

# Frances Ha

(2012, Noah Baumbach, USA)

**Component 1: Varieties of Film and Filmmaking (AL)**  
**Component 1 : American film (AS)**

**Core Study Areas:**  
**Key Elements of Film Form**  
**Meaning & Response**  
**The Contexts of Film**

**Specialist Study Area:**  
**Spectatorship**  
**Ideology (AL)**

## Rationale for study

*Frances Ha* is a film about coming of age and identity, a journey which many A level students will be able to identify with. It is also a film about friendship and loneliness and takes place in affluent New York, depicting a lifestyle which is familiar to students from many popular films and TV shows. It is also darkly comic with an ironic tone which will create some interesting discussions in terms of spectator responses.

## STARTING POINTS - Useful Sequences and timings/links

Pre-credit montage and then the scene in the apartment: the story of us.

Sophie at the dinner party.

## CORE STUDY AREAS 1 - STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

### Cinematography:

- The decision to use black and white is a reference back to the French.
- New Wave and a distancing effect to see New York in a new way: 'familiar and unfamiliar' Baumbach. Framing: begins

with two-shots of Frances and Sophie and then Frances is alone in the frame to indicate her loneliness and lack of support.

### Mise-en-Scène:

- Intertitles detailing addresses split the film into sections which direct our attention to Frances' journey in the search for home. The interiors show the nature of her world: books, art, music and dance studios and the exteriors show us the familiar of her world: books, art, music and dance studios and the exteriors show us the familiar streets of New York referencing back to *Annie Hall*.

### Editing

- Montage is used at the opening to give an intimate snapshot of the friendship and establish the territory of homosocial relationships. It also establishes the idea of a character driven narrative and always directs attention back to Frances. Long takes create a sense of realism and social embarrassment. There is a lack of continuity editing features such as establishing shots so that we feel disorientated and rootless as she does.

### Sound

- The music of Georges Delerue is used from French New Wave films and it sets the fast paced youthful optimism and fun at the opening, there is then a theme for the friendship with Sophie which is melodic and nostalgic suggesting that despite events on screen the friendship will endure.

## CORE STUDY AREAS 2 - STARTING POINTS - Meaning & Response

### Representations

- Femininity is the focus here along with the concept of the young adult, the film is very aware of the criticisms of the fecklessness of the post-college generation which have tended to focus on their sense of entitlement and the film

encourages a more sympathetic portrayal.

### **Aesthetics (i.e. the 'look and feel' of the film including visual style, influences, auteur, motifs)**

- The tone and energy of the French New Wave: music, montage, distancing techniques and pacing; also with the contemplation and humor of Woody Allen with some focus on dialogue: a tone of irony and significant lines delivered in a throwaway style which nonetheless become very quotable.

### **CORE STUDY AREAS 3 - STARTING POINTS – Contexts (also linked to specialist area of Ideology)**

#### **Social**

- The concept of 'Millennials' often portrayed as lazy and selfish: here, the new generation of young artists, dancers, musicians, film-makers in New York who are not willing to relinquish those goals and the film explores the ways in which they are able or willing to compromise to fit in with society. A sense that the American Dream has to be re-assessed in the context of this generation and a new sense of individuality

developed that re-defines success. Traditional support structures are no longer working/relevant such as marriage and the family (although the film makes clear that Frances' family are happy/functional) and a new support through social media is rejected by Francis, instead she learns to be self-reliant while still maintaining the idea of 'your person' which is a homosocial relationship, rather than a sexual relationship – the bond with Sophie is shown to be more important.

### **SPECIALIST STUDY AREA : SPECTATORSHIP AND IDEOLOGY - STARTING POINTS**

- Gerwig's performance aligns you with Frances and she often seems genuine when other characters are false, also she never despairs and is always cheerful and optimistic. However she can be irritating and some spectators may not want to give their allegiance to her, also the ironic and self-conscious tone of the film can create a critical distance between film and spectator which may cause a problem with alignment. The intertextual references to the French New Wave, Manhattan and Girls may increase spectator pleasure or feel too artificial and deliberate.