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Fierce Creatures, Bridges, and Mirrors: Discussing the Dramatic Structure of Film in EFL Classrooms

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Lajos Egri begins his discussion on premise in "The Art of Dramatic Writing" with a few lines about a man sprinting along a road. When interrupted and asked where he is hurrying, he replies, "How should I know where I'm going? I am on my way" (1). Without an objective, a theme, or some sense of direction, what is the point of any activity? Just as life's events can be made more interesting and meaningful by some purpose, good writing—dramatic or academic—must have a foundation, a premise.

How frequently, though, do you encounter writing in the classroom that leaves you asking, "What's the point?" A perennial challenge in working with students on their writing projects is helping them devise a premise and compose their work so that every sentence develops their central idea. Although they may read and write every day, little of that provides practice analyzing the foundation and organization of texts longer than an SNS post. Reading and breaking down an academic article is one of the exercises in my academic writing classes at Aoyama Gakuin University. While many of the students manage to complete that task, most of them tend to respond more positively to the visual arts, finding them more approachable and easier to analyze than the written word.

Assigning a film for viewing and class discussion gives students a chance to review the literary terms they have used in their Integrated English (IE) classes. It also provides an interesting and effective way to demonstrate how a premise provides a foundation and guides the development of the central idea of a work. For foreign language learners, watching a fast-paced film can keep

them focused on the overall story (with a novel, they can lose sight of it somewhere between the text and their dictionary). For IE students working on their book reports, taking a broad look at the story arc makes the task of identifying the theme, or what the story has to say about an idea, and symbols within the context of the novel a little easier. "...[A] ll plays, including farces, are better when the author feels he has something to say" (Egri 17). The farce "Fierce Creatures" has something to say about business and the world we live in, and it is a good film to use with students because one level of its humor is easy to catch, and that provides the motivation to get lost in the story and follow it to the conclusion. The film is also tightly written and has ample lines and visual images that can be referenced when conferencing with students on their own projects. However, as with the IE book reports, it is necessary to work with the students to help them identify the key events and the main idea of the film. Is there a way to do this and avoid taking too much time away from class or the students' own writing projects?

Susan Stempleski and Barry Tomalin suggest having students write a summary from the perspective of one of the characters (Video in Action 68). That works if the students have picked up many of the finer points of the film. Other ideas in the book include filling in video gaps (56) and predicting the plot (84), but those activities require someone to strategically start, stop, and skip to key points in the film. In a more recent book, Stempleski and Tomalin present an activity called "Story Maps" that involves identifying problems and solutions in the story (Film 83). In the same book, their "Time Line" activity can be modified to focus on conflict and resolutions (135). These activities can generate interesting responses, but often times the students' work reveals struggles with identifying key ideas related to the theme and the story arc. There can also be a wide range of views on who is the main character, a problem that can come up with "Fierce Creatures" and the four characters who generate most of the tension in the film. One of the activities in "Film" involves using establish shots and opening sequences to focus on dialogue and images that convey important information about the central idea of the film (65). This activity, coupled with ideas gleaned from several books on dramatic

writing, made me wonder whether previewing key scenes from a film would improve the students' speed and accuracy at identifying the foundational elements of a film's plot line and story arc.

To test this thought, I used "Fierce Creatures" with 118 first-year, second-semester students from differing departments at three Tokyo Universities. Following an introduction to the film, a summary of its introductory scenes, and a brief discussion on dramatic structure, this paper will present the results of student responses to two questionnaires. The first was about student film viewing and discussion habits, and was distributed before previewing selected scenes from the film but after a discussion on the literary terms main character, main conflict, central theme, plot line, and story arc. The second was distributed after watching the film but before the post-viewing discussion, and focused on their identification of the main character, main conflict, and central theme of the film.

As the questionnaire responses will show, "Fierce Creatures" is not the easiest film to follow. Part of the confusion over the main character and the main conflict may arise from the fact that the main character does not appear on the screen until nearly the fifth minute of the film. Although John Cleese, one of the writers, began working on the idea behind the film with Terry Jones in the 1960s before they were in Monty Python together, the long gestation period and the tight script of the 1990s film did not produce what Roger Ebert describes as the "hair-trigger timing" required in slapstick sequences to develop the "musical cadences" that get each part of the film to occur on the right beat. A critic for *Total Film* points out that production issues and the "extensive rewrites and reshoots that were undertaken following a terrible reaction from US test audiences" may have affected some of the film's cohesion. Hans ten Cate reveals that it was the killing off of Kevin Cline's character, Vince McCain, that caused the audience to react so negatively to the original ending of the film in 1995. After some work between John Cleese and William Goldman (*The Princess Bride*) on the script, and also a change of directors, about half of the script was reshot before the film was finally released in 1997. These issues may have had a subtle impact on the film's

timing issues that Ebert decries and some of the confusion that students have over the films main characters and main conflict.

With "Fierce Creatures," and also with student book reports in the IE program, students seem to have greater difficulty expressing opinions on the theme than they do their thoughts on characters and conflicts in the story. In regards to the book reports, theme, symbol, and irony are three terms the students struggle with the most. Completing the story far enough in advance of the book report deadline to have enough time to flip back and forth through the story is important. Looking back over the story arc is an important part of identifying the meaning of symbols within the context of the story instead of importing meaning from without. Is there a way to help the students quickly focus on the theme when reading a novel or watching a film?

In "Technique of the Drama", Gustave Freytag points out that, similar to the ancient use of prologue, sometimes the modern introduction scene is expanded and used "as a special prelude to the drama" (116). Some have criticized "Fierce Creatures" as taking too long to introduce and start the dramatic action that swirls around the main character, but the opening sequence makes a clear reference to the central idea of the film, and the actions of the principle characters and they way they are introduced is, in edu-speak, on task. Bill Johnson writes, "In a story's opening scenes, any character action, scene description, plot event, or character dialogue not rising from a story's promise [think, "premise"] and suggesting a need for its dramatic advance towards resolution rises from having no clear meaning" (10). While the main character may not appear on the screen until nearly five minutes into the film, the actions, dialogue, and issues of the characters who precede his introduction are connected to the central idea of the story arc. A clear-cut premise is essential for dramatic writing (Egri 6), and while there may be many ways to phrase the premise, student writing about novels and film can be improved when they understand the core dramatic issue of the story arc.

Homer begins "The Iliad" with the word "rage" (μῆνιν), and narrator Derek Jacobi's audiobook pronunciation of the word captures the essence of the character flaw that is central to the downfall of the hero Achilles. Now, "Fierce

Creatures" is nowhere near the level of "The Iliad," and a single word expressing the central idea of the film is not the first utterance of the film, but there is one word in the introduction which gives expression to that idea. It is hinted at in the opening shot of the film when the image of an octopus etched in glass fills the entire screen. American audiences, reflecting upon the film's title may think, "Oh, an octopus. Those are fierce. One of them destroyed the Golden Gate Bridge back in the 1950s when the world was still all in black and white." However, members of a Japanese audience might find their thoughts turning towards diced octopus and cucumber flavored with vinegar and served as a snack with a cold beer. Differences in perception amongst the audience that arise in the first shot and the opening scene of the film hint at what this story is all about: perception.

The first character introduced, Willa Weston (Jamie Lee Curtis), enters the center of the screen from the direction of the audience. Arriving early for her first day at a new job, she strides past the glass image of the octopus and enters an environment of glass, concrete, and metal. It is a scene dominated by lines. There is greenery, but it is limited to just four trees lined up in a row in front of the head office of Octopus, Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia. Willa enters the company's lobby through a rotating door, passes the armed security guard to her right, and goes directly to the reception desk where she learns her name is not on the company president's list. The camera is behind her, revealing the lobby area beyond the guards at the desk. Vince McCain (Kevin Kline), much like Egri's directionless runner, is ambling through the background to the left of the screen when he spies Willa and makes a U-turn. His approach to her follows an S-shaped path before he slithers in next to her at the desk. She is not impressed with him and ignores his offers to help get her past the guards until he tells one of them that he will "take her up: she's from the White House." After a quick introduction that reveals he is the vice president of marketing and mainly waiting for his father Rod McCain (Kevin Cline) to die, Willa asks him about his "White House" comment. He tells her, "I was just changing his perception of the situation. First law of marketing." This is the first of three times that the word "perception" is used in the film. The other

two follow important revelations or recognitions for Willa, and as the humor makes clear as the story progresses, the characters' perceptions and misperceptions affect more than just the humor of the film.

As Willa and Vince head up to see Rod, he asks her, "So, what would you like to know about the most powerful man alive?" Arriving at the executive floor, Willa and Vince flank a portrait of his father. The camera is low, forcing the audience to look up at the subject of the painting along with Willa and Vince. In awe, Willa says, "Rod McCain." Sounding something much less than awestruck, Vince remarks, "Round here he's known as Rod Almighty." The perceived similarity between Rod and God is reinforced thirty seconds later when Rod McCain makes his appearance in the dead center of the screen. The camera zooms in on two curved metal handles that, joined by a slight shadow between them, form a circle on the double doors leading to Rod McCain's office. From behind the doors come Rod's exuberant growls over a business deal he has just pulled off. Between the guttural sounds comes the exclamation, "O God, I'm a god!" The doors burst open, revealing Mr. McCain at his full height. His head is near the top of the screen, and splattered on the wall behind him hangs a Jackson Pollock painting, foreshadowing an event that will show the limit of Rod's money and power.

Willa and Vince tag along as Rod and his assistant Neville (Bille Brown) head down the hall to a meeting. On the way, Rod and Neville tick off their new acquisitions, and among them is an English zoo, the mention of which causes Willa to repeat the word to Neville. Seconds later, after she learns that the TV station she had been hired to run was sold just that morning, she begins plotting a new role for herself in the company and asks Neville about the zoo. Neville replies that they have transferred a former policeman turned TV executive from their Hong Kong branch. As he speaks, the scene changes to Marwood Zoo. In the bottom left of the screen appears the head of Rollo Lee (John Cleese), the main character. Rollo charges up the stairs, his Caucasian features and his 196 centimeter height revealing that Neville's perception of him as a "hard-nosed, little Chinese" man is incorrect on two out of three adjectives.

Downs and Wright consider drama to rise out of human error that “comes about because a character does not have an accurate picture of his private, personal self” (49). Action and character are deeply intertwined in drama, and what happens in the story should be unified so that each event “is possible in terms of probability or necessity” (Aristotle 57). The unity of the action in “Fierce Creatures” arises from Rollo Lee’s misperception of himself and the qualities needed to lead in a way that has a long-lasting, positive impact. Until he develops a clearer perception and adjusts his priorities, until he recognizes and attempts to mend a key flaw in himself, and until he finds the courage to stand up to those who hold authority over him, events around him will continue to spin beyond his control. The premise of this film might be, “Simplification clarifies one’s perception of what is important in life.” Leaving behind business offices and getting in touch with nature at the zoo transforms both Rollo and Willa. In the Garden of Eden, Adam learned his place in Creation and named the animals. In the Zoo of Marwood, Rollo learns the names of the animals and began to discover things about himself. In front of the gorilla compound, Willa revisits a childhood memory and she begins to long for a simpler life. A comparison of the settings of the opening and closing scenes reveals something about the changes these two characters undergo in the story. Willa, at the beginning enters a corporate office that, with all its armed guards, architectural lines and metal support beams and bars, resembles a prison cell. In the last scene, she and Rollo are no longer dressed in formal business clothing and stand outside a cage in the midst of greenery as they address the misperception that is the final obstacle in their developing relationship. The change in the external setting symbolizes the internal transformation that both characters have undergone, but it is the action arising from Rollo’s shift in perception that most greatly impacts the film’s pattern of concealment and revelation, propelling the story forward to its conclusion.

When Rollo first takes the stage at Marwood Zoo, he tells the zookeepers that his Octopus TV experience has taught him that “Violence” is the biggest attraction in the world. He states that Rod McCain requires all his businesses to increase earnings by twenty percent or face closure. In order to save the

zoo, Rollo's new policy dictates that they keep "only animals that are potentially violent. Fierce animals. All the rest ... will have to go." The keepers immediately protest, the principle objection being that "the zoo is dedicated to conservation." Rollo answers that he is "all in favor of conservation," and that he wants to conserve the zoo, the keepers' jobs, and fierce creatures.

The upset keepers immediately come up with a plan that involves creating the perception that their animals are violent. Rollo, however, is not duped by new placards portraying extremely tame and cute animals as bloodthirsty beasts. Encyclopedia in hand, he first confronts Sydney Lotterby (Robert Lindsay) who is standing in the coat pen using a chair to fend off a bunch of inquisitive, snuggly-looking animals. He warns Rollo to stay back or risk getting a "nasty nip." Rollo retorts, "A safety pin would give me a nasty nip." Two pens latter, in front of the Patagonian maras, Rollo pointedly says, "Lotterby, you're trying to deceive me into thinking that some of your animals are fierce ... when they are in fact lovable, cuddly, and surplus to requirements." A stunned Lotterby asks, "You want every animal here a psycho?" If the zookeepers had any remaining questions about the Fierce Animal policy, Rollo now makes it expressly clear that he "want[s] a lethal weapon in every cage."

Just prior to ten minutes into the film, the scene shifts back to Atlanta where Willa has set up a model of the zoo. Vince enters the room and expresses confusion as to why she wants to go to England and run an "animal toilet." She replies, "Animal, television companies, paperclips ... it's all business." She foresees an income of billions from a "chain of cash cows," or a "cash dairy" as Rod McCain later puts it. She is in a hurry to present the idea to Rod in her second morning at Octopus before their "ruthless little Chinese friend [has] time to make an impact." She appears to be every bit the "natural-born, corporate killer" that Rod describes her as. Russin and Downs write, "The world, the protagonist, the tone, the theme, the stakes, and the nature of the conflict must all be there within the first ten pages or so." Writers need to establish that "...in this world, this story is the essential conflict, and [these]

characters are the essential people to resolve it" (183). As the eleventh minute of the film elapses, it is clear that zoo director Rollo Lee is facing conflict from above and below him in the company structure. It is also clear that perception, right or wrong, is the idea underpinning the story.

With the main character, main conflict, and main idea established, a quick look over the main points in the dramatic structure of "Fierce Creatures" will reveal the impact that the action and dramatic issue at stake have upon Rollo Lee, and also on his perception of himself and the qualities of enduring leadership. Tension, however, is required in order to transform Rollo's views. Freytag points out, "Even while a man is under stress, and laboring to turn his inmost soul toward the external, his surroundings exert a stimulating or repressing influence on his passionate emotions. ...[W]hile what has been done exerts a reflex influence upon him, he does not remain merely receptive, but gains new impulses and transformation" (19). Looking at key points or scenes in the dramatic structure of the film will verify whether, at the end of the introduction, a viewer's identification of the main character, main conflict, and main idea can be supported from within the context of the story.

What points, though, are key or instructive for students analyzing a film? A survey of books on dramatic writing reveals a variety of terms and definitions. Russin and Downs provide a graph that places their modern story structure alongside the one Joseph Campbell develops in "The Hero with a 1,000 Faces." Here are Campbell's structural points, with those of Russin and Downs included in parentheses: Ordinary World (Balance, Opening Event); Call to Adventure (Disturbance); Reluctant Hero, Wise Old Man, Into the Special World (Protagonist's Decision) | [First Threshold] | Enemies, Allies, Test (Complications, Obstacles, Crises, and Conflicts); Inmost Cave (Greater Complications, etc.); Supreme Ordeal (Dark Moment) | [Second Threshold] | Seizing the Sword (Enlightenment); The Road Back (Climax); Resurrection (New Balance); Return with the Elixir (Catharsis) (102). Campbell's first and second thresholds occur in a place in the structure where a play traditionally breaks between the three acts. Freytag identifies three forces that come to bear on a hero: 1, the exciting force pushes the main character into action; 2, the

tragic force results in the overthrowing of the protagonist; and 3, the force of last suspense introduces a new force and possible a new role (115-139). While Freytag's three forces have more to do with classical tragedies than farce, the point may be made that these forces impel the main character to act and be transformed—for better or for worse. Campbell describes the hero's path as crossing two thresholds in the story. The first crossing occurs as he is separated from the world and begins his initiation, and the second occurs when he returns to the world (23). Whereas the traditional view saw the hero as being driven by forces beyond his control, such as when a god's rage delayed by ten years Odysseus' return home, or from his hubris, as was the case with Oedipus the King, a more modern view is expressed by Will Dunne who sees the character's advance through a story as being caused by his own decisions. An "easy decision" near the beginning of the story sets the protagonist on his way, a "difficult decision" occurs near the middle, and a "crisis decision," a sort of life or death decision, occurs near the end (Kindle location 3578). These ideas can help students when they analyze a film, but the odds are that unpacking all this content will result in more lights going off than on, putting the majority of heads on the classroom desks. Fortunately, there is way to communicate this content that is brief and memorable.

In "Write Your Novel from the Middle," James Scott Bell basically renames the elements in the above structural formulas of myth and drama. He describes the structure of the play as resembling a suspension bridge. There is a "Doorway of no Return" in each pillar, and in the middle of the bridge the main character pauses for a "Mirror Moment, a moment of reflection which lies between the character's pre-story psychology and his ultimate transformation" (28). The mirror moment occurs when the protagonist considers his situation and recognizes something about either himself or the forces opposing him. While this recognition differs from the type Aristotle writes about, similar to Dunne, Bell sees the mirror moment as a reflection that requires a decision, which must be then followed by action in order for the transformation to continue. Matching Bell's fourteen "signposts" (41) (or the above listed structural points of Campbell / Russin and Downs) with stills

from pertinent scenes in the film and hanging them on a suspension bridge drawn on the classroom blackboard helps students to recognize key actions, dialogue, and ideas in the assorted scenes. The bridge and the attached images make it easier to grasp the structural concepts and visualize the transformation that takes place in the story. This is an exercise, though, that is better done during the discussion after the film rather than before as it can bend the interpretation of the students to that of the teacher.

Bell's mirror moment concept, which he demonstrates as occurring in the middle of both films and novels, played an integral role in my selection of film scenes to preview with the students. The total time of "Fierce Creatures" from the opening shot of the Octopus, Inc. sign to the final shot of Rollo and Willa alone together outside a cage in an Eden-like oasis away from the modern world is about 88 minutes. Rollo's mirror moment begins at 43:30 when he tells all the zookeepers what he really thinks about Octopus. His speech is overheard by Willa, and although he shrinks when she confronts him, his open-hearted answer to her question about why he works at Octopus comes after a few seconds of introspection: "Cowardice." Rollo has been brave, or at least domineering, when facing subordinates, but he cowers before his corporate betters. He will have to find bravery to act on his recognition if he—and the zoo—are to be transformed and survive all that the McCain's have done. Willa has her own mirror moment when she makes contact with Jambo the Marwood Zoo alpha gorilla. From this encounter, she finds the strength to finally confront Vince over the degrading way he treats the animals. It is in her first confrontation with Vince that she turns his own phrase on him when he says that he was not lying about Bruce Springsteen's promise to sponsor a tortoise. She replies, "What, [are you] just altering my perception of the situation?" Her next argument with him brings up the word "perception" for the third and final time in the film when she lays bare his misperception of how people see him. This leads to the revelation that he has been stealing money from the zoo, on the books putting it far beneath Rod McCain's twenty percent profit rule. In fact, Rod has already decided to sell the zoo to a group of Japanese investors who plan turn it into a golf course. It is after this scene

that the film reaches its second threshold / crisis decision moment / second doorway of no return (the first occurred when Rollo changed his mind about coming clean on the "five animals [he] was supposed to have shot"), and Rollo has to muster the bravery to act and pull off a master manipulation of perception or lose everything. As this is a comedy, the film ends happily. The false-god Rod is dead, the serpent Vince is banished, and the zoo is safe with a transformed Rollo and Willa cooperating with the zookeepers to conserve a little bit of Eden in England.

Rather than preview scenes revealing the outcome Rollo and Willa's mirror moments, I decided to use a mix of scenes that hint at the upcoming mirror moment, as well as the moment itself. To test the effectiveness of previewing key scenes from a film's plot line and story arc, I showed the film to 118 university students in Tokyo and distributed two questionnaires, one before and one after showing the film. The students were all in the autumn semester of their first year, and they all heard the same talk on the literary terms main character, conflict, theme, plot line, and story arc. The universities are listed in the results as X, Y, and Z:

- X-1 18 students from the education and psychology departments
- X-2 18 students from the law department
- X-3 25 students from the English department
- X-4 15 students from the English department
- Y-1 24 students from the language and the international departments
- Z-1 18 students from the international and cultural studies departments

The first questionnaire dealt with the students film viewing habits and their use of the terms at school and with family and friends. Questions three through eight were about the literary terms. Questions three through five focused on classroom discussions; questions six through eight focused on discussions with family and friends. For ease of comparison, the two settings are paired in the table for each term:

- 1) Have you seen "Fierce Creatures" before? 1 Yes 117 No
- 2) How many movies do you watch per year (in a cinema or elsewhere)?

University		University	
X-1	20.6	X-4	11.9
X-2	16.6	Y-1	20.3
X-3	17.3	Z-1	17.5
		Average	17.4

- 3) Have you used the term "main character" to discuss films or stories in a class at school?
- 6) Do you talk about the "main characters" of films or stories with family or friends?

Main Character	School		Family/Friends	
University	Yes	No	Yes	No
X-1	8	10	15	3
X-2	9	9	14	4
X-3	21	4	21	4
X-4	10	5	10	5
Y-1	9	15	16	8
Z-1	10	8	16	2
Total	67	51	92	26

- 4) Have you used the term "main conflict" to discuss films or stories in a class at school?
- 7) Do you talk about the "main conflict" of films or stories with family or friends?

Main Conflict	School		Family/Friends	
University	Yes	No	Yes	No
X-1	5	13	8	10
X-2	3	15	6	12
X-3	19	6	9	16
X-4	8	7	5	10
Y-1	7	17	8	16
Z-1	3	15	5	13
Total	37	66	36	67

5) Have you used the term "theme" to discuss films or stories in a class at school?

8) Do you talk about the "theme" of films or stories with family or friends?

Theme	School		Family/ Friends	
University	Yes	No	Yes	No
X-1	11	7	8	10
X-2	5	13	12	6
X-3	20	5	10	15
X-4	10	5	6	9
Y-1	10	14	10	14
Z-1	10	8	13	5
Total	66	52	59	59

Discussions about main characters are the most common in any setting. It would be interesting to know what percentage of these discussions are about the actual character in the film and what percentage are about the actor or actress playing the role.

Different classes were shown different clips from the film before watching it to test whether the results of the previews would vary widely.

X-1 (18) and x-2 (18) did not preview any scenes.

X-3 (25) was split into two groups, X-3a (12) and X-3b (13).

X-3a (12) watched the first 11 minutes of the film that were described earlier in this paper.

X-3b (13) watched the first scene between Willa and Vince at the gorilla enclosure. During this scene, Willa reminisces about childhood trips with her father to a zoo in Atlanta to see Willy B the gorilla. Vince then reveals that as a five-year-old he sold a puppy his mother gave to him. He says he did not see the point in having a dog when he needed nothing fetched. This group also watched Rollo's mirror moment.

X-4 (15) watched Rollo's Overthrowing Force/Difficult Decision/Doorway of No Return Nr. 1 scene when, after deciding to tell

in a class at

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59

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: Decision/
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Willa and Vince that, contrary to the misperception he created establish his image as hard-nosed and tough, he did not actually shoot five cuddly creatures. However, Rollo decides to keep his secret when Vince says, "Shooting those animals saved your [job] from extinction." This group also watched Rollo's mirror moment.

Y-1 (24) watched both Rollo and Willa's mirror moments.

Z-1 (18) watched the first scene between Willa and Vince at the gorilla enclosure, as well as Willa's mirror moment.

Who is the main character?

Character	X-1	X-2	X-3a	X-3b	X-4	Y-1	Z-1	T
Rollo	11	13	6	10	12	11	6	69
Willa	3	4	6	1	3	11	9	37
Vince	2	1	-	-	-	1	2	6
Rod	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
R L & W	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	3
None	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total	18	18	12	13	15	24	18	118

What is the main conflict? (MvH: Man v Himself; MvM: Man v Man; MvSo: Man v Society; \$va: money v animals)

Conflict	X-1	X-2	X-3a	X-3b	X-4	Y-1	Z-1	T
MvH	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	14
MvM	8	8	4	2	7	19	12	60
MvSo	5	7	5	9	7	4	5	42
\$va	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total	18	18	12	13	15	24	18	118

What is the central idea or theme? (Animals: Care of Animals; LP: Life Priorities; CV/P: Changing Viewpoints/Perceptions; Co-op: Co-operation;

Money; Power; Mis: Misunderstanding; Success; None)

Theme								
	X-1	X-2	X-3a	X-3b	X-4	Y-1	Z-1	T
Animals	6	7	5	6	6	3	6	39
LP	3	5	3	2	2	6	3	24
CV/P	2	-	1	-	5	2	3	13
Co-op	-	2	1	-	-	-	1	4
Money	2	1	2	2	1	3	2	13
Power	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	4
Mis	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	6
Success	1	-	-	1		-	-	2
None	2	-	-	1		9	1	13
Total	18	18	12	13	15	24	18	

The real benefit of using film in the way described in this paper is difficult to assess. Of all the numbers in the above tables, the one that stands out to me the most is the X-4 results for theme. This group, a small class of 15, watched Rollo's first Doorway of No Return scene and his mirror moment. This group had the highest number of students who wrote down a theme that fit in the category of changing perceptions. While the other previewing selections do not show a bias toward Willa over Rollo, the previews shown to X-3a, Y-1, and Z-1 appear to have influenced more students to select Willa as the main character. X-3a watched the ten minute introduction Which is dominated by Willa. Y-1 viewed both mirror moments, but Willa's is the more dramatic. Both X-3a and Y-1 were evenly split in their identification of the main character. Only Z-1, which was the single group solely to watch Willa previews, chose Willa over Rollo as the main character. To get a stronger sense of how this activity impacts the student's perceptions of a film's main character, main conflict, and main theme, having them support their view with evidence from the film would likely yield deeper insight.

The post-viewing discussion content is much more focused after doing this exercise, and the students, after considering Bell's bridge and the stills from key scenes, tend to use more dialogue and scenes from the film to support

their opinions as they talk about the plot line, story arc, theme, and even the meaning of symbolic images within the context of the film. Being able to reference the film and getting students to recall their own thoughts on the film when conferencing with students on other writing projects, be it a book report, an essay, or a research paper, is invaluable. And for lovers of film, the greatest reward is in hearing new film analysis skills being put to use and knowing that the new appreciation of film will stay with the students and affect the way they think about movies long after they leave the college classroom.

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