

Component 2

Global filmmaking perspectives

Section B: *Documentary Film*

This is a **single film study** where you will be required to study one film from the following category – Documentary film

The films are chosen from one of the following;

- ***Sisters in Law* (Ayisi and Longinotto, Cameroon and UK, 2005)**
- ***The Arbor* (Barnard, UK, 2010)**
- ***Stories We Tell* (Polley, Canada, 2012)**
- ***20,000 Days on Earth* (Forsyth and Pollard, UK 2014)**
- ***Amy* (Kapadia, UK, 2005)**

The films are studied in relation to the following areas;

The core study areas

- **Area 1: The key elements of film form; cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, sound and performance**
- **Area 2: Meaning and response; how film functions as both a medium of representation and as an aesthetic medium**
- **Area 3; The contexts of film: social, cultural, political, historical and institutional, including production**

Specialist studies

Learners will be required to approach documentary film in terms of two specialist studies

1. **Critical debate; *The significance of digital technology in film***

The degree of the impact the digital has had on film since the 1990s is a developing debate. Some film commentators argue that, although digital technology could potentially transform cinema, so far films, especially narrative films designed for cinema release, have changed very little from pre-digital times. Others consider that the impact of digital filmmaking is only beginning to emerge, both in high concept Hollywood filmmaking and in much lower budget experimental work.

2. Filmmaker's Theories

The documentary film will be explored in relation to key filmmakers from the genre. The documentary film studied may either directly embody aspects of these theories or work in a way that strongly challenges these theories. In either case, the theories will provide a means of exploring different approaches to documentary film and filmmaking.

Two of the following filmmakers' theories must be chosen for study:

Peter Watkins

Nick Broomfield

Kim Longinotto

Michael Moore

Introduction

What this resource will do is to offer a number of ways into teaching Documentary Film which will be directly linked to what is outlined in the specification and also will feed into how this area is going to be assessed in the examination.

The structure of this resource will be based around lesson tasks and ideas that will supplement the delivery of this part of the course.

1. What is documentary?

This will offer some introductory tasks to the concept of documentary film, especially in relation to the core areas of study.

2. Specialist Studies – Looking at and applying filmmaker's theories

This will give a sense of the filmmakers named in the specification and their approaches to documentary.

3. Critical Approaches - Significance of digital technology

This part of the resource will examine the impact of digital technology on the documentary genre.

4. Case Study – *Amy* (Kapadia, 2015)

This unit will examine ways of teaching this film by focusing on key aspects of the core and specialist areas of study. These methods can be easily transferable to the other films in this section.

What is Documentary?

Task One – Personal responses

This is an individual task. List all the documentaries that you have seen and then answer the following questions

- **Were they documentaries that you saw at the cinema?**
- **Were they documentaries that you saw on television?**
- **Were they documentaries that you saw through a streaming service – Netflix, Amazon Prime?**

If you have seen no or very few documentaries suggest reasons why this might be.

Task Two - Defining documentary

In pairs or small groups of three, come up with a clear definition of what you think documentary is. Try to do this in less than 25 words.

Task Three – Defining documentary in relation to fiction film

In the same pairs or small groups think back to your first year of study. Choose one of the American films that you studied – either from Hollywood 1930-1990 or American film since 2005 option.

Looking closely at the core area of study Area 1: The key elements of film form; cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, sound and performance map out how each of these might be different from a documentary film.

In small groups brainstorm what you think the **main techniques of the documentary film** based on the core study area 1 are and what kinds of responses might they create in the spectator

Task Five – Philosophical Debates on Documentary Film

Look at the following terms

Objectivity

Non-Fiction

Construction

Truth

Reality

Cinematic

1. Firstly outline what they mean in relation to documentary film.
2. Rank them in order of importance in how you view documentary, what is the most important term as number 1 and the least as number 6.
3. Give reasons for your rank order.