Film trailers and posters

Film Trailers and Film Posters

This resource aims to prepare students for the GCSE topic area of Advertising and Marketing. The range of classroom tasks has been devised to develop students' knowledge and understanding of film trailers linked to the specification framework. The section linked to film posters will allow students to prepare for Section B *Thinking about the Media – Planning* developing creative and planning skills through interlinked activities.

Links to Framework – areas of exploration

GENRE: film genres, sub genres, hybridity. Genre as a marketing device. Genre iconography. Repetition and difference. Codes and conventions of trailers. Genre and audience.

NARRATIVE: How trailers are constructed. Typical narrative structures. Character functions within narratives. Plot, setting and locations in which stories take place.

REPRESENTATIONS: Recognisable character types and stereotypes. Representations of gender-links to genre context and audience relationship. Representations of age, ethnicity, culture, nation and issues.

MEDIA ORGANISATIONS: Sustaining and extending markets. The use of stars. Cross-platform media campaigns. Film companies – multi-national conglomerates, independent companies. Production, distribution, exhibition.

AUDIENCE: Audience categorisation. Targeting audiences. Fans. Audience pleasures, responses, uses and gratifications.

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Resource 1: Film charts

Digital resource
Screen 1:
Question: What do you think are the top grossing films of all time?
Asking learners this opening question allows for an immediate connection with the industry aspect of this topic area and will lay the foundation for an understanding for the importance of trailers and posters in the advertising and marketing of films. Comparing the facts and figures of the list from Box Office Mojo allows for an assessment of students' understanding of the film industry at this starting point. [Definition of **gross**: *the total amount of money taken worldwide at the box office. Box office business is the amount of revenue taken through ticket sales.*]

Screen 2:
Domestic *means sales ticket sales in America and Canada*. The **weekend box office** for the initial week of release or **opening weekend** is often widely reported and a good indicator of financial success. [The **weekend box office**, defined as the box office receipts from Friday through Sunday.] This grid develops learners' understanding of the importance of drawing audiences into cinemas on the immediate release of a film opening that weekend.

Screen 3:
Global Markets – The top films here can be described as *blockbuster films*. This type of film can be understood as being a studio produced film [refer to studio column above and studio column *top grossing films of all time* slide. The major studios behind these films are Warner Brothers, Universal, 20th Century Fox, Paramount and Buena Vista Pictures [a *distribution* company owned by the Walt Disney Company]. The blockbuster film has a high budget that allows for visual, cinematic spectacle and an ability to attract global audiences.

Screen 4:
Figures are derived from movies tracked overall and including the movies that were released in 2015. The figures here show how the studios dominate the market.

Screen 5:
This early use of facts and figures helps to focus learners' attention on the *industry* and *organisations* aspects of the media so putting typical discussions about films which are *good or not* [opinion led responses] into the media framework. Instead discussions can be geared towards: which films are *commercially successful,* which films *appealed to audiences*, why were these films successful, what *genres* are popular with *wide, mainstream audiences*?

Learners are also drawing on their own existing knowledge and experiences which are then shaped into knowledge and understanding of film linked to the concept areas.

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These opening questions can prompt enthusiastic discussions which act as a useful springboard to areas about the industry that will underpin the study of trailers to follow.

Class based research can develop students' understanding of themselves as a target audience. It also develops the skills needed for the research aspects of the controlled assessment elements of the course *presenting findings in an appropriate manner, undertaking focussed research of a particular group*… The prompt questions here can be extended or constructed in the form of a questionnaire – teaching opportunity here in relation to how to construct a questionnaire.

**Film Charts – Printable resource**
These are useful prompt questions related to the facts and figures charts.
These questions can be posed in relation to particular charts and can be used as a basis for further research prior to further study or returned to at the end of the unit.

Resource 2: Company Logos

Choose one of these film companies.
Research 5 films released by these companies.
Prepare to feedback to class.

Universal logo - Flickr Creative Commons Licensed under CC 2.0
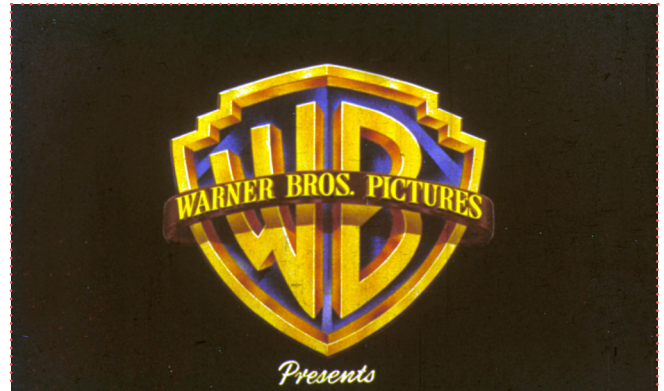
Warner Bros logo - Moviestore collection Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

Paramount logo - David Crausby / Alamy Stock Photo

Buena Vista International logo. Every effort has been made to seek copyright permission for this image, however if you would like this image to be removed please contact us on resources@wjec.co.uk

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20th Century Fox logo - Flickr Creative Commons Licensed under CC 2.0

www.imdb.com is a good place for students to start their research as this site lists filmographies for each company. Research can be extended with questions related to the key concepts of genre [what types of films are made…] and audiences [who are the films aimed at etc.].
Research skills can usefully be developed with this activity.

Resource 3: Budgets

Digital resource
Screen 1:
Students will probably suggest things related to their own viewing of some of these blockbuster films. Suggestions might include special effects, action scenes [explosions, car chases etc.] stars or well-known actors etc.

Screen 2:
Show the trailer for one of the films on the budget list: *Jurassic World/Furious 7/Avengers: Age of Ultron*. While watching ask students to make notes of everything that they think costs money.

Range of features might include: stars, CGI, settings, locations, cast, props, stunts, explosions, range of camera shots [aerial, tracking, crane etc.], script/dialogue, music. The three films can be considered as the high-budget, studio, blockbuster films referred to earlier, and the trailers showcase the visual spectacle that they can afford to offer mainstream audiences.

The pleasures offered tend to be escapist as a cinematic *experience* is promised which aims to draw people into cinemas. In their notes students might suggest features that belong to the pre-production stage/the production stage and the post-production stage of film making which can be explored explicitly.

Screen 3:
Why are film franchises more likely to make money for film companies?

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Some of the students' suggestions might include the films listed here. Reasons why they are good for companies are that the films have a wide mainstream appeal and can generate profit that will be returned into the company to fund other productions.

Screen 4:
This will lead in to the next resource focusing on audiences.

Budgets – Printable resource
Stages of film making: give students a list of features and ask them to organise each aspect in the appropriate stage e.g. story development/screen writing/casting/finding locations/casting/filming/recording sound/editing of shots/adding visual effects/adding sound effects/ the sound track/the trailer itself…

Franchise: a film that is a part of a series of films. All aspects of the franchise such as characters and all linked merchandise belong to a company. They are the film's property. [http://www.empireonline.com/features/infographic-studio-franchises]

Resource 4: Audiences

Digital resource
Screen 1:
Ask students to draw up a grid and then study either the posters or the trailers and suggest who were the films' target audience. Answers should be justified with features included in the poster and/or the trailers. [This activity begins to prepare students to understand that marketing campaigns are constructed to appeal to specific audiences before more in-depth study of how trailers and posters, the topic areas, do this.] Reasons for appeal might include:

TFIOS = recognisable *Divergent* stars, female character voice-over [identification], emotional appeal of the drama, romance and relationships, based on well-known book, company acts as a quality marker, social media presence.

Tammy = fans of Melissa McCarthy – featured strongly, well-known for previous films [*Heat, Identity Thief*], comedic scenes throughout – genre foregrounded, fans of Susan Sarandon – featured in trailer.

Boyhood – unusual concept, an independent film [IFC independent company owned by AMC] – offers something different outside the usual genre formulas, features stars – Patricia Arquette/Ethan Hawke, positive critics' comments, director might be recognised for previous work.

More than one audience might be suggested for each film but students are encouraged to make the links between industry>film>audience and to support their suggestions which at this stage should be beginning to be informed by knowledge and understanding of the industry.

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Audiences – Printable resource
Printable film posters

Resource 5: Audiences

Marketing printable resource
It is helpful that learners see themselves as part of the market and are encouraged to reflect on ways in which they are influenced by marketing strategies.

Modelling answers can help to make the process more explicit and consolidate areas studied so far in this unit. In this instance a wide range of marketing strategies influenced the decision to see *Jurassic World* in the cinema: familiarity with the *franchise*, clearly *branded campaign* which raised awareness of the film's release, the *trailer* was shown in the cinema and on television, film magazines such as *Empire* magazine ran *feature articles* contributing to the anticipation, *branded merchandise* helped to secure awareness and contributed to *must-see* factor.

Digital resource
Screen 1:
After initial consideration of what aspects influenced their decision to see a particular film, asking students to put what influenced them *in order of importance* gives a further insight into the changing world of marketing.

Social media might have a more prominent role to play in targeting and influencing the younger demographic. While traditional marketing forms such as the film trailer is still important, where and how this trailer is viewed might differ with a younger audience. Increasingly social media plays an important role in a film's marketing. Social media is a two-way mode of communication that invites interaction and communication between audiences.

[http://www.tintup.com/blog/movies-and-social-media-marketing-films-with-new-media/]
Discussions are likely to demonstrate the fact that films today are marketed across platforms involving audiences in highly sophisticated social media campaigns. Audiences are now integrated into every stage of a film's promotion and ultimately in the film's success.

Innovative social media campaigns can be researched further and studied alongside the more traditional forms of film trailers. [*The Shorty Awards* recognises innovative social media campaigns. Please turn to: http://industry.shortyawards.com/category/6th_annual/film. This is also an interesting area to research for appropriate social media campaigns for use in the classroom as wider case studies.]

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Screen 2:
This straightforward model consolidates students' understanding of the ultimate purpose of marketing taking them back to the importance of box office figures in gauging the commercial success of a film. This also places trailers and posters in the context of advertising and marketing.

Resource 6: Film trailers

Digital resource
Screen 1:
Traditionally trailers were only viewed in cinemas and were part of the cinema visit's highlight – to see what was up and coming and to experience the anticipation and excitement created. This is still partly true, and viewing a trailer is still an important part of the cinema visit – to see teaser scenes on the big screen, to have the look of a film revealed or for characters to come to life. Due to the long process of film-making, film trailers, (several versions of them) are often released a year before the film itself, again to generate and then maintain interest.

However trailers are often viewed in other mediums as audiences are targeted quite specifically and so social media is playing an increasingly prominent role.

There is for example a new trend called 'unlocking' which involves tweeting about a film and encouraging enough other people to do so until a film trailer is unlocked for viewing. Increasingly, as films are in production for years, there is a trend for companies [official feeds] to tweet photos of sets, costumes and even snippets of footage of a film to generate conversation on social media. For some people this reveals too much and spoils the big reveal of seeing a film for the first time on the big screen. However for others this just increases the anticipation.

Please turn to:
[http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/from-teaser-clips-to-tweets-how-social-media-killed-the-art-of-the-movie-trailer-10378630.html]
and
[http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2014/jun/16/twitter-movie-website-hashtag-film-social-media]

Resource 7: Trailer conventions

Digital resource
Screen 1:
All films can be accessed via YouTube links or via BBFC website http://www.bbfc.co.uk/
All trailers here are 12A or PG but check suitability for own classes.

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Mindmap – Printable resource
The example Mindmap can be given to students after they have completed their own.

How to create a film trailer – Printable resource
Students can use this as a prompt sheet when designing their own film trailer.

Resource 8: Genres

Digital resource
Screen 1:
Most students understand that genre is a type of film that can be recognised through shared typical features.

Ask students: *What is your favourite type of film? What was the last film that you saw… what type of film was it? How do you know?* A straightforward understanding can be constructed. Further discussions will probably be related to some of the points above. It is important here to develop students' understanding of how the *industry uses genre* to *attract audiences*. Genre is used as a marketing strategy as audiences know what they like, they usually have a preferred genre, and marketing campaigns use this to attract audiences. Films of a certain genre have a set of particular features or shared conventions almost like a set of ingredients or a *repertoire of elements*. If a film is successful with audiences, then producers of media texts will be keen to create a film that can replicate that success so that *genre* can be understood as a creative strategy *that minimises risk*. Promoters of films need to attract audiences to maximise a film's appeal so genre can be a useful *marketing device*, a useful way of *categorising films*. While certain films might be popular with audiences, they do not want the same film over and over, and so genre is also about *similarity* and *difference*. In a genre film therefore certain character types might be recognisable, there will be a typical storyline and set of situations, but there will be enough *difference* to create fresh appeal. It is important for a film to have its own USP [unique selling point].

Screen 3:
The images here encourage students to look closely at *genre codes* and *conventions*. The film titles and knowledge of the films are not relevant here although students might recognise them. The activity requires students to look closely at the *visual clues* to reinforce the learning point that genres have a recognisable set of known/shared conventions.

The visual clues here might generate discussion about; typical settings, character types, character relationships, costumes, situation, key iconography, technical codes such as special effects, framing of image and lighting.

The stills here are from *Gravity* [science fiction], *The Internship* [comedy], *Warm Bodies* [comedy, zombie, romance], *RoboCop* [sci-fi/action], *Iron Man* [superhero, action]

The Hunger Games [adventure], *12 Years a Slave* [period, historical, drama], *The Other Woman* [comedy].

Screen 4:
As audiences clearly have a shared understanding of the codes and conventions of genres, it is clear why promoters of films use genre as a way of communicating with potential audiences. Genre is used in film trailers and film posters as a form of short hand. Trailers are encoded with recognisable genre features that are decoded by audiences. Analysing audio-visual texts provides more challenge in relation to genre and marketing as now pace, editing, music, the use of a voice-over, aspects of dialogue can also contribute to a sense of the film's genre. They also now have to consider more specifically whether the film can be categorised as a sub-genre and/or as a hybrid of different genres.

Resource 9: Film stars

Digital resource
Screen 1:
For reference and further research:
http://www.forbes.com/pictures/emjl45mmei/the-worlds-highest-paid-/
http://www.forbes.com/pictures/emjl45eddhj/the-worlds-highest-paid-/

Screen 2:
All of the actors can be explored in more detail either as a whole class or as individual assignments. A class display of 'stars', the actors here and the films that they are associated with, can be a useful visual learning tool.

A star in Hollywood needs to be able to *open* a film. These *bankable* actors are considered well-known enough to be able to attract audiences to the opening weekend so ensuring box office success [and investors the return of their money]. There is a huge difference in the earnings of male and female stars in Hollywood and the fees that they command – this can form a basis of further debate.
Refer to: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/aug/23/melissa-mccarthy-bridesmaids-star-kept-it-real-and-cleaned-up

Screen 3:
This task establishes some key points about the term 'star'. Prior to this task, students can study a montage of stars and try to link them to films with which they are associated [resource sheet] to develop knowledge of actors and the notion of what is a star.

In this statement card task, students may agree or disagree with the statements – there is no definitive answer as all of these elements are important to an understanding of what is meant by the term 'star'. Other statements can be added by students writing what they think is important on the screen, or if using the printable resource, by writing on blank cards.

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Screen 4:
Any star can be used to demonstrate the ways in which the industry uses stars: *to appeal to audiences, to guarantee a box office draw* and *to secure commercial success.*

Screen 5:
A more in-depth study can be developed as the course progresses as stars often have a complex image that has developed over time across multifarious roles. There are stars whose personal lives are at odds with the image cultivated by the industry which can lead to more complex readings of the roles that they adopt. Some stars fail to adapt and change over time – their ideological values fail to chime with the zeitgeist while others continue to resonate for differing reasons.

Screen 6:
Model how an actor's persona can be constructed over time through the roles that they play and through subsidiary media before setting students a research task to apply and consolidate their understanding.

What is a star? – Printable resource
Card sequence activity

Star theory – Printable resource
Ask students to write their own definition of what a star is based on the statement card activity. A star is…
Theory can then be introduced.

Making a star – Printable resource
Students consider what makes a star persona

Resource 10: Godzilla

Choose a film to draw the learning together. In this instance *Godzilla* is the example.
(Printable resource – case study *Godzilla*)

Digital resource
Screen 1:
Ask students to listen to the sound of the trailer without showing the visuals. This activity is useful as it focuses the students' attention on the importance of sound codes within a trailer. The questions act as a prompt as to what features of sound might do…their purpose and effect.

The sound in the trailer consists of dialogue, diegetic and non diegetic sounds.
The audio codes serve to:
► Serve to create suspense
► Establish the genre

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- ► Introduces the narrative particularly the disruption
- ► Introduces enigmas
- ► Indicates key scenes/situations
- ► Creates pace and a sense of urgency

Screen 2:
Sound is particularly important to this film as the monster's roar is an iconic aspect of the creature that fans [already familiar with the Godzilla franchise] would be highly anticipating. This appeal to fandom is clearly exploited here though the marketing campaign and the interactive aspects of the official film site.

Screen 3 (and printable resource – Visual conventions):
Still images allow for close analysis of the key features of a trailer and the way in which a trailer is structured. The student can be asked to annotate the stills commenting the purpose and function of each frame using key terminology.

close-up/ mid shot/ reaction shot/ point of view shot/ low angle shot/ aerial shot/ establishing shot

Other terms: iconography/ mise en scene/ intertitles/ genre/ iconography/ colour coding/ action codes/ enigma codes/ indexical codes

Screen 4:
After listening to the sound then analysing the stills students can now put the sound and visuals together. Encourage students to write up their analysis.
How does the trailer for *Godzilla* use typical codes and conventions to create audience appeal?

Printable resource – Trailer structure
Diagram explaining the structure of a trailer.

Printable resource – Narratives
Trailers are such condensed texts that they can usefully be used to teach film narrative. These resources ask students to consider how each stage of the Godzilla trailer is established before going on to ask them to consider the same things in a film trailer of their choice.

Resource 11: Film websites

Digital resource
Screen 1:
It is advantageous that students can actually access and explore a website for a film on current release. The examples here can be used to show the features they need to note.

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Is there clear branding? How is this created?
What interactive features are there?
How can users gain further information about the film?
Are there entertainment/diversion features?
How is an online community encouraged?
Find examples of convergence.
Give examples of the different merchandise that can be purchased.
What does the website add to the audience's/users' experience of the film?

Film websites – printable resource
Questions can be given as a prompt sheet before they answer the wider question:

Q. What are the advantages for organisations in having an official film website as part of a marketing campaign? Refer to specific details of a film website you have explored to support your points.

Resource 12: End of unit learning checkpoint

Students watch a film trailer and answer the following:

► Name two typical trailer features. Explain how they have been used.
► How has iconography been used to establish the genre of the film?
► How has sound been used in the trailer?
► How are male and/or female characters represented in the trailer? Are they presented in a typical way? Are they in typical roles or are they in roles that challenge traditional representations?
► Are stars used as a marketing device? How would the stars/actors appeal to audiences?
► How have narrative codes been used in the trailer? Is there a clear structure? Have enigma codes been used? Does the narrative seem typical in terms of genre or different?
► Identify two specific settings represented in the trailer. How important are the settings to the film being promoted?
► Identify two persuasive features. How would they appeal to audiences?
► Does the trailer suggest a USP for the film? What does the USP seem to be?
► How typical is the trailer compared to other film trailers? What are the typical or untypical features?
► Suggest a target audience for the film. Explain your choice.
► Does the film have high production values? [big budget] How important is this to the film's appeal to audiences?

Resource 13: Extended tasks

These tasks will be presented to students in a paper-based format:

► Storyboard a trailer for a well-known story. What elements would you include? How would you create audience appeal?
► Make a film trailer taking the photos/sequencing/adding transitions and sound
► Analyse a trailer and present your findings to class considering how the trailer has been constructed to create appeal.

Most of the films explored so far have been for large studio production. Research a British and/or Independent film and consider how it has been marketed to audiences. Draw up a list of similarities and differences between the marketing of Hollywood American films and Independent and/or British films.

Film trailers, as you have learned, are an important form of advertising and an integral part of a marketing campaign. You now need to draw together everything you have learned about film trailers to from a structured piece of writing to answer the question below:

Q. How does your chosen trailer use typical conventions to create audience appeal?

Choose a film trailer to analyse in detail. Watch the trailer several times and take notes
[*You can use a note-taking grid to help organise your ideas*.]
Refer to specific details in the trailer to support your points.
Write up your findings using media terminology.

[Be prepared to present your trailer and findings to class.]