

GCE A LEVEL



# WJEC Eduqas GCE A LEVEL in FILM STUDIES

## COMPONENT 2

### Introduction to Film Movements: Silent Cinema Student Resource

#### FILM MOVEMENTS – SILENT CINEMA



**Introduction to Film Movements:  
Silent Cinema Student Resource  
Component 2: Global filmmaking perspectives  
Section C: Film movements – silent cinema**

One of the following film options will be studied:

***One Week* (1920), *The Scarecrow* (1920), *The ‘High Sign’* (1921) and *Cops* (1922), (Keaton, US)  
*Strike* (Eisenstein, USSR, 1924)  
*Sunrise* (Murnau, US, 1927)  
*Spies* (Lang, Germany, 1928)  
*Man with a movie camera* (Vertov, USSR, 1928), and *A propos de Nice* (Vigo, France, 1930)**

The films are studied in relation to the following core study areas:

- **Area 1: The key elements of film form; cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, sound and performance.**
- **Area 2: Meaning and response; how film functions as both a medium of representation and as an aesthetic medium.**
- **Area 3: The contexts of film: social, cultural, political, historical and institutional, including production.**

**Specialist studies**

**Learners will be required to approach a silent film in terms of one specialist study:**

**Debate 1: The realist and the expressive**

In the 1940s, the French film critic André Bazin set in motion a major debate when he argued that both German Expressionist and Soviet Montage filmmaking went against what he saw as the ‘realist’ calling of cinema. This opposition between the realist and the expressive has informed thinking about film from the beginnings of cinema when the documentary realism of the Lumière brothers was set in opposition to the fantasy films of Méliès.

**Introduction:**

This resource will introduce you to the study of silent cinema. We will cover the following areas of study:

- 1: An introduction to the study of silent cinema  
This section includes introductory tasks to introduce you to silent film as a primarily visual cinema.
- 2: Specialist study area – applying Debate 1: The realist and the expressive to silent cinema  
This section will enable an understanding of debates about realism and expressionism and ways in which you can apply these debates to the silent film(s) set for study.
- 3: Case study – *Sunrise* (Murnau, 1927)  
This unit will examine ways of teaching *Sunrise* by focusing on the core and specialist areas of study. These methods are transferable to other silent films in this section.

## Studying silent cinema

### Task 1: Personal responses

In small groups, discuss the following questions

- Have you ever seen a silent film?
- If so, what films have you seen and what was memorable/interesting about them?
- How did you experience these films (e.g. at the cinema with live music or online)?

### Task 2: Understanding silent cinema

In small groups, discuss the following questions:

- How do silent films differ from sound films?
- What are your expectations of watching a silent film?

### Task 3: Telling a story with no dialogue

By the end of the silent period, filmmakers were adept at telling stories in purely visual terms, with sparse intertitles used only when necessary.

**Task:** Create a storyboard for a short clip from a sound film with dialogue (you may wish, for example, to use one of your contemporary Hollywood films). Storyboard the scene as a silent film, telling the story visually, with the use of one intertitle if necessary.

#### **Task: Sound and 'silent' cinema**

Silent films were never silent. They were always accompanied by music. There is currently a resurgence in silent cinema and therefore opportunities for you to see silent films in a cinema with live music.

You will watch a short clip from a silent film with no musical accompaniment.

- In small groups, discuss what sound and music you would use to accompany the image and heighten emotion.

### 3. Critical debates: The realist and the expressive

This section explores this debate in relation to silent cinema. All the films in this section will utilise aspects of the realist and the expressive with a wide variety of results. The tasks here enable students to explore and understand the realist and the expressive in relation to their set film(s).

#### **Task: Realist and expressionist modes of filmmaking**

- What is your understanding of a realist mode of filmmaking? Can you think of examples of films that are realist?
- What is your understanding of an expressive mode of filmmaking? Can you think of examples of films that are expressive?
- Can you think of any films which merge the two traditions?

### Task: Lumière and Méliès

Louis and Auguste Lumière and George Méliès are two key pioneers of early cinema. You will be shown four or five short Lumière films and one or two George Méliès films.

After watching the films, make notes based on the following questions:

- What are the differences between Méliès' and Lumière's films?
- What is realist about Lumière's films?
- What is expressionistic about Méliès' films?

**Extension task:** In your own time, watch *Hugo* (Scorsese, 2011). This film is Martin Scorsese's love letter to silent cinema and George Méliès. Here you will learn about the life and work of Méliès and the development of cinema in the early period.