

The Kiss [*Le Baiser*] Lesson Ideas

Questions

- Why was this film shot in black and white?
- What associations do we have with silent movies?
- Are these fulfilled in expected or unexpected ways?
- How is music used to change the tone of the film?
- List the types of special effects used in this film.

Activities

Please note: It is suggested that this film is suitable for most Secondary School students S1 – S6; however, individual teachers should review the content of the film in advance to ensure that they are comfortable working with the moral ambiguities explored in this screen narrative.

The activities outlined below are intended as suggestions for the type of activities that might be used with this film for a variety of different age groups; the activities can of course be adapted by the teacher to the age and experience of their specific class.

Pre-Watching Activities

- Working in groups, research the history of film and silent film in particular.
 - Who were the stars of the silver screen in Hollywood and Europe?
 - Who were the great cinematic directors (or conductors as they were then known) of early film?
 - When did the age of silent film come to an end?
 - When was the first colour film?
- Prepare vocabulary lists relating to romance and notions of chivalry. Depending on the age of your students, you may also want to explore the word chivalry and its relationship to the age of romance and 'le cheval', as well as discussing the difference between romance and Romanticism

Watching

- Watch film up to kiss (01:37). Freeze frame invitation (00:32) and ask pupils in French to tell you what it means. Draw attention to masculine/feminine agreement of 'aimée(e)'.
 - Continue film to shot of film-maker's thumbs (01:58). Ask pupils (in French if possible) what they think has happened. Who says, 'et merde'?

- Continue film until woman falls (02:47). Draw pupils' attention (in French, using mime) to the fact that the man is trying to shake off the woman in order to save his own life.
- Watch film to end.
- Watch film again, pausing at key points, for instance 00:52 (woman on rock), 01:03 (hands over eyes), 01:12 (dialogue), 01:31 (holds out hand), 01:42 (film goes wrong), 02:35 (struggle), (02:58) him alone, 03:14 (her fall), 03:30 (end). Ask pupils in pairs to think of intertitles for characters' thoughts or dialogue (intertitles are text cards inserted between dramatic sequences to explain or modify our understanding of the drama). Or ask pupils to choose for themselves six scenes to storyboard and write intertitles.
- Ask pupils to write a letter to a friend describing the encounter as part of a holiday, from the point of view of the man or the woman up to the moment of the kiss. They could describe the journey, their arrival at a hotel, the landscape, the food, a first meeting, their feelings, their hopes for the future and so on, using the verb forms and superlatives practised in Unit 15.

Analysing

- Working as a class carry out a full grid analysis on the film (Similarities, Surprises, Patterns and Puzzles) to try and determine the different themes and meanings of the film. You may want to pay particular attention to the reasons that the film was filmed in the style of an early silent film and the various levels of comic, dramatic and cinematic irony that this lends to the film.
- Explore and brainstorm answers to some of the following questions:

Cinematography, Editing and Production Design

- The film maker uses the camera very well to lead us in a certain direction. How was the camera used to build up the simple romance?
- Close ups were used on many occasions. Look at original silent films – are close ups used?
- How does this modern silent film differ in the use of camera to an original silent film and why?
- Compare the range of camera angles and whether there are any tracking shots in *Le Baiser* and any other original silent film.
- What special effects were employed to help tell the story?
- How could you manufacture a similar feel re: silent movie with a digital camera?
- This film was shot in black and white. What colours would you expect there to be?
- Describe what the colours of the characters clothes and the scenery probably were.

Character

- Who are the two characters?
- In pairs or small groups and work on a back story for them.
- Give them names, social positions and describe how they met.
- What characteristics did the young woman portray?
- How did the man appear at first?
- Before the film broke, what clues were there that his motives were suspect?
- Why do you think he decided to walk into the water at the end of the film?

Narrative Structure

- What sort of story is this?
- What are the key events?
- Over what time period was this story?
- The story had an unexpected twist. Were there any clues as to how the story might develop or was it well concealed?
- Can you think of any other films where the twist is well hidden?
- Take the story and change one factor either the letter, the setting or one character and see how the story changes.

Setting

- Where was the film set?
- How do we know it is France?
- What clues are there in the film to help us identify the time it is set in?
- What time of day/year was it?
- Would there be another setting in which this film would work? If so what?
- Why did the director choose to film this by water?
- How was the period conveyed to the audience?
- Choose another setting to place the action in. How does this change the narrative and feel of the piece?

Genre

- What does the film do to our expectations? What sort of film genre is it?
- What starts off as a gentle romance turns into something very different.
- What impact did that have on the audience?
- Why were we shocked?
- Does it fit into any genre you know or is it a new experience?
- Is it a combination of genres?
- It was meant to shock but also be funny. Does this mix work and can you think of any other examples of films which have comedy from something shocking or unexpected?

Symbolism

- Is there a moral to the story?
- What does the story do to our expectations of behaviour regarding gender?
- What would we have done in a similar position? Should men be gallant and protect women in the contemporary world or is this notion to be challenged?
- The action is turned upside down as is the social mores of gender behaviour. Is this a major filmic device used by the film maker to help us understand the story in greater depth?

Follow-up and cross-curricular activities

Writing and Reading

- Write a synopsis of the film.
- Ask pupils in pairs to create dialogues for the opening scene (01:00 to 01:42) and the struggle scene (02:12 to 03:40).
- Ask pupils to draw a series of right-way-up/upside-down scenarios (for instance, using the plane or boat from the film) and write intertitles for them.
- Discuss the metaphor the film employs and ask pupils to collect French idioms that correspond to 'head over heels in love'.
- Discuss the way the film demonstrates to the viewer that this is a 'film within a film', and the effect this has.
- Read a selection of love poetry from early 20th Century both French and English poems.
- Define the essence what makes a love poem.
- Write a love poem. Or write lyrics for a love song/rap. Or write a script to voice over a silent film.

Drama

- Research the history of melodrama, the music hall and early film, and the style of acting needed to convey the narrative to the audience.

Sound and Music

- Silent films rely on a soundtrack being played or performed alongside the film. Find different styles of soundtrack to match the action and discuss how it changes the narrative or feel of the film.
- Watch a silent film without any soundtrack. How does this affect the watching experience?
- What would happen if a more modern soundtrack was used? Listen to a range of French songs about love or lost love e.g. Edith Piaf, Françoise Hardy, or Mireille Mathieu. Experiment with putting different sounds and rhythms over the top of the film.

- While other groups are involved in writing activities, ask one group of pupils at a time to devise a new soundtrack for the film using sounds, instruments and some spoken French at appropriate moments.

Plan or plan and shoot your own silent film

- Devise a silent film. The setting should be contemporary. The group takes on a role within the production and must work within a budget and deadline.
 - How will the process be planned?
 - Who takes responsibility for each area?
 - Who is project leader?
 - How will the script be decided?
 - How will you limit the number of shots to conform to the expectations of silent film?
 - What process is there for discussion and negotiation?
 - Who are the key members of staff who will be able to help and advise?
 - How will the shoot be organised?
 - How will the editing be decided?
 - Are there to be intertitles or subtitles?
 - Could the film have a choice of languages?
 - How will the translation be organised?
 - Who will decide on the soundtrack?
 - How, where and when will the finished film be screened?
 - What happens then?