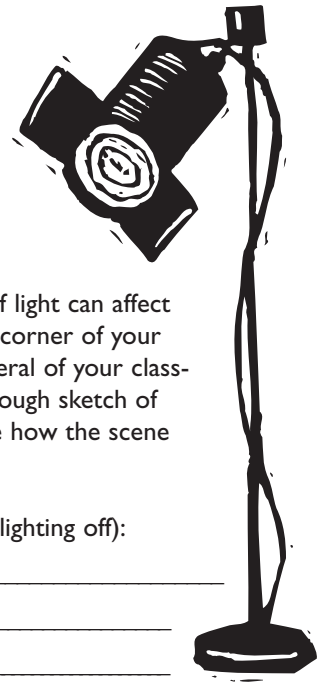


LIGHTING *the* SCENE



Noted filmmaker, author and teacher Kris Malkiewicz describes lighting as “the most important element in cinematography...the task to which a cinematographer gives his primary attention.”

The cinematographer must know how to manipulate the lighting—using the right quality of light and distributing it in just the right way—to create the mood that is required for each scene in the film. The cinematographer must know how and when to use *hard light* (light that travels directly from its source undiffused, creating sharply defined shadows) and *soft light* (light that bounces off another source or is diffused through a translucent material, such as tracing paper, thereby softening the shadows). He or she also must consider the angle of the *throw* (the path the light follows). This is important in creating the mood of a scene and suggesting the time of day. Additionally, the cinematographer must be able to communicate clearly to those who set and focus the lighting instruments precisely how he or she wants a scene lit.

The primary source of light outdoors is sunlight. Although often supplementing sunlight with artificial lights, when shooting outdoors the cinematographer must consider how the angle of the sun at different times of day affects the setting and changes its mood and appearance. Try this experiment to see just how much impact the angle of the sun can have. Pick a location (a room in your house with a large window, a spot in your yard, the street in front of your house, etc.) that you can easily observe at sunrise, at midday, at sunset and at twilight.

The setting I will observe is: _____

Now, let's look at how other sources of light can affect the mood and feeling of a scene. In a corner of your classroom, create a vignette by posing several of your classmates. On the back of this sheet, draw a rough sketch of your vignette. In the space below, describe how the scene changes as the lighting source changes.

Natural light from the window (overhead lighting off):

Overhead fluorescent lights (curtains closed):

Spotlight (the beam from a large flashlight, for example):

Candlelight:

SOME IMPORTANT LIGHTING TERMS

Back light: A light designed to separate the actors from the background.

The actor is lit from directly behind, creating a halo effect that emphasizes hair or a profile while leaving the face in shadow. The *kicker light* has a similar function, but is placed in a three-quarters-back position on the opposite side of the face from the key light and often is lower to the floor than the back light.

Key light: The main source used to light a subject.

Fill light: Light that is used to fill in the shadows created by the key light.

Set light: A light that is used to illuminate the walls and furniture on a set.

Source light: Light that appears to be coming from a source within the scene, for example, a lamp on a table or a fireplace.

Record what you see in the chart below. Think about such things as the amount of light, the shadows the light casts and their angles, whether colors are bright and vivid or muted and subdued and how the scene “feels” (warm and inviting, alive and energized, etc.).

TIME OF DAY	HOW THE SETTING LOOKS	MOOD CONVEYED BY THE SETTING
Sunrise	_____	_____
Midday	_____	_____
Sunset	_____	_____
Twilight	_____	_____