



## GENRE

# Invasion of the Body Snatchers and E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial

## Before film screenings: Introduction to GENRE

Genre literally means 'type'. In film, it means a group of films that can be classified together because they have similar ingredients (**conventions**) even though they may have been made at different times, in different countries, by different people.

Most genre films have a combination of **familiar** elements they know audiences will enjoy. But they also have fresh and **unique** elements that surprise the audience or challenge the conventions.

Audiences like genre films because they experience:

- Familiar elements they already know they enjoy (e.g. a car chase in an action film)
- Unique elements, or 'twists' on the conventions, that they weren't expecting
- Interesting or alternative representations (of people and issues) that are thought-provoking but are within a 'safe' and enjoyable context.

Both *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* are classified as **science fiction** films.

**Teacher's note:** if your students have little experience of watching whole films, you could show a range of trailers or even show film posters, to stimulate discussion.



<p>What science fiction films can you think of?</p>	<p>What similarities do they have:          Typical characters - what are they like? What do they do?</p> <p>Typical plot events happen?</p> <p>What are some typical locations? What are some typical costumes?</p> <p>Other conventions?</p>
---	--

Science fiction films also provide a number of **audience pleasures**:

- **Spectacle**: showing audiences sights and sounds they have never seen before - crazy-looking aliens, huge starships, distant alien worlds - all created using advanced special effects
- Excitement/fear - conventions of sci-fi films are often mixed with the action, superhero or horror films
- Exploring big, 'what-if?' questions: are we alone in the universe? What would aliens be like? What are the limits of science? What if robots took over the world?
- Exploring social or political issues in an enjoyable and entertaining context (e.g. recent *Star Wars* films have female characters that challenge gender stereotypes).

Think of three science-fiction films that offer these audience pleasures with examples of specific scenes or characters. (Again, you may want to show trailers for recent films)

Film	Audience pleasures	Specific examples



Film	Audience pleasures	Specific examples

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is also classed as a **horror** film. What are some **genre conventions** of horror films?

<p>What horror films can you think of?</p>	<p>What similarities do they have:          Typical characters - what are they like? What do they do?</p> <p>Typical plot events happen?</p> <p>What are some typical locations? What are some typical costumes?</p> <p>Other conventions?</p>
--	--

Though horror films aim to create feelings of fear, anxiety and disgust they are amongst the most popular in cinema history. They provide a number of **audience pleasures**:

- **Visceral fear/shock**: ‘jump scares’ or slowly building dread and fear - but in a ‘safe’ environment. Creates **catharsis** - a way of safely experiencing negative emotions
- Explores **‘primal’ fears** that have been in human cultures for centuries: fear of death, fear of pain, fear of losing your mind, fear of being ‘eaten’, fear of being infected or



transformed, fear of ‘standing out’ or isolation, fear of being close to danger

- Explores ‘social’ fears, particularly: fears of **the Other** (people who aren’t ‘like you’), or that things we used to trust are now threatening us.

Where can you see these **conventions** and **audience pleasures** being offered in the trailer for *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*? What **primal** and **social** fears are being exploited?

Example from trailer	Audience pleasure (i.e. why would people enjoy this?)

Even though *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* is not a horror film, there are some scary elements. When you watch the film think about any points where you are scared, anxious or feel threatened? How are these negative feelings eased or solved by the narrative later?

## During film screenings: identifying and comparing use of GENRE

**Teacher’s Note:** It’s advisable to show the film in its entirety during lessons, in 10-15 min long sections with discussion and note-making time of at least 10 mins in between. The notes students make on their charts can be used as a revision tool to remember key plot events and link them to genre.



Example from <i>Body Snatchers</i>	Genre Convention Used (Science Fiction)	Example from <i>ET</i>

The **conventions** above are the **familiar** elements of the film - but what is unique and **surprising** for the audience in *ET*? How do they challenge the conventions?

What was unique or surprising?	How did it challenge the conventions?



Think again about *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. How did it also use many **conventions** of the **horror film genre**? Link to examples of specific scenes, characters events.

Horror genre convention	Examples

Think about the examples of other **horror** films from earlier. In what ways does *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* **challenge the conventions**? What did you find unique or **surprising** in the film compared to other horror?

What was unique or surprising?	How did it challenge the conventions?

## After the Screenings -

Further research on genre:

**What other film genres can we identify being used in *ET*?** Idea: The 'Family Movie': What is this genre? What are some examples? What similarities (e.g. characters, plot events, locations) do they have with *ET*?



What other film genres can we see being used in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*? Idea: *film noir*. What is this genre? What are some examples? What similarities do they have with *Bodysnatchers*?

Debate task:

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* isn't really a science fiction film (but *ET* definitely is). Discuss.

Planning arguments:

<p><u>For</u> Even though the pods are discussed as being from space, we never see any spaceships, advanced technology, or even any shots of the night sky (e.g. the very first shot of <i>ET</i>) <i>What other sci-fi genre conventions aren't used in the film?</i></p>	<p><u>Against</u> There are lots of sci-fi conventions used, including many elements that provide sci-fi fans with audience pleasures. <i>What sci-fi conventions are used? What sci-fi audience pleasures are being provided? Can you compare to another sci-fi film to support this argument?</i></p>
<p>It's a political allegory about communism and the Cold War. <i>Can you elaborate on this argument?</i></p>	<p>Your idea:</p>
<p>The 'science' isn't very rational or believable e.g. how does a pod person 'steal' the soul of a human? <i>What are some other examples?</i></p>	<p>Your idea:</p>

Creative task:

Can you rewrite the second half of each film to make *ET* a **horror** film, and *Body Snatchers* a 'feelgood' **family** film? How would you use **genre conventions** to change them?