears.

It can:
- Determine the mood or genre of a film
- Build up or release tension
- Change the emotional or physical status of a character
- Smooth out transitions in an edit to allow a film to flow/link the scenes together
- Highlight or code a theme or message.
A brief history of film sound
Fred Ott’s Sneeze (1894)

Film Language: Sound
Dickson Experimental Sound Film
(circa 1894)

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Emerging technologies

• 1905-1930s - ‘Nickelodeon’ screening dens with live music → Large movie palaces

• 1906 - audion tube which could amplify sound

• 1919 - synchronised sound printed directly onto the film strip

• 1927 - first ‘talkie’ *The Jazz Singer*, slipped in and out of silence and still used title cards
Film language: Sound
Dialogue

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

• Establishes characterisation, relationships, narrative and backstory through the:
  • Content (words spoken) and;
  • Delivery (performance and mood).
Voiceover

- An omniscient **narrator or a character talking over** the images on screen.

- Provides backstory and a subjective or objective perspective of the story as it unfolds.

- Usually recorded in a studio.

Listening to the voiceover in the following clip:

**To what extent do you believe that his view his objective or subjective?**
Voiceover -
Sunset Boulevard (1950)

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Diegetic and non-diegetic sound

In film language, sound is divided into two terms:

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

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

What is the effect of non-diegetic music in the following clip?
Absence of non-diegetic sound

• Some realist filmmakers choose to avoid non-diegetic music as much as possible.

• Consider the absence of non-diegetic sound in the following clip from *The Blair Witch Project*.
The Blair Witch Project (1999)

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Film Language: Sound
Parallel sound

• **Matches the mood** or tone of the visual sequence.
Contrapuntal sound

• Strongly **contrasts with the mood or tone** of the visuals in the scene.

• In which type of scene or genre of film is this technique commonly used? Why?

• Can you think of any notable examples?

• Watch the film clip on the next slide - what impact does it have?
Apocalypse Now (1979)
Vision on/sound off

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Pleonastic sound

- Exaggerated sound to **heighten emotion or meaning** in a scene.

- Consider: a person walks into a room and across a hard floor, pulls out a chair and sits down.
  - Which sounds are emphasised? What atmosphere is created?
  - Can reinforce a threatening presence or emphasise the emotional impact of a specific action.
sound effects

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

- Sound effects are integral to the sense of reality to the world depicted in a film (e.g. footsteps, rain falling).

- They can also be used to increase mystery, suspense and disorientation for the viewer (e.g. in science fiction or horror films).
Foley sound

- Foley sound takes its name from Jack Foley, a sound editor (1925-1960) 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.
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005)

Click on the image above to play clip

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Foley sound

• Foley supervisor Alex Joseph, achieved the gooey effect required for the chocolate river by jumping into a swimming pool with a sack of nutrient agar.

• The algae-based jelly swells in cold water, absorbing up to 20 times its own weight.

• “I was swimming about in the stuff all day,” said Joseph. “It was very gloopy. I had to take four showers to get it all off.”
Interactive Foley sound video with Pete Burgis

Click on the image above to play clip.

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Film Language: Sound
Foley sound activity

In a few moments you will have 20 minutes to:

1. Rewatch the film scene which has been pre-loaded onto the iPads in iMovie.

2. Choose your location and objects for recording Foley.

3. Record your sounds into your iMovie soundtrack.
Top tips for recording film sound

• Location scouting – stop and listen

• “Quiet on set!”

• Ambient sound for patching

• Handles – space before and after

• Boom/radio microphone or field recorder
Concealed

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