Movie Trailers As Persuasive Texts

Introduction: Students love to watch film and they also love to go to the movies. So they are already familiar with trailers whose purpose is to promote/market upcoming releases. Today, teachers and students can locate trailers via the web, so they are more accessible than ever. This page is a resource for teachers who wish to consider using trailers to teach students about persuasive texts and techniques.

Persuasion: Students should already know something about persuasive writing and persuasive arguments. (e.g. what techniques do writers use to convince us of something?) Students might also have previously studied persuasion via advertising (print and non-print) or via propaganda. It would be a good idea to review elements of persuasion before diving into this lesson.

The Language of Film: Are your students aware that film is a text that has a language all its own? Yes, elements of film need to be understood by students, after which they will become "active" rather "passive viewers" of film. For example, certain camera angles will be used for certain purposes; specific music will convey an emotion; lighting can be manipulated for effect. Everything is created for a reason and has meaning. To help you and your students get started, here is a [good web site](#) which has complete explanations of the languages of film. (Need more background? Log onto the Media Literacy Clearinghouse's [Motion Picture website](#))

Why study film? "Anyone who has ever watched a movie with a classroom full of teenagers knows that students are comfortable with film and understand its power. By high school, they have watched thousands of movies and television

shows and unconsciously understand the basic tools and conventions of the medium. Although they may still treat it chiefly as passive entertainment, they can often be sophisticated interpreters of the interplay of sound and image. They know – often without knowing they know – that the close-up on an actor's face signifies something different emotionally from a long shot of an actor across a distance. They know that certain kinds of music indicate that a dramatic event is about to happen, and they know that 'fuzzy' camerawork can signal a dream sequence or flashback in which we are inside a particular character's mind or point of view." ([Source](#))

Getting Started — Ask students to brainstorm answers to these questions:

- what are the "elements" of most film trailers?
- who is the audience for the trailer? How do you know?
- what is the audience told or shown? not told or shown? why?
- what is the primary purpose of the trailer?
- who creates/edits/produces trailers?
- how are trailers distributed/disseminated?
- what specific techniques are used in trailers?
- what is the length of most trailers?
- does watching a trailer make you desire more information?

[Introducing Film Trailers](#): worksheet to download and have students complete

Getting Started — Have students define and understand the following terms/phrases/ideas:

- Genre
- Narrative
- Location
- Characters

- Voice Over
- Theme
- Mood
- Pacing
- On-screen graphics
- Editing & post production (includes Special Effects)
- Music and other sound effects

Download: [Analyzing Film Trailers as Persuasive Texts](#) (worksheet); [Analyzing A Film Trailer](#)(pdf, worksheet)

Background
What is a movie trailer?
Trailers or previews are film advertisements for films that will be exhibited in the future at a cinema, on whose screen they are shown. The term "trailer" comes from their having originally been shown at the end of a film programme. That practice did not last long, because patrons tended to leave the theater after the films ended, but the name has stuck. Trailers are now shown before the film (or the A movie in a double feature program) begins. (Source: [wikipedia)](#) also called teaser trailer: A short trailer which does not give very much at all away about a film. It is designed to arouse curiosity and may appear a long time prior to the release of a movie (source: [mediaknowitall](#))

More about trailers:
Trailers consist of a series of selected shots from the film being advertised. Since the purpose of the trailer is to attract an audience to the film, these excerpts are usually drawn from the most exciting, funny, or otherwise noteworthy parts of the film but in abbreviated form and without producing spoilers. For this purpose the scenes are not necessarily in the order in which they appear in the film. A trailer has to achieve that in less than two and a half minutes, the maximum length allowed by theaters. Each studio or distributor is allowed to exceed this time limit once a year, if they feel it is necessary for a particular film.

(Source: [wikipedia)](wikipedia)

Where to locate movie trailers on-line:

- [AOL](AOL)
- Cinematrailers.net
- Get-Trailers.com
- Hollywood.com Trailers
- Internet Movie Database Trailer Gallery
- iTunes movie trailers
- Movie-List – New and Classic Movie Trailers
- Movie Trailers (archive.org)
- SabuCat Movie Trailers (archive.org)
- TrailerStats

Trailers on TV: HD Net's Trailerama; The Ultimate Trailer Show (showtimes vary)

NCTE Resources Involving Film Trailers:
Lesson Plan: Using Movie Trailers in the ELA Classroom
At The Movies: Extending Literacy Learning With Movies Trailers (Classroom Notes, April '09)
Chapter: Turning Texts Into Movie Trailers (from Lesson Plans for Creating Media Rich Classrooms)
Book: Reading Shakespeare Film First
Book: Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom
Book: Great Films and How to Teach Them / Study Guides for 12 Great Films CD-ROM

Recommended text/readings:

- Podcast: History of Trailers, Codes & Conventions
- Award Season Sparks Tailor Made Movie Trailers
- How Trailers For Oscar Nominees Make Their Case
- Golden Trailer Awards: Advertising as Art Form?
- 9 Storytelling Tips From A Master of Movie Trailers
- Golden trailer awards: just the ticket for short attention spans

- [New guidelines for movie trailers](#)
- [After 100 Years, Movie Trailers Are Still Must See Viewing](#)
- [Making Coming Attractions Attractive](#)
- [Using Film Trailers In Literacy](#)
- [Conducting a textual analysis of a trailer](#)
- [How Movie Ratings and Trailers Mislead You](#)
- [Coming Soon: A Technological History of the Film Trailer](#)
- Using Technology to Promote Reading: Book Trailers (LibrarySparks,May/June '09)
- [What happens when movie trailers include stuff NOT in the movie?](#)
- [Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers](#)
- [How to Create A Compelling Film Trailer](#)
- [History of Trailers](#) (CBC, Age Of Persuasion)
- [Trailers: How a small time slot adds up to big industry headache](#)

Recommended external links:

- [Recut trailers](#)
- YouTube: [Recutting a Movie Trailer](#)(instructions)
- [Create Your Own 'Sweeny Todd' Trailer](#)
- [Exploring Film Trailers](#)
- Film Street (UK): [How to make a trailer](#)
- Film Trailers: [Genre & Narrative Structure](#); [Trailer Techniques](#); [In The Classroom](#)
- [How to analyze a film trailer](#)
- [In A World: Movie Trailers](#) (CBS, Video)
- [Make a trailer](#)/ [trailer worksheet](#)
- [Making Movie Trailers](#)
- [Movie Trailer Production](#)(VoiceThread)
- [Movie Trailers](#)(The Director's Cut)
- [Teach It: Trailers](#)
- Teaching Trailers [2010](#) [2011](#) [2012](#)
- [Teaching Trailers](#)
- [Teaching Trailers Plus](#)

- [Using Film Previews to Practice Constructing Questions in English](#)
- [Using Movie Trailers in an ESL CALL Class](#)
- [Visual Rhetoric/Mediums and Manifestations of Visual Rhetoric](#)
- [Making Book Trailers with Photo Story 3](#)
- [Blog advice: Book video trailers](#)