

FILM KEYS

A quick guide to decoding
the narration, message,
and impact of a film, and to
support active spectatorship.

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THE STORY

- Does the film have a plot? How would you describe it in a nutshell?
- What is the narrative structure of the film like? Is there a clear beginning, middle, and end in the movie?
- What is the funniest, saddest, or most suspenseful scene of the film? Is there a happy ending?
- What kinds of conflicts does the film have? How do they affect the story and what is the cause of the conflicts?



How does the narrative structure of the film affect the story, reading of the film, and emotions of the spectator?

CHARACTERS

- Who is the main character of the film? What is he/she/they like? What does he/she/they look like? What can or cannot he/she/they do?
- What are the other characters of the film like? What are their connections to the main character?
- What kind of emotions do the characters go through?
- Do you identify with a character of the film? Who and why?



**Who is using power in the film?
Who makes decisions? Who has a voice and who does not? Do the characters communicate with each other? What kinds of characters are missing from the film?**

FILM LANGUAGE

- How is the film executed? Consider the costumes, set design, setting, camera angles, framing, lightning, and colour scheme, for example.
- What kind of pacing does the film have? What kind of role does the film editing have?
- What kind of score does the film have? What is the sound design in the film like?
- What kind of end product do the elements used in the film construct? What does the film show, instead of explicitly explaining it? Why are these elements used and how do they affect you?



The gaze: What does the framing, angles, and colours tell about the characters? How is the camera positioned and how does it portray the characters?

FILM CULTURE

- Did you have any expectations for the film and why?
- What is the genre of the film? What kinds of typical genre characteristics does the film have? What other films of the same genre have you seen?
- To whom and how is the film marketed? How does the promotion of the film differ from the actual movie? Does the film have any merchandise?
- To whom would you recommend the film? Why? What kinds of reviews has the film had?



Where, when, and with whom are you watching the film? How does it affect your viewing experience and opinion of the film?

MESSAGE AND EFFECT

- Who has made the film?
Why and from what point of view?
- Can you summarise the film with one argument? Do you agree with it?
- What kinds of emotions does the movie evoke in you? Why?
- How is the topic framed? What is not told? What information does the film entail? What kinds of values does it portray?



How does your own background and experiences affect the way you see the film?

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A film is a diverse form of visual art and narration. The ability to read and decode a film is crucial in today's audiovisual culture.

The questions in this leaflet can be used to decode a single film or as an introduction to film literacy.