

Part 1: What is Aesthetics?

Aesthetics refers to the style and look of a film.

The director uses a combination of elements to construct the style of the film which prompts the audience to respond to characters, situations and locations in a particular way. The construction of the scene/film also allows the director to explore themes and develop messages for the audience.

Cinematography is the art of the camera, where it is positioned, how it moves and how the shot is lit. When we are examining how a scene has been constructed this is an essential element in considering how the audience have been positioned.

Are we close to the subject? Why?

Does this make us feel comfortable and safe or are we 'too close for comfort'? We should also consider how long the director is making us look at this moment (Editing).

Camera shots:

Extreme close-ups are reserved for moments of extreme emotion and intimacy.

Close-ups allow the audience to emotionally connect with characters.

Medium/Mid shots, for example from the torso to the head.

Long shots show the full length of the character and may be used to demonstrate their isolation.

Extreme long shots, often used to establish a location or to 'show off' spectacular SFX.

High Angle is when the camera is placed high/above the subject, it can be used to imply a character is submissive, insignificant or victimised as the camera is in a powerful position 'looking down on them'. Extreme high angles are called '**Birds Eye View Shots**'.

Low Angle shots are when the camera is below the subject, placing them in a position of power, and the audience in a lower status, 'looking up at them'. Extreme Low Angles are called '**Worms Eye view shots**'.

60° angle shots (off-centre shots), Dutch/canted angles, are used to visualise a sense of uncertainty, that 'something is not right'.

POV shots: Point of View shots are through the ‘eyes’ of a character, allowing the audience to share their experience, usually followed by a reaction shot so the audience can then observe the characters response.

Are we far from the subject? Why?

What does the director want the audience to observe here? Why have they allowed us to see ‘the big picture’ at this particular moment? How do you think we are supposed to feel about the subject at this moment? How has the director filled the frame and why?

Camera Movement

Aerial

These shots are usually taken from a helicopter and allow the audience to enjoy the spectacle of the landscape.

Crane

When the camera is placed on a crane, it allows the shot to ‘sweep’ over the action of the scene.

Pan

The camera is in a fixed position and moved horizontally. A **whip-pan** is when the panning motion is very fast, disorientating the audience, creating a sense of realism.

Tilt

The camera is in a fixed position and moved vertically.

Tracking/ Dolly shot

The camera is placed on a track in a ‘dolly’ (like a train track and a car), and the dolly is then pushed alongside the action. This is quite a fluid movement.

Steadicam

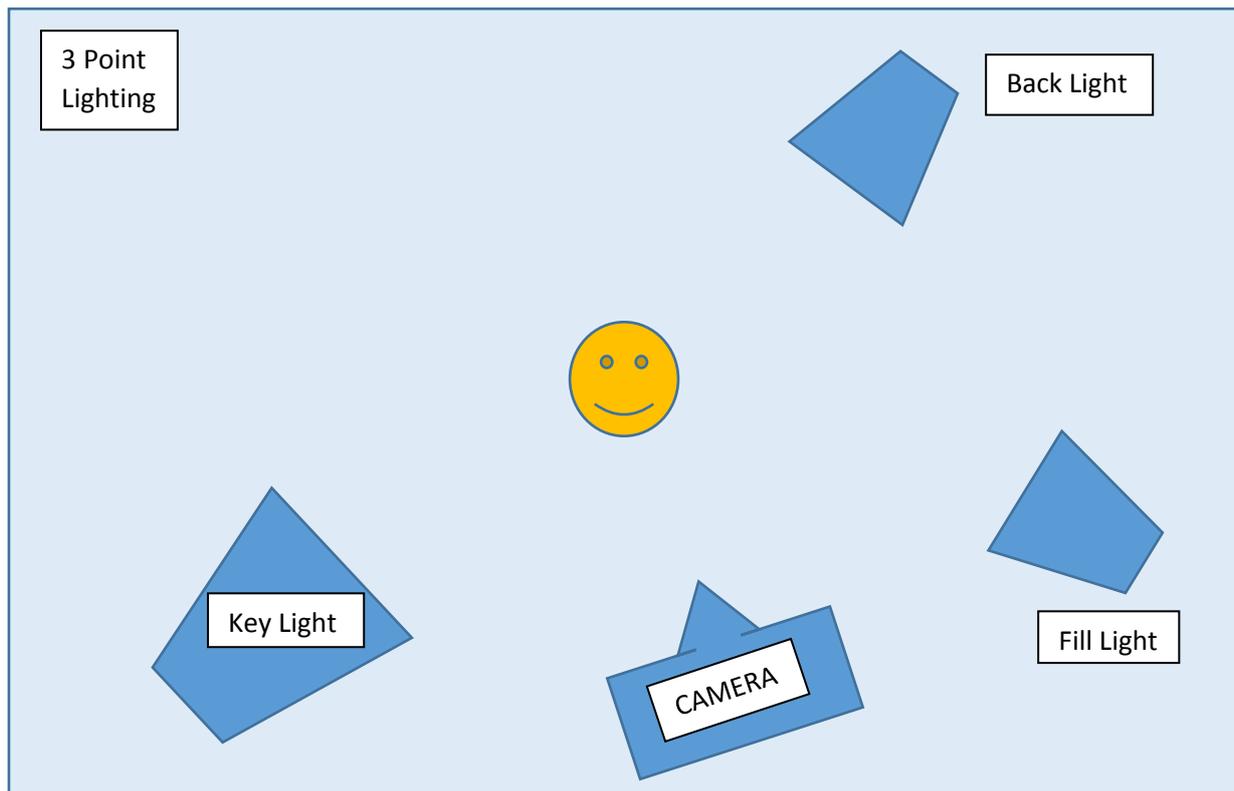
This is a type of **handheld** shot, a stabiliser is used to make the free moment of the camera operator smooth, handheld shots can also be ‘wobbly’ and unstable, creating a more realistic and immersive effect.

Zoom

This is where the shot is moved by adjusting the camera lens, from close up to long shot zoom out, or from long shot to close up, zoom in.

Lighting

When using a studio/set the traditional lighting set up is a 3 point set-up, **Key Light** is usually 'front on' to the subject and is the main source of light, a **back light** is used to define the shape of the character against the background and a **fill light** is used to illuminate shadow.



High Key Lighting

The High Key Lighting is bright and full, this is used by a director to imply an upbeat and hopeful mood, often used in comedies and musicals.

Low Key Lighting

The Low Key Lighting is dark and full of shadow, this is used by the director to imply mystery, fear & uncertainty, commonly used in horror and thriller genres.

Natural Light

When shooting on location, using natural light is preferable, but additional lights are needed to create particular effects, such as a '**halo effect**' created by back lighting to suggest an angelic trait within the character.

CINEMATOGRAPHY ACTIVITY:

You have 10 shots to introduce the character of the 'New Teacher', as they walk into class for the first time, there is no dialogue in the scene.

Firstly you have to decide if they are a Protagonist (Hero) or an Antagonist (Villain), this will help you choose the type of shots you need to use.

Sketch or take photos to create a basic 10 shot storyboard.

Show the storyboard to a group –can they tell if the character is a Protagonist or an Antagonist based only on where you have decided to place the camera?

Colour filters

These are a very powerful tool for the director, blue tones can be used to suggest decay and death, warm sepia tones can be nostalgic and comforting.

Mise-en-scene

This is a French term meaning 'everything in the frame', this includes the arrangement and design of props, costume, performance, special effects and setting.

An analysis of the style chosen for these elements of mise-en-scene is a very rich area to discover meaning.

Settings

You should consider who does the space 'belong' to? And what does it say about them? When exploring characters' personal spaces such as their room or their home, it is an extension of their character, what does it tell us about their hopes, dreams and fears?

Spaces are designed to create meaning and are an extension of the directors' aesthetic, but we also need to consider HOW they have been shot, what angles and filters have been used? And what could that imply about the status of that place and the people within it?

Props

These are another aesthetic design feature that can be considered as an extension of character, what can they represent about them?

Costume & make-up

These designed elements express a character's intention, mood and back story. The choice of colour, texture, and fashion, hair and special effects make up, made by the design team can tell us all about a character without words. Characters can be designed to echo different eras, genres or styles to prompt the audience to read that character in a different way.

MISE-EN-SCENE ACTIVITY:

Design an antagonist for a superhero film, think about costume, casting, props, and colour. Place the villain in their lair/lab/vehicle.

Now change one thing to imply that they are 'not all bad', that deep down there is goodness in them.

How has this made the character more interesting for the audience?