

Lights, Camera, Learn! Lesson Synopsis  
A Thousand Words: Compelling Storytelling with Still Images and Good Editing.  
Presenter: Frank Guttler

This hands-on lesson explores concepts of fundamental screen grammar in visual storytelling and how choices in the editing process can enhance or distract from a story. This lesson can be adapted when teaching a digital video or photography class, or as part of a unit across the curriculum and models applications in History and Social Studies.

## **Goals and Objectives**

Upon completing this unit students will:

- Know types of shots and their purposes
- Understand the role of character, point of view, and narrative in telling a story
- Be able to tell a story by combining images and narrative
- Develop an understanding of how thoughtful camera movement and editing techniques can enhance the story

Upon completion of the unit, students will be able to:

- Visually scan a photographic image to identify the type of shot
- Use storyboards to develop a narrative plan
- Import images to a desktop editing system
- Combine images, sound, movement and editing transitions to create a video sequence

### **Media Production Skills Objectives:**

#### **The Unique Vocabulary of Editing Transitions**

Video stories are comprised of scenes, sequences, and shots or clips. A scene is a part of the story that takes place in one location. Scenes are created from sequences and shots. A shot is a single piece of video created when the camera begins recording until the end of the recording. Shots are usually edited (trimmed) into clips and combined into a series of clips called a sequence. A sequence shows the same action from different perspectives to move the story forward. A transition is used to join clips. You have probably viewed many video transitions on television and in movie theaters. Now you will learn what they are called and how to use them.

The most basic transition is called a cut. A cut is a simple switch from one clip to another. In most cases a cut is the best choice to keep your story moving. On television cuts occur about every 7-8 seconds. There is always a reason for a cut.

When using cuts in the video editing process you should question the reason for your choices. Cutting may:

- Change the scene
- Compress or expand time
- Vary the point of view
- Build up an image or idea

Less abrupt transitions are achieved with the fade, dissolve, and wipe:

### **Fade:**

Fade-in or fade-out is an image dissolving to a blank screen (usually black or white). This creates a natural beginning or end to a scene.

### **Dissolve:**

Dissolve is also called cross-dissolve. It happens when the first image gradually disappears while the second image appears. Imagine a sapling tree in front of a house, then a slow cross-dissolve of the same house with a full-grown tree in place of the sapling. The idea of many years passing is relayed with this effect.

### **Wipe:**

A wipe transition happens when a line passes across the screen in any direction, eliminating the first image as it passes and leaving the second image in its place. The wipe is effective when cutting between two scenes of parallel action. It suggests simultaneous action or builds suspense. A wipe can also be effective when following a physical action like a door or curtain closing or a character crossing from one side of the screen to the other.

### **Iris:**

An iris transition is when a circle begins (or ends) at a single point in the screen and expands (or contracts) to fill the entire screen, leaving a second image or blank screen behind it. An Iris transition can also give your video a cartoon or retro feel.

One of the first things most people do when they open a new editing system is play with all the flashy effects and transitions. Understanding how these transitions enhance or distract from the appreciation of a movie's story is critical to the post production process. Using transitions correctly can create a visually pleasing and appropriate bridge between video clips. Incorrectly used transitions can interrupt the flow of visual information and adversely affect the viewer's perception of your movie.

With all the options available to you, a good rule of thumb for using transitions is less is more. The best transitions do not call attention to the technology of the editing system. When considering a flashy digital transition, ask yourself, "Does this transition really bring that much to my story?" Focus on your editorial choices with

cuts, transitions and effects for a polished end product.

## Getting into the picture with Ken Burns

Perhaps the most successful and respected historical documentary filmmaker worthy of study in this context is Ken Burns. His acclaimed and award-winning productions have covered topics as varied as the Civil War, Baseball, the Brooklyn Bridge, and Jazz. His film making style is noted for its creative use of photographs and arched footage. His films use still images and his camera moves from subject to subject, zooming into a specific element or pulling out from a single face to reveal a large crowd. His technique of moving a camera into and around a photograph to narrate is the popular "Ken Burns Effect" standard in most versions of Apple's iMovie.

Here is Ken Burns describing he creates the effect that bears his name. (YouTube Video - "Ken Burns on the 'Ken Burns Effect'" - [click here](#)).

The technical name for this technique is 'Pan & Scan'. It is a powerful technique for storytelling by guiding an audience's eyes to see exactly what you want them to see.

Learning Objective:

By creating a sequence of 6 or more personal or public domain still images students will demonstrate the degree of their understanding of the following concepts

- meaning of image sequences can be guided or manipulated by the use of image placement, transitions between images, edit points (timing), digitally created movement across the image, and pacing (length of time on screen).
- the images and sequences meaning can be affected by the context of its placement in the sequence
- effects, narration and/or music can effect the meaning of the sequence
- a viewer personal life experiences affect the meaning of the sequence beyond that of the artist
- to provide students a direct connection between their personal experiences, their state, and artists.
- to provide students with an assignment that requires them to engage with the still image and develop a regard for its value as a storyteller, an historical artifact, and chronicler of

life.

- to engage students create aesthetically informed digital artworks that may make personal, social, or political statements.
- how to employ, navigate, and utilize the capabilities of Apple's iLife suite to accomplish the above.

Standards: (complete list on applicable standards handout)

#### Creative Expression: Creating Digital Artworks

2.3 Demonstrate beginning skill in the manipulation of digital imagery. (grade 5)

2.6 Use technology to create original works of art. (grade 6)

2.6 Create an original work of art, using film, photography, computer graphics, or video. (grade 7/8)

2.3 Develop and refine skills in the manipulation of digital imagery (still or video) (HS Prof)

2.4 Demonstrate in their own works of art a personal style and an advanced proficiency in communicating an idea, theme, or emotion. (HS ADV)

#### Historical and Cultural Context

3.1 Research and discuss the role of the visual arts in selected periods of history, using a variety of resources (both print and electronic). grade 6

3.4 Discuss the contributions of various immigrant cultures to the art of a particular society. grade 8

#### Aesthetic Valuing

4.3 Analyze and articulate how society influences the interpretation and message of a work of art. HS ADV

Applicable Standards: *by grade*

Grade 5 (p 66-71) CE 2.3\*

Grade 6 (p 74-79) AP 1.3, CE 2.4, 2.5, 2.6\*; HCC 3.1; AV 4.4; CAR 5.3

Grade 7 (p 82-87) CE 2.6\* ; HCC 3.2; AV 4.1, 4.3 CAR 5.1, 5.3\*

Grade 8 (p 90-95) AP 1.3\*; CE 2.3\*; HCC 3.1\*, 3.4\*; AV 4.4; CAR 5.3\*

HS Prof. (p 117-121) AP 1.6\*; CE 2.3\*; HCC 3.2\*; AV 4.1\*, 4.2\*; CAR 5.2

HS Adv. (p 117-121) AP 1.4\*; CE 2.1, 2.4; HCC 3.2; AV 4.3; CAR 5.2

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Name: Frank Guttler

Industry Sector: Arts, Media & Entertainment

Career Pathway or Class: UC Video Production

Lesson Plan Name: A Thousand Words: Editing in Storytelling

<i>Standard</i>	CTE Arts Media Technology (2.6) Deliver multimedia presentations: a. Combine text, images, and sound and draw information from many sources (e.g., television broadcasts, videos, films, newspapers, magazines, CD-ROMs, the Internet, electronic media-generated images).
<i>Standard sub-component</i>	4.0 Technology 4.4 Understand digital applications appropriate to specific media and projects. 4.5 Know the key technological skills appropriate for occupations in the arts industry.

		Benchmark/Level
<i>Concepts/ benchmark What do students need to know? At what level?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Know types of shots and their purposes</li><li>2. Develop an understanding of how thoughtful camera movement and editing techniques can enhance the story</li><li>3. Be able to tell a story by combining images and narrative</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Define</li><li>2. Identify and discuss 3 examples.</li><li>3. Demonstrate or 'pitch' an example narrative using images.</li></ol>
<i>Skills/benchmarks What should students be able to do? At what level?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Visually scan a photographic image to identify the type of shot</li><li>2. Use storyboards to develop a narrative plan</li><li>3. Combine images, sound, movement and editing transitions to create a video sequence</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Correctly identify shot types in quiz.</li><li>2. Create accurate hand-drawn storyboard.</li><li>3. Import assets into video editing program, combine with music and narration and export playable file.</li></ol>
<i>Topics/contexts What must be taught?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Basic screen grammar and vocabulary.</li><li>2. Critical self and peer-to-peer evaluation techniques.</li><li>3. Use preproduction graphic organizers like storyboards to hone narrative and production skill.</li><li>4. Basic video editing techniques that emphasize story appropriate effects and transitions.</li></ol>	

Assignment: (What will the students do to complete the lesson?)

Students will create a short photo-story video with music and narration that demonstrates proper use of editing transitions and effects that enhance the story.

Assessment: (What will students do to provide evidence that they have achieved the standards?)

The videos will be screened for teacher and peer discussion and assessment using the following rubric:

Exceeds- More than one digital effects are used in a way that enhances the storytelling and match the footage or sound effects.

Meets- At least one digital effects is used in a way that enhances the storytelling and match the footage or sound effects.

Approaches- At least digital effects are used but they DISTRACT or do not match the action or storytelling.

Does not meet- No effects are used, or effects are used in a very distracting manner and do not enhance story.