

Review the films in the U. S. Library of Congress archive (at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist...>) and select 3 of the short historic films to critique. Then perform a formal analysis of the scene or film's composition based on the 4 prompts below.

Woods, Frank E., Writing, et al. *A Corner in Wheat*. United States: Biograph, 1909. Video. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2012600307/>.

1. What is the film about? A rich man takes a controlling monopoly on wheat production, which harms the common people while he becomes rich. When he learns of his success, an accident leads to his death. Even with his death, the common farmer keeps on sowing wheat.

2. Discuss the characters and characterization in the film. The main character is a rich wheat magnate that takes over a controlling monopoly of all wheat production. He has flashy clothes, fancy dinners, a rich office, and lots of friends. Other characters are his entourage that follow him around. There are also the common folk and the farmers that are harmed by price gouging in wheat. They dress in common and poor clothes.

3. What is the setting? The time period is contemporary with the film - the early 1900s. It is drab and weary looking setting for the common folk. That is contrasted by the rich man that has fancy clothes, a fancy office, and fancy dinner parties. It is a picture in contrast. The ironic setting of grain silo brings those contrasts into sharp relief. The rich man finds out about his successful monopoly and quickly dies, killed by the very wheat that was his source of riches. It is a great storytelling technique that shows that what we desire most can be our downfall.

4. How does the Cinematography and artistic design help tell the story? It is fairly standard early 1900s cinematography, which uses wide shots and a theatrical style for visuals. The lighting is basically flat, which was common at the time. The art design and costuming is impressive and an important part of the visual storytelling. The design of the poor store setting is drastically contrasted by the lavish office and dinner party scene of the rich man.

Barnes, J. D. , Cast, et al. *The Great Train Robbery*. United States: Edison Manufacturing Co, 1903. Video. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/00694220/>.

1. What is the film about? A band of thieves conduct a train robbery. First they take the trail office before the train stops and they sneak onto the train. They blow open a safe and steal and kill from the passengers. After the thieves escape, a posse is formed that hunts down and kills the thieves.

2. Discuss the characters and characterization in the film. The characters are divided into basically three groups: the thieves, the victims, and the posse. The thieves are violent and quick to kill people when needed. The victims are mostly The posse is having an enjoyable evening with dancing when they are called to hunt down the thieves. The posse is quick to leave their comfortable surroundings to hunt down the murderous thieves. It is a clear cut story of good and evil where evil gets its comeuppance in the end.

3. What is the setting? Where does that action occur, what is the time period and what feelings can be associated with the settings? The setting is a western style town, likely in the late 1800s. It takes place in a city with a major train that is the target of a major crime.

4. How does the Cinematography and artistic design help tell the story?

This is also a fairly standard example of early 1900s filmmaking with a very theatrical presentation. The lighting is flat and theatrical. This was an early film that used special effects - the filmmakers used a matte technique to show the train in the window at the station and the

landscape going past the train as seen from the inside. The thieves dress in dark clothes and are violent. Some of their victims dress in lighter colors. The posse is also dressed in dark clothes, which is a reflection on violent men regardless of if they are good or bad.

Connecticut State Board Of Education, Guy Hedlund, and Worcester Film Corporation. *The Making of an American*. 1920. Video. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/mbrs00016771/>.

1. What is the film about? Provide a brief summary of the film. Pete is an adult immigrant to the USA from Italy. He looks for jobs, but does not speak English and has troubles finding and keeping a job as a result. Pete takes classes to learn to speak English and his outlook improves quickly. He is shown getting a house, getting married, becoming active in politics, and gaining promotions because he learns English. He goes on to encourage other new immigrants to learn English.

2. Discuss the characters and characterization in the film. Pete is a typical early Twentieth century immigrant, even with some stereotypical aspects. He sports a stereotypical Italian mustache and wears lower class, but nice clothing. This is purports to be an educational film that skirts the edge of propaganda. It does come from a different era of filmmaking, but it also addresses an issue that seems to be negative for some people today: assimilation. It comes from a time when America was heavily trying to be more of a melting pot for immigrants, but that is neither here nor there at this point. The character arc is simplistic, with the language problem being the one item that turns everything around for Pete.

3. What is the setting? Where does that action occur, what is the time period and what feelings can be associated with the settings? The setting is a city in the USA in the early 1900s. It is likely intended to be New York since many immigrants came to the city on their arrival to the States. The city is shown from low-income tenement housing to effectively the suburbs with Pete eventually buying a house.

4. How does the Cinematography and artistic design help tell the story? This is still from the era when cinematography was very theatrical in presentation and relied mainly on wide shots with lots of movement in the frame. There are more medium shots and angles than some earlier films, but primarily the film is shot on wide shots with flat lighting. There is some limited camera movement, which reflects the smaller cameras available in the 1920s. The costumes do reflect Pete's changing economic status, from poor and searching for any job to being the supervisor at a factory and a political figure. It is a visual representation of his character arc. It is still primarily an educational film with some propaganda leanings, but it does have a clear, if simplistic, message about assimilation and success in the USA.