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Pleasure

The Quiet American is a film that has been adapted from the novel of the same name written by Graham Greene. Filmmakers from every country in the world have often used existing novels as sources for films. There have been thousands of films that have been based on novels but often these films have been severely criticised – they don't show us exactly what is in the novel. Certain characters and events have been 'left out'. However, we should not look on these things as a way in which to criticise filmed adaptations. Instead of looking at differences as a starting point, let us look at the different types of pleasures that films and novels offer us and also at the ways in which we experience adaptations and the different pleasures that such experiences give.

When we read a book, sitting quietly with no other distractions, it is possible to put down the novel for a day or two and then pick it up again. We might even re-read a few pages, or turn back to earlier in the novel to refresh our memory of what has happened. This is a very different experience to watching a film in a cinema. There we will sit in darkness surrounded by other members of the audience for, in the case of *The Quiet American*, for about one hour and forty minutes whilst the story unfolds before our eyes.

What different pleasures do we get from reading a book compared to watching a film? How does each try to engage us and arouse our emotions? Make a list of how both media tell a story and what effects each use to guide us through the story.

The next thing is to look at ways in which each medium actually tells a story.

Task

Obtain a copy of the novel *The Quiet American* (Vintage Classics edition) and read pages 17-18 where Fowler first meets Pyle. Make a note of what happens.

Now, on the website, look at study clip 1 again the meeting of Fowler and Pyle.



Fowler meets Pyle

Study Clip 1

1 Watch the study clip and then write down what information you find out about both Fowler and Pyle.

A) How were you given this information?

B) How are the two characters introduced to us?

C) How does the way the characters are dressed give us information about them?

2 Now you should list the number of shots that are in this sequence. Try to describe what type of shot each one is e.g. close-up, long shot etc.

3 When you have done this say why each shot was included in the sequence. What does each shot tell us about what is happening?

Look at the sequence again. As well as seeing the characters of Fowler and Pyle, what else are we shown in the background to some of the shots? What does this tell us about the world in which the characters exist?

How are we introduced to each character? How does the film make us aware of what each character is like?

How does the novel do this? What is included in the novel that is not in the film and vice versa? Why do you think there are omissions and additions in each? If there is something in the film clip that is not in the novel, then where has this come from? Is it another part of the novel or has it been invented by the scriptwriter? If so, why? What does the addition tell us?

Having completed this task can you now come to some conclusions about methods of storytelling in books and in films?



Genres

We tend to understand films through the conventions that they use in telling their story. Conventions can cover such things as characters we expect to see, particular situations, and themes etc. These are governed by the particular genre into which a film fits. So, a western will have certain kinds of characters and situations that are particular to only that type of film. The same could be said for science fiction. These 'types of film' are normally referred to as genres. How many genres can you name? And what do you expect to find in films in each genre?

Into which genre or genres would *The Quiet American* fit? Critics who have seen the film have described it as a love story, a war film, and a detective story and also as a political story. Is it only one of these or is it a combination of all four?



Task

In the chart on page 5, write down which conventions from each of these four genres appear in *The Quiet American* and which scenes show these conventions.

Of the four genres listed above that you have looked at, analyse and rate which of them is the most important in the film and which the least from the overall point of view of the story of *The Quiet American*.

The genre of the film can also affect the way in which the story is told. Looking at *The Quiet American* we can see that the story begins with its ending – Pyle's death. The rest of the film explores how and why this happened – the motivation for the murder. Of the four genres listed above, which make most use of the idea of the flashback in order to tell their story?



Story	Conventions	Scenes
Love		
Detective		
War		
Political		



Characters

One of the key elements of storytelling is the characters in the story. A novelist or filmmaker has to create believable and interesting characters in order to involve the reader/viewer in the story.

The major techniques used by authors and filmmakers to establish a character and to help us understand what type of person they are include:

- Physical description (including dress, looks, voice)
- Personality (friendly, happy etc.)
- Actions of the character
- Interaction with other characters
- Comments on other characters

Characters are essential to the movement of a story. As a story is a construction and everything within it should be relevant to its development, then we can see that the actions, thoughts and words of any character are a vital element of the dynamic of a story.

There are three central characters in *The Quiet American* – Fowler, Pyle and Phuong.

Firstly, think about each character individually. For each of the three characters answer the following questions:

- 1 Describe the physical characteristics of the character
- 2 Describe their personality
- 3 What do we know about the background of the character?

Your answers will lead you to some general conclusions about each character. The next thing to look at is how you have come to understand this. For your answers to questions **2** and **3** think of moments within the film which illustrate the points you have made.



Actions & Motivation

Having looked at the physical and personality aspects of the three characters now look at their motivation and also their actions in order to see how each character helps to move the story along, both through their actions and their decisions.

Task

In the chart below you will be required to choose three key actions for each of the main characters. For each of these actions say what each of them tells us about the character and then why this is important to the overall plot of the story, how it helps to move the story along.

What the action tells us about the character	Importance to the plot
<p>Fowler</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p>	
<p>Pyle</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p>	
<p>Phuong</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p>	



Interaction

Look back to your answers in the previous task. How many of the key actions of each character involved one of the other main characters? Key to the plot of *The Quiet American* is the relationships between Fowler, Pyle and Phuong.

Task

Now consider how the characters interact with each other and also how their relationships change. Thus if we look at the relationship of Fowler and Pyle, we can see that it undergoes many changes during the story, from friendship to dislike, back to friendship and then finally betrayal. Can you think of the key moments in the film, which highlight these changes?

When you have done this think about the relationships between Fowler and Phuong and Pyle and Phuong. How do these change during the course of the story?

Finally, when you have tracked all three relationships, look to see how they are linked together, the ways in which Graham Greene has sewn the three characters together.

Minor Characters

So far we have looked only at the three main characters in the film. However we are also introduced to other characters – Phuong’s sister, Joe from the American Embassy and Heng. Can you remember any other minor characters from the film?

Task

Now think about what these characters add to the overall narrative of the story. Why have they been included? How do they help move the story along?



Moving Image Analysis

Now go to the section of the website, study clip 2 and then answer the questions below. You will need to look back at answers you have already given about the various characters. This exercise will help you see how a filmmaker is able to communicate information through the choice of camera angles, music etc.

Fowler, Pyle & Phuong

Study Clip 2

This is a key scene where Pyle and Phuong meet for the first time and the 'love triangle' begins. In this scene you will mainly look at the concept of 'point of view'.

- 1 Look at the study clip. On this first viewing, try to identify which shots do NOT show Fowler, Pyle or Phuong. What is shown in these shots and why?
- 2 'Point of view' of the action is controlled by where the camera is placed. Sometimes the camera gives us the point of view of one of the characters. At other times, the point of view is that of the audience - we are 'looking in' on the action.
- 3 Identify those shots where you think we are given the point of view of one of the characters. Then explain why you think we are given this viewpoint at this particular moment.
- 4 What are the predominant colours in the scene? What do these colours suggest to you? Look closely at the clothes the actors wear. How do these create an idea about the characters that they play?
- 5 How is the action on the dance floor linked to Fowler sitting at the bar?



Moral Standpoints

So far you have looked at the way in which the story and characters of the film *The Quiet American* have been constructed. We will now look at the 'message' of the film, the ideas that it is putting forward.

All films are based on the idea of conflict, be it good and evil, right and wrong, funny and sad. In your work on genre you will probably have looked at some of the conflicts which arise within specific genres. These conflicts are normally embodied within certain characters and their actions.

In looking at the conflicts and the moral standpoints that we are presented in *The Quiet American*, we should start with the characters themselves.

If we look at Fowler, Pyle, Phuong and Heng, what different moralities does each embody? How does each view what is happening in Vietnam at the time of the action? Is what each does good or evil? Or might their actions be amoral? How do they justify their actions? Try to describe each characters' moral view on the actions that we are shown in the narrative.

Having explored the characters, we now need to examine whether the film itself has a particular moral stance. Does it favour any one of the characters' outlooks or does it try to give a balanced viewpoint? At the end of the film, did you feel sympathy with any one outlook shown?

Finally, we should consider our own moral outlook - what values do we take into the film as members of the audience? The book on which the film is based was published in 1955 in a very different world to the one in which we live now. How might audiences then have reacted to the story compared to now? Back in 1955 the major political concerns were the dismantling of colonial power and also the fight against Communism. What concerns are prominent in politics today?



Task

Hot seating – members of your group should be prepared to be hot seated as one of the four characters listed above. The other members of the group should then question them about the events that we see occur in the film and how they react to them.



Themes

Looking back at the work you completed on genre, it is worth looking at one of these in order to explore the ideas of themes within the story of *The Quiet American*.

If we take the key example of the detective story, then we can say that most detective stories deal with themes of terror, guilt, violence, betrayal and mystery. These themes run through most detective stories.

Task

Look at the other three genres listed. What themes are common to films within each of these genres? You might repeat certain of the themes that occur in detective stories. For example, you might say that betrayal is a theme of love stories and that violence occurs in war stories. Try to come up with as many themes as possible for each genre.

In the chart below write down four of what you think are the themes of the film. Next to each theme write down at least two incidents from the film that illustrate that theme.

Theme	Incidents in <i>The Quiet American</i>



Structures

The story of *The Quiet American* can be divided into four parts:

- Fowler meets Pyle
- Pyle saves Fowler's life
- Pyle steals Phuong from Fowler and Fowler realises that Pyle is responsible for the explosion
- The death of Pyle

All of these events unfold with our knowledge, as the viewer, that Pyle will die (we have seen his body at the beginning of the film when Fowler identifies him.) When we look at the structure of the story we need to think about three things - the plot, the story and the narrative.

Plot – these are the elements, which recur from story to story – in many ways these are the same as the genre conventions that you looked at earlier. To tell the story the filmmaker uses these elements.

Story – this is where the elements of the plot are structured into a sequence. This refers to the brief outline of *The Quiet American* that is printed at the top of the page.

Narrative – the way in which the story is actually told and filmed – the type of shots used, the use of music, the way the film is edited together. If the story outline were written up as a novel then the narrative would be expressed in a different way through the choice of words and descriptions.

So, above you have the story of *The Quiet American* in its basic form. We now need to look at how this is translated into a developed narrative; how this narrative expresses the themes of the film; how *The Quiet American* uses conventions of genre to build up the narrative and finally how all of this is translated onto film. You will need to have in front of you all of the work that you have completed so far so that you can use your findings to answer questions about the story structure.

Task

In the chart on page 13 log all of the key moments of the film that fit into each story section. Say how each section of the narrative reveals something about the characters. Finally, what themes are shown in each of the story sections?

Once you have completed the chart trace through the narrative the various developments which take place both of characters and also themes. Looking at your chart, can you see any relationships between the themes and certain of the characters?

Can you see the ways in which certain of the narrative events are linked, the ways in which one action causes another action to happen? How does this relate to the ways in which a certain



character is shown to us? What you are doing here is looking at the way in which Graham Greene has structured the basic story and how the filmmakers have taken the novel and translated it into a filmed narrative.

Key narrative moments	Revelation of character	Themes



Moving Image Narrative

Now go to the website and look at study clip 3 and answer the following questions.

Fowler & Pyle

Study Clip 3

This is the moment in the film where Fowler must decide if he will set up a 'trap' for Pyle by inviting him to a restaurant where he will be intercepted by the Communists. If Fowler decides to do this, he will signal to the rickshaw driver by opening a book at the window. It is also the moment where Fowler confronts Pyle about his actions.

- 1 Look closely at the scene. Why do you think the director chose to make the camera follow Fowler to the bookshelf instead of using a series of cuts?
- 2 How does the director use the books to build up tension within the scene?
- 3 Why is the camera mainly focused on Fowler during this scene?
- 4 In what ways do the scriptwriter and the director pull together the many themes of the story in this scene?

