

recordings of the actual sounds of the objects on the screen. Other times, the sounds may be louder or softer than in real life or may be unrelated sounds that are more effective than the real thing. Sound editors and mixers may contrast sound and image or sound and silence to generate suspense or create a mood.

Using rhythm, tempo, melody, dissonance, and instrumentation, a film's music conveys mood, emotion, and character in ways that dialogue and imagery alone cannot. Dario Marianelli's Academy Award-winning score for the 2007 film *Atonement* incorporated the sound of typewriter keys to signify the obsessiveness of the main character. A pounding beat can generate excitement. Sharp, dissonant notes can be scary or disorienting. Music can also add to the emotional impact of a scene by playing against the onscreen images or being noticeably absent.

Show a scene from one of the movies mentioned above or from a film of your choice. Discuss the values and opinions expressed in the movie with your students. Have them consider casting, characters, point of view, dialogue, costumes, setting, visual effects, cinematography, editing, sound, and music. Ask your students how each craft contributed to the film's story, tone, emotions, characters, and positive or negative impressions.

### EXTENDED ACTIVITY

Take one element, such as music, and have your students discuss it in greater detail. For example, you might ask the students what kind of instruments the composer uses and why. When does music play in the scene? When is it absent? How is the music different in different scenes? What does the score add to the film? For production design, you might ask the students how the look of the film creates mood and emotion. Are certain colors associated with certain characters or emotional states? What kind of objects can be found in each scene? How do they relate to the character, the time period, the genre, and the story? See past YMI Teacher's Guides ([www.oscars.org/teachersguide](http://www.oscars.org/teachersguide)) for additional ideas.

## ACTIVITY THREE SUBJECTIVE *or* OBJECTIVE?

### Part A. BIAS

Every viewer sees a film through the lens of his or her prior experience, knowledge, beliefs, and value system. In other words, all viewers have a bias. A teenage viewer from a small rural village is likely to respond differently to a movie than an older viewer who lives in an urban area. Each ethnic group interprets stories from a distinct perspective. Certain

films may appeal more to religious viewers, while others attract young people on dates. Yet most viewers enjoy and understand a variety of films, including silent films, documentaries, and foreign language films that do not exactly reflect their own experiences.



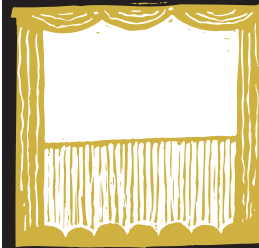
The movies *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) and *Save the Last Dance* (2001) are all stories about high school students. *Rebel without a Cause* and *Boyz N the Hood* both are set in Los Angeles, but the time period, social class, and racial makeup of the characters depicted are worlds apart. *Save the Last Dance* and *Boyz N the Hood* both take place in urban, predominantly black neighborhoods, but each has a different tone and a different message.

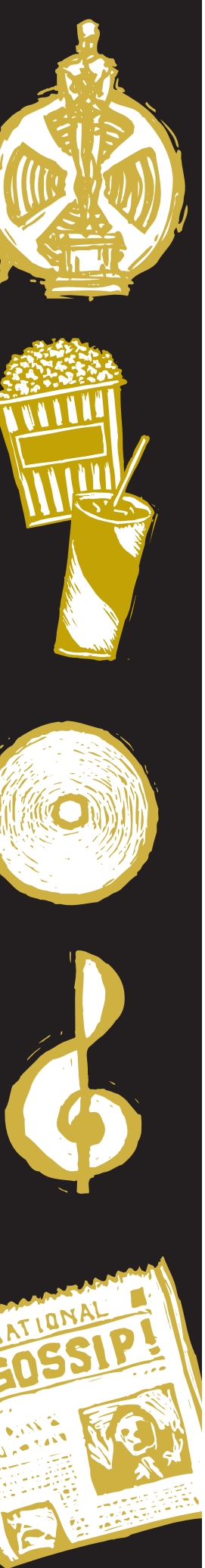
Contemporary teenagers might think that an older movie like *Rebel without a Cause* is not relevant to their lives, but the young characters in this film have the kinds of conflicts with their parents and peers that most young people will recognize.

Because they are the creation of a specific group of individuals, the media also have biases. This does not mean their messages must be discounted, only that consumers need to be aware of these biases in order to arrive at a deeper and clearer understanding of these messages.

As the media cover current issues, trends, and events, they influence viewers' attitudes toward these subjects. Movies, like other media, promote values and ideologies. While audiences expect serious films to contain some sort of message, even entertaining comedies like *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) or *Juno* (2007) reflect cultural values.

During World War II, women, by necessity, replaced men in the workplace. Movies from that period such as *So Proudly We Hail!* and *Madame Curie* (both 1943) depicted working women in positive ways. However, when American businesses needed to accommodate returning soldiers, movies began to emphasize the role of women at home. These images of women both echoed and reinforced what was happening in the larger society.





Documentaries and fiction films both use similar approaches to storytelling, yet because each film has a distinct point of view, each is often perceived very differently when it comes to "truth." Helen Keller and her teacher, Annie Sullivan, were profiled in the documentary **HELEN KELLER IN HER STORY**



(1955) (above left). Anne Bancroft played Annie Sullivan, and Patty Duke was Helen Keller in **THE MIRACLE WORKER** (1962) (above right). **HELEN KELLER IN HER STORY** won an Oscar for Best Documentary Feature, and Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke each received Oscars for their performances.

*The Enchanted Cottage* (1945), a love story between a man disfigured in the war and a homely woman, referred to another problem faced by some returning veterans. By emphasizing the characters' interior beauty, the movie attempted to change public attitudes toward former servicemen with war injuries.

Have your students list several movies that they like and explain what they like about them. Then have them do the same for movies that they do not like. Ask them to discuss what kinds of biases, both favorable and unfavorable, these lists reveal. Then ask them if they can identify similar biases in the media that they use regularly. For example, do the media focus on the same subjects? Do they ignore other subjects? Do they have a particular political or religious approach?

#### EXTENDED ACTIVITY

Have your students choose a person whose real-life story has been turned into a feature film. Ask them to compare the way the story is presented in the feature film to the way it's presented in other media such as documentaries, news articles, or biographies. What are the differences in point of view? The details included or omitted?

### Part B. STEREOTYPES AND GENRES

A stereotype is a simplified representation of a group of people who have specific qualities in common. Although the word often has negative connotations, stereotypes can provide a useful shorthand for filmmakers. Familiar character types help films from a different era or stories set in

different social or cultural environments appeal to a wide audience. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* was released in 1982, but today's teenagers can immediately recognize the character types.

Stereotypes have other functions as well. In *Legally Blonde* (2001), the stereotype of the "dumb blonde" is used for comic effect when Elle, played by Oscar-winning actress Reese Witherspoon, turns out to have an excellent legal mind. Another stereotype holds that older people are conservative and concerned with the end of life, while teenagers are wild and experimental. The 1971 comedy *Harold and Maude* reverses these stereotypes. Maude (Ruth Gordon), a woman about to turn 80, is lively, impulsive, and life-embracing. Her 20-year-old friend Harold (Bud Cort), on the other hand, is focused on death.

Another example of the humorous use of stereotypes can be found in *The Nutty Professor* (1996). In this case, overweight people are portrayed in stereotypical ways, and their behavior is meant to be funny. However, the film ultimately advocates tolerance and acceptance.

Stereotypes can have negative effects when members of certain ethnic groups are continually or exclusively depicted in the same way. *The Siege* (1998) tries to show the danger of judging people by their ethnicity. Made before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the film imagines a mass internment of Arabs living in the U.S., similar to the internment of West Coast Japanese-Americans during World War II. Although the filmmakers raise constitutional rights issues, some reviewers criticized the film for its derogatory portrayal of many of the Arab characters.

Stereotypes apply to people; genres apply to the films themselves. Genres are used to categorize films

that use a common set of conventions or that revolve around similar issues or circumstances. Some typical genres are war, horror, romance, Western, crime, action, comedy, disaster, adventure, mystery, sports, and fantasy.

Have your students identify as many stereotypes (ethnic, gender, age, etc.) as they can. Ask them if they have seen these stereotypes in movies, on television, on the Web, in books, magazines, or comic books, or in other media. Have them discuss why those stereotypes were used in each situation. Do the stereotypes have a positive effect, a negative effect, or both? Have your students discuss whether there is any truth to the stereotypes they have identified.

Then have your students list as many film genres as they can. Have students discuss the way genre and stereotype are related. For example, do Westerns have specific stereotypes? Do sports films?

### EXTENDED ACTIVITY

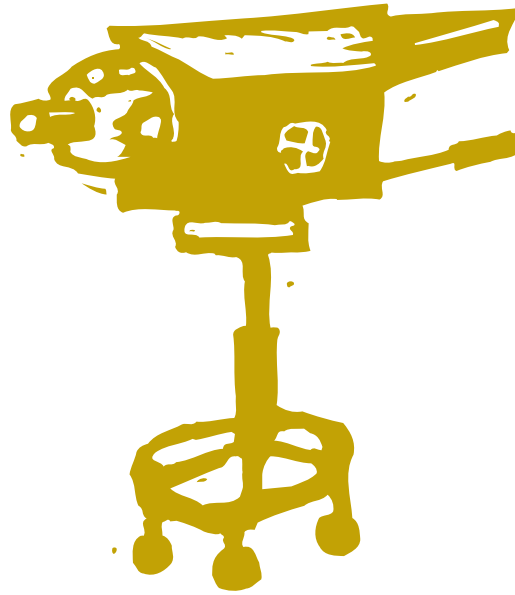
Show your students a movie that uses a negative stereotype. Some suggestions are *The Oxbow Incident*, *In the Heat of the Night*, *Mystic River*, *Crash*, *My Left Foot*, *The Siege*, and *Juno*. Ask them if films have an obligation to present all groups in a positive manner. Discuss the ways a movie can stimulate dialogue and reflect reality without belittling a type of individual or an entire group. Or have them research and discuss the life of someone in film, politics, or another walk of life who has overcome stereotypes in his or her career.

## ACTIVITY FOUR YOUR TURN

Movie content is affected by its writers, directors, producers, and distributors, among others. Writers are often advised to “write what they know,” and may easily overlook stories of people from dissimilar cultural or ethnic backgrounds. If producers do not think that a given movie idea is commercial (a decision often based on the way similar films have performed in the past), they may be less willing to work on it, and distributors may be less interested in distributing it.

Although certain filmmakers and members of the media make efforts to search out stories and characters from outside their experience, some viewers may approach these stories and characters with suspicion. They may feel that a movie portraying teenage Latina girls, for example, is less truthful or less real when it is created by older white men than when the filmmakers are closer in age and experience to their subject matter.

Have your students consider the values and tastes of their age and ethnic group. Ask them to identify



movies or television programs that embody these values. Ask them to name movies that try to persuade the viewer to think in a certain way. Then have them list movies that were made mainly to entertain. Ask your students to suggest a story they have not seen in the movies or characters they feel have been ignored. Have them identify any stereotypes they might use in their story. Ask them which genre would best suit their ideas and why.

Divide the students into pairs or small groups and ask each to research and develop one of their story concepts and write an outline or a treatment for a movie. Ask them to discuss their story’s message and to identify their movie’s intended audience.

Using their own drawings or copies of images from books, magazines, or the Web, ask them to put together a storyboard illustrating their story. Have them consider the ways that color, line, shape, and composition convey the mood and emotions of their story. What other techniques can they use to reinforce the story’s message?

Have each group present its storyboard and any other supporting materials to the other students. Ask the students to critique each presentation using the criteria in the previous activities. Have them consider how the story could focus on another message by being presented differently. Ask them how the story would change if it were developed in a different genre or were aimed at a different audience.

### EXTENDED ACTIVITY

Have your students write a short script for one or more of the stories they have developed. If you have access to a video camera, film the script and ask your students to discuss the result, covering some of the above topics.

