

Viewing a Documentary Film

Enduring Understandings

- Documentary films present the filmmaker’s own vision of reality; it is essential for the viewer to watch actively rather than passively to judge the credibility of the film.
- Documentary filmmakers use many distinctive techniques, including photographs, interviews, animation, and re-enactment, as well as film of actual events, to convey their ideas.

Essential Questions

- How does one judge the validity of a documentary?
- What biases on the part of the filmmaker and the viewer can affect the way a film is perceived?

Notes to the Teacher

The goal of this lesson is to teach not only about the filmmaker’s techniques used in this particular film but also to help students become active, critical viewers of documentary film, in a world where images are often substituted for extended written information.

He Called Me Malala uses several different source-types of film footage, mixing them without comment or explanation: (a) present-day film footage (both staged and unstaged); (b) still shots from the past; (c) film footage from the past; (d) present-day re-enactments of past events; (e) animated sequences; (f) voice-overs narration or commentary, and (g) filmed interviews.

Following the front credits, we hear Malala telling the story of her namesake, Malalai, an Afghan heroine, shown in animation. We switch to footage of Malala after she was seriously wounded. The film then proceeds to tell the story of Malala’s youth, the coming of the Taliban to her village in the Swat Valley, and the rise of their leader Mullah Fazlullah (the “radio Mullah”), whose arrival was easily accepted with his promise of greater freedom, especially for women. Over time, his regime becomes increasingly more restrictive of everyone’s freedoms. Finally, all women are barred from any kind of education. Many young women continue attending school secretly.

Malala is given an opportunity she gladly accepts and becomes an outspoken critic of the regime. The Taliban begins blowing up schools and entire villages. In the summer of 2012, a Taliban gunman stops the school bus carrying Malala and her schoolmates. She is singled out and

shot in the head; two of her friends are also wounded. Near death, she is rushed to a hospital. Gradually, she recovers. As she is more and more celebrated, she moves out into the world, becoming a spokesperson for women’s education and visiting places of oppression. Then, in 2013, at age 16, she addresses the United Nations and, in 2014, is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (this is shown intercut into the end credits).

The filmmaker, Davis Guggenheim, has chosen to present this story in an episodic manner, moving backward and forward in time, interweaving views of her family life, the Taliban’s destructiveness, her recovery, her celebrity, and her humanitarian efforts. He does this in such a way that the viewer focuses on the simple, unassuming, and forthright courage and determination of this remarkable young woman. We become less concerned with the chronological order of the political strife she faced than we are with her strength in standing up to her opposition. We observe her in several settings following her recovery—with little regard for chronological sequence, again focusing on her remarkable poise and maturity.

Show the first 10 minutes of the film to acclimate the students to the use of quickly changing scenes. Stop the film to review **HANDOUT 2** on the structure of the first 10 minutes and **HANDOUT 3**, a film glossary, to enable students to review the opening, applying critical thinking and analysis. They should then be better equipped to approach not only the opening, but also the entire film, in a similar manner.

Duration of the Lesson

Three or four 50-minute class periods

Assessment

Quiz on film terms (optional)

Written or oral assignment taken from assignments in **HANDOUT 4**

Participation in class discussion

COMMON CORE STANDARDS ADDRESSED BY THIS LESSON

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Materials

DVD of *He Named Me Malala*

DVD player and monitor or screen

Copies of **HANDOUTS 1–4** for each student

Procedure

Part 1:

1. Distribute **HANDOUT 1: ACTIVE VIEWING**. Tell students they will be watching the film *He Named Me Malala* after reading the handout. Read through the handout together, discussing as appropriate and encouraging students to ask questions.
2. Show the first 10 minutes of the film (to the shot of Malala being frightened by a dog and attempting to run away.) Let this shot finish and stop the film.
3. Distribute **HANDOUT 2: REVIEWING THE OPENING** and **HANDOUT 3: A GLOSSARY OF FILM TERMS**. Rewind the film and watch the first 10 minutes again, pausing frequently to read through each section of **HANDOUT 2** with your students, and referring them to terms on **HANDOUT 3** as necessary.
4. Have students read through **HANDOUT 3** and go over the vocabulary as you deem necessary to be certain your students are familiar with each term.
5. Finally, distribute **HANDOUT 4: ASSIGNMENTS**, asking your students to select one (or more) of the assignments to keep in mind (and take notes on) as they view the film in its entirety. You may wish to have students sign up for the various assignments, perhaps forming teams that will pool their observations prior to reporting. Students wishing to select more than one assignment should be encouraged to do so and allowed to handle the combination in any suitable manner (or to select the one deemed more useful for a report) after viewing the film. You may wish to consult **HANDOUT 4: TEACHER'S VERSION** well in advance of any class discussions.

Lesson 10 (FILM LITERACY)



Part 2:

1. Show the film, either from the beginning or from wherever it was stopped, as you prefer and as time permits.
2. Since this film is nearly 90 minutes long, it will take an additional day to complete the viewing. It might be good to look for a stopping place any time in the last few minutes of the period and ask for feedback. Students may wish to point out special things they have observed and ask questions about the observations of others. As noted, you may wish to consult **HANDOUT 4: TEACHER'S VERSION** well in advance of any class discussions.

Part 3:

1. Remind the class that they will be writing or speaking about their observations on the chosen assignment(s). Give the due date for any writing you will be collecting and the due date and format for oral presentations. Announce the date of a vocabulary quiz on the film terms if you intend to give one.
2. Show the remainder of the film. Give students time to discuss their observations, if possible.

Part 4:

1. Ask for oral reports in whatever structure you have established, or, after reading the written reports on the film, ask a few students to read theirs aloud. Allow for class discussion following the reading of each.
2. If desired, review the Glossary (**HANDOUT 3**) in preparation for a vocabulary quiz to be given at a later date.

Handout 1

Active Viewing of a Documentary Film

Documentaries have become an important and exciting way to experience narrative. The evolution of documentaries from hard news, nature films, and travelogues to dynamic story-telling experience has taken place over time so that the documentary can be experienced and critiqued in much the same manner as the fiction film.

The filmmaker's point of view

The first question an active documentary film viewer should ask is, "What is the filmmaker's point of view on the subject of the film?" That should lead to, "Does it lead to distortion? How much faith can the viewer put in the film's perspective on the subject?"

This is not to say we should never trust a documentary film; only that we should examine the filmmaker's, hence the film's, perspective to gauge the degree to which we might accept or reject this depiction of reality. Becoming aware of intentional or unintentional distortion requires the focused attention of an active viewer. Passive viewing—not thinking about the filmmaker's role—does not lead to the kind of critical thinking we should be trying to develop.

We call the source of the film the "filmmaker." This might be the director, producer, or distributor, that is, whoever controls and influences the film's statement most. Perhaps the director is just a skilled person hired to create a film designed by someone else. In a documentary, however, the film's director often has chosen the subject because of what he or she wants to say about the subject.

Consider, for example, films used at political conventions to introduce candidates. Notice the role of personal bias in each of these different instances. (1) Some of the people working on the film may not even care for the candidate, having a personal bias against him or her. Still they are pro-

fessionally responsible for providing what is asked of them.

(2) It is not the intention or expectation of the filmmaker that this film will persuade those of the opposition to support the candidate, knowing their personal biases would be too much to overcome. (3) The film serves its purpose if it creates a unifying excitement among the viewers at the convention, whose personal biases are in favor of either the candidate himself or herself or at least the principles of the party that has chosen the candidate.

Opening ourselves to new possibilities

If we have determined that the conscious intentions of the filmmaker are genuine, perhaps even noble, we can begin to watch the film with a high degree of confidence in its message. We may, however, notice a clash between the beliefs offered by the film and our own. Being aware of this difference might allow us to begin to question previously held "certainties" in the light of new information. It is up to the viewer to be as aware as possible of any conflicting biases in order to think critically about the film, its point of view on the subject, and the information presented.

Calling to mind the fact that others may disagree with the conclusions we reach is a good way to try opening ourselves to the possibility that there is more to be considered on any given subject than we had previously thought.

Handout 2 ▶ P. 1

He Named Me Malala: Opening Scenes

The following is a description of the first 10 minutes of the film. You will be viewing the first 10 minutes again; pay close attention to the structure of these first 10 minutes. Note the use of voice-overs, panning shots, intercutting, montage sequences, and split edits, etc. (These terms and those in bold are defined in Handout 3.) It may be useful to think “this shot shows...” as each appears on screen. This will help you understand the nature of a documentary film as an assemblage of images on a chosen subject. Note: If it is not clear what you’re seeing, try to figure out why the film’s director wanted you to be momentarily confused.

Following the **front credits**, the screen goes to black and we hear an off-screen voice (Davis Guggenheim, the director) preparing Malala for a recording session. The black screen gradually becomes an animated **sequence**, illustrating Malala’s story of her Afghan namesake, Malalai. Note the predominance of darkness and muted colors used throughout, with the exception of Malalai’s clothing.

Pay attention to the way light appears and its special use as Malalai speaks. At the end of the sequence, as the banner is falling, the screen again grows dark, followed by an **abrupt cut** to an unconscious, wounded Malala being carried away. The camera pans to the right, following Malala, leading to the beginning of a **montage sequence** with several shots of Malala being attended to. We then hear Malala, in a **voice-over (v.o.)**, telling of her terrible dream while in a coma.

The **montage** shifts to a series of shots of people keeping vigil for Malala, and the **v.o.** shifts to what seems to be television announcers reporting about her. The **montage** finishes with an **abrupt cut** to an out-of-focus pale blue screen, then coming into focus showing a hospital room as seen by someone lying in bed, followed by views of hospital equipment in a **montage** suggesting Malala’s **point of view**.

This sequence ends with a shot of a tabletop with cell phone and glasses, the camera **panning** left to **discover** Ziauddin in dark profile. We hear him in voice-over, “We were thinking ‘what Malala will be thinking...’” [Note: This shot of Ziauddin and the two shots following the title are repeated in the same order at the end of the film, during which the quote, “We were thinking...” is expanded.] The film’s title, *He Called Me Malala*, follows the shot of Ziauddin and is followed by a shot showing a pen-in-hand writing in a spiral notebook, then a shot of a window with cards and teddy bears and Malala, writing, reflected in the window. In a **v.o.**, Malala says, as if to herself, “It is an honor for me to be speaking again.” She will use these words later in the film.

In a **split or sound edit** we hear Ziauddin calling loudly, “Come, Malala, come!” A new **scene** begins with Malala saying, “I lost my shoes” and we see her walking, in a new setting, the next shot revealing their new home in Birmingham, England. It is breakfast time and Malala is talking about her brothers to someone off-screen. The younger brother is Atal, “a good boy,” and the older, Khushal, “the laziest one.” A second scene, showing Malala and Khushal arm-wrestling, is **intercut** with the breakfast scene until finally, Malala wins.

Handout 2 ▶ P.2

He Named Me Malala: Opening Scenes

We go back to what appears to be the same morning, following breakfast, in another room (Atal's?) where Malala and Ziauddin argue with him about her love for him... and what a slap means. An **abrupt cut** to an empty hospital therapy room, accompanied by the sudden sounds of a running electric motor, where we see Malala slowly entering the scene from the bottom of the picture, being raised on a therapy table. At the end of the sequence between Malala and her therapist, we hear a sound suggesting a helicopter in another **split edit**.

The following sequence begins with a shot of well-worn foreign black shoes below loose white trousers. This is the first shot in a **montage sequence** followed by a Taliban flag, the steering wheel of a bus, a burning truck, girls on a bus (two girls playing cat's-cradle, one reading), a dark night with someone pointing a flashlight toward the camera, wheel (of the bus) coming to a stop.

Then, an **abrupt cut** to a shot of many reporters crowded together, all talking at once. The camera pans right, discovering Malala, looking composed at a news conference, leading to her autographing her book, then walking down a hall where a dog appears, frightening her. As she runs back down the hall, the camera follows her, unintentionally **discovering** the soundman and two additional men who had been out of view behind her. This **shot**, which could have been omitted, is clearly a reminder to the viewer of the camera crew's presence in the recording of the film.

HANDOUT 3 lists many familiar words, which have special uses or meanings in the film industry. Becoming familiar with them will help you express yourself when you discuss or write about this film as well as other films in the future, fiction films, or documentaries.

Glossary of Film Terms

Abstract (adj.):

the quality of a picture or scene that is in some significant way removed from everyday reality.

Action

(1) activity or movement recorded on film; (2) word called out to begin a **take**.

Audio:

the sound track, usually consisting of at least one or more of the following: dialogue, background sounds, sound effects, music (background or natural).

Audio cut:

(see “split edit”).

Available light:

natural light at a location.

Back-story:

relevant events that happened prior to the time setting of the film

Boom:

a long pole, usually counterbalanced, on which a microphone, camera, or light is attached, allowing an operator to place the instrument appropriately. Often, a boom “travels,” or is moved as needed.

Camera angle:

the angle of the camera as it records a scene to suggest a particular emotion or attitude. For example, an *extremely low angle*, looking up, suggests the strength and dominance (sometimes evil) of the subject; a *slight low-angle*, looking up, suggests the strength and nobility of the subject; an *extreme high-angle*, looking down on the subject, suggests the weakness, perhaps pitifully so, of the subject; a *moderate high-angle*, looking down, suggests disdain for the subject.

Camera movement:

when the camera changes location or angle during filming.

- **Pans or panning shot:**

rotates horizontally on a stationary base (“pan” is derived from “panoramic”);

- **Dollies or a dolly shot:**

camera moves in (forward) or out (backward) on a subject, usually by means of being mounted on a dolly (a wheeled cart);

- **Booms:**

raises or lowers by being placed on the end of a **boom** (see above).

Close-up:

a shot of one subject, usually of just head and shoulders. *Extreme close-up:* so close that only a portion of the person or object is shown on the screen.

Credits:

listing of the names of those involved in the making of the film.

- **Front credits:**

production and distribution company logos shown prior to the beginning of the film.

- **Opening Credits:**

listing of the names of members of the production staff (and in fiction films, names of the leading actors) often **intercut** with the opening shots.

- **End credits:**

credits shown at the end of the film, sometimes including added bits of information, listing all persons (and businesses) who had some role in making the film.

Glossary of Film Terms

Crew:

all of the people needed to get the motion picture and sound recorded and edited, other than those being filmed.

Cut:

(1) a change in what has been recorded on the screen (from one shot to the next); can be *smooth, gentle*: the new scene, somewhat similar to the former scene in tone, light intensity, and/or sound, or *abrupt*: the new scene strongly contrasts with the former scene in tone, lighting, and/or sound; (2) word called, usually by the director, to end the filming of a particular **take**.

Discovery shot:

when the camera moves, usually by **panning**, during a shot and unexpectedly shows (“discovers”) a person or significant prop that was present from the beginning of the scene but not in the camera’s view or focus.

Editing:

the process of assembling the **footage** from the many and various **takes** into an effective narrative form (note: in fiction film, the film editor is usually

not the same person as the director; in documentary film, the director often serves as his or her own editor).

Fast motion:

recording the scene with the camera running slower than 24 frames-per-second (fps) so the projected motion is faster than normal (e.g., if shot at 6 fps, then 4 seconds of action is shown in each second.)

Focus:

the sharpness of the image. In normal filming, the subject is in “clear focus”; part or all of a shot may be deliberately out of focus for a special effect. *Soft focus*: deliberately filming with the camera slightly out of focus on the main character.

Footage:

refers to what has been recorded on film (e.g., the footage of one particular press conference is shown several different times in the film). *Staged footage*: the director sets up an interview or a re-enactment; *unstaged footage*: the film crew records an event that is taking place the best way they are able.

Frame (n):

(1) a single image, in sequence with many other single images on a single strip (formerly of celluloid film, now on digital recording). Similar to a photo but meant to be shown with numerous similar frames recorded in sequence to create a “motion picture.” If reproduced as a single photograph, it is known as a “still.” (2) the same as when we discuss what is in the picture-frame, that is, what is included within the pictures borders.

Intercutting:

repeatedly alternating back and forth between two scenes.

Key lighting:

the main, or primary, light on a subject in a frame; *high-key*: brightly lit; *mid-key* (medium key): medium light; *low-key*: little or no light; frame is dark.

Montage:

(from French for “editing”) usually used to mean a series of rather short shots put together to create a coherent sequence.

Glossary of Film Terms

Off-screen (adj. phrase):

refers to dialogue or sound coming from a source not seen but understood to be nearby.

Point of view (p.o.v.) (n. phrase)

(1) a shot taken to suggest the perspective (including relative height and direction of view) from a character's position; seeing things as if through their eyes. Usually a **p.o.v. shot** follows a shot showing a character looking in a particular direction. (2) Beliefs or mental attitude of a person on a given subject.

Re-enactment:

the portrayal of an event after the fact, generally using actors; e.g., if no **stock footage** is available, for example, showing a "booted soldier" (Taliban) walking toward a vehicle (the school bus), the moment is then duplicated by re-enactment.

Scene (n):

consists of a series of shots usually taken in a single location, relating some portion of the story.

Sequence (n):

a series of **shots** or **scenes** united by the same idea. Might be the same as a scene, if successive scenes have different themes so that each is a sequence itself, or may consist of more than one scene, if they share a common theme.

Shot (n):

constant sequence of **frames**, uninterrupted by **cuts** or **editing**.

Split edit:

when the audio and visual portions of a shot do not end simultaneously. Usually, the sound from an upcoming shot is heard before the shot appears on the screen. Normally used when transitioning to a new scene.

Stock footage:

film shot previously, not for use in any specific film, kept in a film library and available for use whenever appropriate.

Take:

a single, continuously filmed bit of action that produces a **shot**. The same action filmed again because the previous "take" was unsatisfactory in some way, is referred to as "take 2," "take 3," etc., of the same shot so the film editor has a choice of which works best. Documentary filmmakers prefer to avoid "retakes" since the opportunity doesn't exist when life's ordinary events are being filmed; doing retakes during interviews is generally regarded as violating the documentary code. (One infamous WWII general lost much of his troops' respect as they watched him insist on retaking his wading ashore from a landing craft several times to make sure the cameras got good shots of the event.)

Voice-over (v.o.):

an off-screen narrator, not actively present in the scene, speaking or commenting on the action; can be the same person or character as in the scene, but the comments are recorded separately from the filming.

Handout 4 ▶ P. 1

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

1. Reminders to the audience that there were real persons making this film.

While we are viewing the titles, we hear Davis Guggenheim, the film director, checking with Malala to see if she is ready to record the story of her namesake, Malalai. The filmmaker uses this to deliberately inform or remind the audience that he has had a hand in shaping the film's content. Later in the film, there is a scene in which Malala, frightened by a dog, begins to run away. The camera follows her as she passes the soundman (with a microphone on a **boom**). No doubt this was a spontaneous and unplanned event that Guggenheim could have omitted but, again, he uses it to remind the viewer that this film was created by a crew of people to tell a story.

Assignment: Watch for other moments when the viewer is, somehow, reminded that the film is not some “magic capturing of reality” but a conscious assemblage of moments based on reality.

2. Using animation to illustrate a story

During the telling of the story of Malala's namesake, the scene is primarily dark. Watch for the appearance of light. What do you think the filmmaker is suggesting? Notice that, in the animation, we see Malalai struggle and stumble her way up the mountain. Why do you think the filmmaker chose to make that happen?

Assignment: Watch for other moments where the filmmaker uses animation instead of live action and make notes on several of the animated sequences: What is depicted?

How effective are these sequences? What else could be done in their place if the filmmaker had been opposed to using animation?

3. Using a montage as an intrusion

Following our first visit with the Yousafzai family in Birmingham, we see a few shots suggesting the presence of the Taliban military—their flag, the chaos of conflict, etc. The next **sequence** begins with Malala walking down a hall (the shot in which the dog scares her, above).

Assignment: What is the effect of including the Taliban **sequence**, especially since there is no dialogue or **voice-over** narration? Watch for other times when the Taliban's presence is shown in a similar manner.

4. Using montage as storytelling

An early **montage sequence** shows Malala after the Taliban's attack and another shows many people keeping a vigil as we hear the television reports of it. Do these **sequences** adequately tell you enough about the closeness of her death and the world's reaction to her shooting? Notice the transition out of the **montage** we are given to show that Malala is recovering.

Assignment: Watch for other **montage sequences** and be ready to describe several. Do you think each is effectively used in telling this story?

Handout 4 ▶ P. 2

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

5. Highlighting relationships

Upon waking from her coma, Malala immediately asks about her father, Ziauddin. Throughout the film, we are shown the importance of their relationship in a number of ways.

Assignment: Contrast that relationship with what we see of the relationship with her mother, Toor Pekai. Describe the difference between the relationships, as you understand them *from the film*. Consider the reasons for this difference in terms of both cultural expectations and family values, as they are presented. Would you expect Malala to have a different mother–daughter relationship should she have a daughter of her own? Why, or why not?

6. Repetition of a sequence

Twice in this film, near the beginning and again near the end, we hear Malala’s father say (in a **voice-over**), “We were thinking, ‘What Malala will be thinking?’” On both occasions, we see the same three shots in succession: first, Ziauddin in dark silhouetted profile against an out-of-focus window, providing an abstract background, split horizontally (top half light, bottom dark). (The first time these three **shots** are shown the title, *He Named Me Malala*, comes between the first and second **shot**.) The second **shot** is of a hand holding a pen, writing on a notepad, and the third, a window ledge with cards and stuffed animals, Malala reflected in the window.

Assignment: Notice that the second time, Ziauddin’s speech is longer and more complete, just one of the small differences. Why does the filmmaker choose to repeat the **sequence**? Include any other differences you may have noticed. Pay particular attention to the first of these **shots**, described above. In what way is this depiction most appropriate?

7. Creating “reality” for the camera

Notice the first sequence showing the family at home in Birmingham, England.

Assignment: To what extent does the presence of the camera and film crew control the family’s behavior? Are they “putting on a show” or being themselves in this situation? Do you think the filming changes family dynamics or merely reveals them?

8. Abrupt transitions

Davis Guggenheim frequently uses very abrupt **cuts** as transitions (moving from one scene or sequence to the next). Sometimes these are accompanied by an abrupt change in the sound level (such as Ziauddin’s “Come Malala, come!!” or the loud noise of the press conference following the peaceful scene of Malala with a speech therapist).

Assignment: Look for other examples of abrupt transitions, visual or sound. Why is this technique particularly effective for this story?

Handout 4 ▶ P. 3

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

9. Re-creating an event

Notice the subject of the various **shots** used to depict the arrival of the Taliban in the Swat Valley in 2007.

Assignment: Since the filmmaker was obviously not even thinking of making this film at that time, what does he use to depict the event?

10. Interrupting a sequence

Notice that the **sequence** telling of the Taliban's attempt to kill Malala is broken or interrupted by a sequence with Malala doing a card trick for her friends Shazia and Kainat.

Assignment: What is the purpose of this interruption? What effect does this have on your reaction to the entire story of Malala?

11. Using re-enactment

To show the threat of the Taliban, we see **shots** such as their booted feet as though we are looking under a vehicle. These were probably actors in costume, representing the Taliban, since it is highly unlikely that this kind of footage of the Taliban walking would be available.

Assignment: Does this representation of reality, a **re-enactment**, intrude on your belief in the documentary? A similar technique is frequently used in fictional films; does it belong only in fictional films? If it bothers you, why?

12. Ironic Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition means placing two things next to one another to call attention to their similarities or differences. The **sequence** following Malala relating the story of her shooting is a **montage** of the radio mullah, Fazlullah, telling the women of Swat he will bring them the greater rights and freedom promised to women in the Qur'an. Notice the effect gained by presenting this out of chronological order, as this promise was made when the Taliban arrived, yet it is placed after the Taliban's attempt on Malala's life for simply going to school. Many scenes throughout the film are presented out of chronological order.

Assignment: Look for several **sequences** that gain strength by being out of order. What is gained by the juxtaposition of two **sequences**? Be prepared to describe the sequences and the effect of the ordering on the story.

13. A Fitting Conclusion

At the end of the film we see Malala addressing the UN, following a **scene** of the Yousafzai family at home, playing a child's card game, which Ziauddin apparently loses. In the final **sequence**, Malala is asked if her father has forced her choice on her and she quietly and confidently claims that the choice was hers.

Assignment: Why does the filmmaker choose to conclude the film with these three sequences? What does the family game reinforce for the viewer?

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

14. A More Fitting Conclusion

During the **end credits** we see a special event in Malala's life (which, in fact, did take place after her book had been published). Then again we hear Malala speaking of her role and commitment.

Assignment: Assume that this **sequence** could have been included in the film prior to the end credits (that is, suggesting it happened before the film had been edited into its final form): What reasons might the filmmaker have for placing it where he does?

15. Summary Evaluation of the film

Did you manage to follow the story of Malala despite the director's decision to tell it out of chronological order? What problems did this approach pose for you?

Assignment: Did this approach clarify the events and their relationship for you? If not, why do you think the director chose to use this technique instead of being straightforward with time sequencing and the relating of facts?

16. Reviewing a Film

Assignment: Write a review of the film as if for your school paper. Would you recommend this to your fellow students? Why, or why not?

Handout 5 ▶ P. 1

TEACHERS VERSION

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

Most of the assignments suggested below can be completed in a very short essay. Some students will be tempted to write just one paragraph, perhaps only a single declarative sentence, to answer the question posed. You might suggest that they think of a friend or relative, living in some other city, as the “audience” for this essay; that way, there will need to be an introduction (“Recently in school we watched...”) and a stated reason for writing (“I noticed something interesting I want to tell you about...”). It might even be useful to have your students mail a copy of their essay to the “audience” chosen, asking for feedback.

1. Reminders to the audience that there were real persons making this film.

While we are viewing the titles, we hear Davis Guggenheim, the film’s director, checking with Malala to see if she is ready to record the story of her namesake, Malalai. The filmmaker uses this to deliberately inform or remind the audience that he has had a hand in shaping the film’s content. Later in the film, there is a scene in which Malala, frightened by a dog, begins to run away. The camera follows her as she passes the soundman (with a microphone on a **boom**). No doubt this was a spontaneous and unplanned event that Guggenheim could have omitted but, again, he uses it to remind the viewer that this film was created by a crew of people to tell a story.

Assignment: Watch for other moments when the viewer is, somehow, reminded that the film is not some ‘magic capturing of reality’ but a conscious assemblage of moments based on reality.

Any of the many montage sequences might serve this purpose, since it is obvious that the various shots do not necessarily follow one another but were assembled by someone for a particular purpose. Abrupt transitions offer the same. The presence of Davis Guggenheim, interviewing one member of the family, might also be considered.

2. Using animation to illustrate a story

During the telling of the story of Malala’s namesake, the scene is primarily dark. Watch for the appearance of light. What do you think the filmmaker is suggesting? Notice that, in the animation, we see Malalai struggle and stumble her way up the mountain. Why do you think the filmmaker chose to make that happen?

Assignment: Watch for other moments where the filmmaker uses animation instead of live action and make a note of several of the animated sequences: what is depicted? How effective are these sequences? What else could be done in their place if the filmmaker had been opposed to using animation?

Davis Guggenheim makes extensive use of animation in telling us about Malala’s childhood. Clearly he doesn’t have much footage from this time and only a few photographs, so, if he wants to present it visually, his only other choice might be re-enactment, which would probably become tedious. Notice how, in re-enacting the attack, he keeps the faces of the girls blurred. With animation he can emphasize whatever elements he cares to and control the tone and color.

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

3. Using a montage as an intrusion

Following our first visit with the Yousafzai family in Birmingham, we see a few shots suggesting the presence of the Taliban military—their flag, the chaos of conflict, etc. The next **sequence** begins with Malala walking down a hall (the shot in which the dog scares her, above).

Assignment: What is the effect of including the Taliban **sequence**, especially since there is no dialogue or **voice-over** narration? Watch for other times when the Taliban’s presence is shown in a similar manner.

The intrusion of the Taliban here is a suggestion that we never can know when or where they’ll turn up. This is a gentle suggestion of the way Malala and her family had to live prior to the attack. The repetition of similar shots, prior to the actual attack, reminds the viewer that the Talibs might show up anywhere. (Note: Originally a “Talib” was a student, often of religion. Now, the term covers that collection of men following one kind of teaching about a very strict religious way of life.)

4. Using montage as story telling

An early **montage sequence** shows Malala after the Taliban’s attack and another shows many people keeping a vigil as we hear the television reports of it. Do these **sequences** adequately tell you enough about the closeness of her death and the world’s reaction to her shooting? Notice the transition out of the **montage** we are given to show that Malala is recovering.

Assignment: Watch for other **montage sequences** and be ready to describe several. Do you think each is effectively used in telling this story?

There are a good many montage sequences to be considered. Answers may vary.

5. Highlighting relationships

Upon waking from her coma, Malala immediately asks about her father, Ziauddin. Throughout the film, we are shown the importance of their relationship in a number of ways.

Assignment: Contrast that relationship with what we see of the relationship with her mother, Toor Pekai. Describe the difference between the relationships, as you understand them from the film. Consider the reasons for this difference in terms of both cultural expectations and family values as they are presented. Would you expect Malala to have a different mother–daughter relationship should she have a daughter of her own? Why, or why not?

The father’s importance and dominance was an expectation for Muslim families. Those in Western countries may notice how little attention is paid to Toor Pekai throughout the film, but it is unlikely that most traditional Muslims would think it out of the ordinary. When appropriate, Malala does credit her mother, as well as her father, for her upbringing and the freedom she is used to. It seems likely that Malala, being free of the old repression, would have a different relationship with any daughters she may have.

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TEACHERS VERSION

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

6. Repetition of a sequence

Twice in this film, near the beginning and again near the end, we hear Malala’s father say (in a **voice-over**), “We were thinking, ‘What Malala will be thinking?’” On both occasions, we see the same three shots in succession: first, Ziauddin in dark silhouetted profile against an out-of-focus window, providing an abstract background, split horizontally (top half light, bottom dark). (The first time these three **shots** are shown the title, *He Named Me Malala*, comes between the first and second **shot**.) The second **shot** is of a hand holding a pen, writing on a notepad, and the third, a window ledge with cards and stuffed animals, Malala reflected in the window.

Assignment: Notice that the second time, Ziauddin’s speech is longer and more complete, just one of the small differences. Why does the filmmaker choose to repeat the **sequence**? Include any other differences you may have noticed. Pay particular attention to the first of these **shots**, described above. In what way is this depiction most appropriate?

Ziauddin, shown alone in a dark room, thinking and wondering, had to be feeling somewhat responsible for the attack that nearly killed his daughter. It was his set of beliefs, taught to her throughout her life, that led to her willingness to confront the Taliban that led in turn to the shooting. He has to wait a long time for Malala to recover sufficiently to reassure him that she has been free to choose her own way; his way was not forced on her. The viewer doesn’t have to wait long in this sequence of three shots to see a recovering Malala, writing a draft of a future speech.

7. Creating “reality” for the camera

Notice the first sequence showing the family at home in Birmingham, England.

Assignment: To what extent does the presence of the camera and film crew control the family’s behavior? Are they “putting on a show” or being themselves in this situation? Do you think the filming changes family dynamics or merely reveals them?

While it is clear the family is playing to the camera to some extent, their spontaneity is such as to convince the viewer that the relationships shown are very much the ones they live with. The children often show a degree of self-consciousness but don’t seem to be hesitant to reveal themselves.

8. Abrupt transitions

Davis Guggenheim frequently uses very abrupt **cuts** as transitions (moving from one scene or sequence to the next). Sometimes these are accompanied by an abrupt change in the sound level (such as Ziauddin’s “Come Malala, come!!” or the loud noise of the press conference following the peaceful scene of Malala with a speech therapist).

Assignment: Look for other examples of abrupt transitions, visual or sound. Why is this technique particularly effective for this story?

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TEACHERS VERSION

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

The abrupt and jarring transitions might be considered a way to suggest the changes that Malala has experienced. From Swat Valley, Pakistan, to Birmingham, England, by way of an attempt on her life, followed by her arduous recovery, have to have been extremely disorienting for Malala and her entire family. Consider the chaos she has been through as you observe her poise and mature outlook. Notice what it is that can show her somewhat nonplussed: discussing boy/girl relationships and the sudden appearance of a barking dog.

9. Re-creating an event

Notice the subject of the various **shots** used to depict the arrival of the Taliban in the Swat Valley in 2007.

Assignment: Since the filmmaker was obviously not even thinking of making this film at that time, what does he use to depict the event?

Guggenheim uses shots of loudspeakers and radio antennas. These are appropriate since Mullah Fazlullah used radio broadcasts to spread his teachings.

10. Interrupting a sequence

Notice that the **sequence** telling of the Taliban’s attempt to kill Malala is broken or interrupted by a sequence with Malala doing a card trick for her friends Shazia and Kainat.

Assignment: What is the purpose of this interruption? What effect does this have on your reaction to the entire story of Malala?

Guggenheim chooses to interrupt the dramatization of the attempt on Malala’s life with a scene showing her doing a card trick for her friends to heighten the suspense, delaying the “inevitable” so that we are reminded that she is a fun-loving young woman, as well as an outspoken opponent of all that had happened to her people.

11. Using re-enactment

To show the threat of the Taliban, we see **shots** such as their booted feet as though we are looking under a vehicle. These were probably actors in costume, representing the Taliban since it is highly unlikely that this kind of footage of the Taliban walking would be available.

Assignment: Does this representation of reality, a **re-enactment**, intrude on your belief in the documentary? A similar technique is frequently used in fictional films; does it belong only in fictional films? If the re-enactments bother you, why?

Responses may vary, but we would expect most students to experience the re-enactments as an effective way of presenting these parts of Malala’s story. Although we don’t see their faces clearly, the threatening presence of the Taliban and of their destructiveness is made quite clear. Having actors play roles with dialogue would probably strike too many of us as a fictional approach.

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

12. Ironic Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition means placing two things next to one another to call attention to their similarities or differences. The **sequence** following Malala relating the story of her shooting is a **montage** of the radio mullah, Fazlullah, telling the women of Swat he will bring them the greater rights and freedom promised to women in the Qur'an. Notice the effect gained by presenting this out of chronological order, as this promise was made when the Taliban *arrived*, yet it is placed *after* the Taliban's attempt on Malala's life for simply going to school. Many scenes throughout the film are presented out of chronological order.

Assignment: Look for several **sequences** that gain strength by being out of order. What is gained by the juxtaposition of two **sequences**? Be prepared to describe the sequences and the effect of the ordering on the story.

Answers will vary. There are a great many such sequences. Malala's book, I Am Malala, tells her story in chronological order and is filled with much detail of the step-by-step events leading to the attempted assassination, but with very little to say about the events that follow. With this film we get less information about the period of her resistance but far more about her use of her fame. We are presented with a clear picture of a level-headed young woman, mature beyond her years, emerging triumphant from a dreadful ordeal.

13. A Fitting Conclusion

At the end of the film we see Malala addressing the UN, following a **scene** of the Yousafzai family at home, playing a child's card game, which Ziauddin apparently loses. In the final **sequence**, Malala is asked if her father has forced her choice on her and she quietly and confidently claims that the choice was hers.

Assignment: Why does the filmmaker choose to conclude the film with these three sequences? What does the family game reinforce for the viewer?

We are shown that Malala is capable of addressing this august body forcefully without (apparent) nervousness or fear; that she is still a girl, enjoying simple moments at home, with her family; and, finally, that she has made her own choices, conscious of the possible consequences, accepting the outcome with her simple belief in doing what is right and not being especially proud of the courage others see in her.

Techniques and Film Devices to Watch for...

14. A More Fitting Conclusion

During the **end credits** we see a special event in Malala's life (which, in fact, did take place after her book had been published). Then again we hear Malala speaking of her role and commitment.

Assignment: Assume that this **sequence** could have been included in the film prior to the end credits (that is, suggesting it happened before the film had been edited into its final form): What reasons might the filmmaker have for placing it where he does?

When Malala, who was one of the finalists, was passed over for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013, she carried on, undisturbed by missing this honor. Placing the 2014 awarding of the prize to her as an afterthought puts it in the proper perspective. It is something that did happen to her, but it is not what her life has been about.

15. Summary Evaluation of the film

Did you manage to follow the story of Malala despite the director's decision to tell it in fragmented scenes and sequences and out of chronological order? What problems did this approach pose for you?

Assignment: Did this approach clarify the events and their relationship for you? If not, why do you think he chose to use this technique instead of being very straightforward with time sequencing and the relating of facts?

The composure and equanimity Malala has possessed throughout her life, her love of learning and fierce determination to make education available everywhere despite the chaos brought into her life by the Taliban, are made compellingly clear in this presentation of her story. A step-by-step recounting of the events in her life is better suited to a book such as her I Am Malala, than it would be to the screen. The film becomes a song of praise for this remarkable young woman.

16. Reviewing a Film

Assignment: Write a review of the film as if for your school paper. Would you recommend this to your fellow students? Why, or why not?

Suggest that students bring in copies of some film reviews and establish what the expected format for such an essay might be.