

ProTalk

Discussion Files

C2. The transition from silent to talking pictures

Afaq Language Center

Language Center

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Goals

- Can read and understand a complex text about the history of film.
- Can compare silent and talking film conventions and present my own critical analysis of film.



Silent film is a **different animal** to the kinds of films we are used to seeing in the cinema in the modern day. What motivated this **transition**, and how did films develop all the way to the modern day?

Going to the cinema

Do you go to the cinema much?
If so, what do you like about it?
If not, why is this the case?



Film review



Are you a film buff? Do you watch many films? Why (not)?

Give a brief outline of the last film you enjoyed, and explain what it was you liked about it in particular.

Discussion about film

Think about the following questions in relation to films you've seen recently, and/or your own personal values. Remember to explain your answer.



1. Do you think genre really exists? What do you think of prejudice against certain genres, like RomComs?

2. Is there any content you consider unsuitable for the big screen? Why?

3. Is censorship necessary? Do you agree with age ratings on films?

Read the text and summarize it.

Sound and picture in the 1890s

Have you heard of Thomas Edison? He might be best known for having invented the light bulb, but it was also Edison who invented the **phonograph**, a device for both recording and playing sound, as well as the **motion picture** camera. The two different technological ingredients for talking pictures, or 'talkies' as they were known, had been discovered in the late nineteenth century, but it wasn't until the late 1920s that this **end** was realised in the way it had been originally intended by Edison. Although Edison had made **Herculean efforts** to bring talkies to the public, he had found no satisfactory way of synchronising the soundtrack with the picture. It was around 1925 when recorded soundtracks of any kind began to be added to motion picture.







Read the text and summarize it.

Silent film

Silent film (known more **colloquially** as silent pictures), was a very different form of entertainment than what we expect to see at the cinema today.

For one, there was no **set-in-stone** soundtrack. Instead, a live orchestra - or in some cases a solo **pianist** if it was all the theatre could afford - would sit in a pit below the cinema screen and play music to accompany the onscreen action. The musicians would play **swelling**, uplifting music for happier scenes, tense music for scenes of conflict...you get the picture!



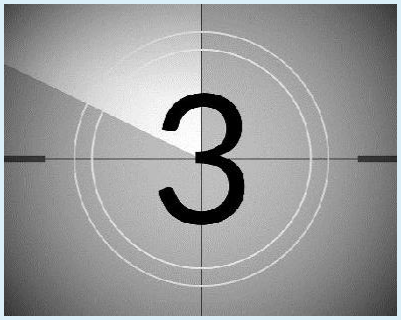
Read the text and summarize it.

Silent film

The acting in silent pictures was also very different; the actors **conveyed** their emotions and thoughts exclusively through their body language and facial expressions. Occasionally, the characters would speak, in which case the words would appear onscreen as 'titles' so that the audience could understand.

Charlie Chaplin was one actor **esteemed** for his silent acting; although he never spoke, audiences were able to perceive his feelings without effort from the way he moved his body. One of the main advantages of silent film was that deaf people could happily sit in the audience and feel perfectly included, able to follow all of the action without missing anything.







New vocabulary: have you seen any of these words in different contexts? How was it used? How does context change meaning?

motion picture

end

Herculean effort

colloquially

set in stone

pianist

swelling

to convey

esteemed

Questions on the text

Read back over the text and answer the following questions.



1. How were silent films screened? What was done about the soundtrack?

2. See if you can find a pun (a play on words) somewhere in the text.

3. What happened in silent films when somebody spoke? How did the audience know what was being said?

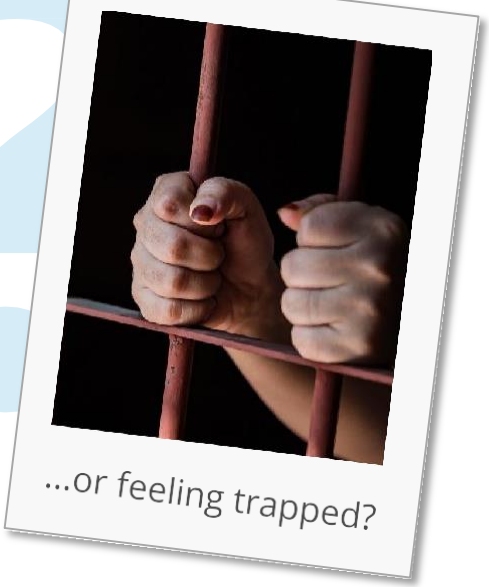
Big question

Would you ever go to see a silent film in the cinema?

Do you think you would enjoy it in the same way as a talking film?



happy audience?



...or feeling trapped?

Inclusive activities

Silent film was just as inclusive and immersive an activity for deaf people and people hard of hearing.

What kind of group or community activities can you think of that we have nowadays which are just as easy for a deaf person to follow?



Describing music



The text used adjectives such as **swelling**, **uplifting** and **tense** to describe music.

What emotions do these adjectives convey? What other words can you think of that could be used to describe music?

Contrasting differences

The text outlined some key differences between the styles of silent and talking film. Think about them again, expand on them, and add as many new ones as you can to the list.

Silent film	Talking film

Silent vs. talking

How would each situation below be shown in a talking versus a silent film? Use the lists you compiled in the previous activity to help you explain your answers!









Aaaaaand action!

Choose your favourite situation from the pictures on the previous slide and develop it into a short scene with a beginning, middle and end. Figure out where the picture you're drawing inspiration from will fit in. Choose whether you would put it in a silent or talking film and adapt your story to the genre.

Who are the characters?

Who is the main character?

What happens at the start of the scene?

What is the camera focused on?



In what style is the dialogue?

Or, if it's silent, what would the music be like?

How does the scene develop? Do problems arise?

How is the scene resolved?

Imagine this

Imagine you are a deaf person in the 1920s. You previously enjoyed going to the cinema once or twice a week. It was nice to feel included in the fun of a community, as well as loving to watch the films themselves. Now talkies have become the norm and you feel a lot more excluded from what's happening. Explain to your friend how you feel about this change.

- Compare and contrast your feelings before to how you feel now
- Try to explain the experience of not fully understanding what is going on in talking films





isolating

confusing

disorienting

excluded

included

disrupted

new technology

Critical analysis

Choose a film (or TV series) which you know particularly well and think about it in relation to the following three points. Answer in detail.



1

Character development: what are the characters like? Do they progress in a positive way or do they go downhill during the course of the film?

Critical analysis

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Themes: what type of ideas does the film dwell on? What kind of message does the film relate?

Critical analysis

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2

Themes: what type of ideas does the film or show dwell on? What kind of message does the film relate?



3

Overall tone: does the film end on a happy note, sad note, or bittersweet?

Heading for obsolescence

Many actors from silent film didn‘t make it into the talkies. Put yourself in the shoes of the actors.

What do you think they would have thought of this big transition which had such a big effect on their career?



Presentation

You are a film star in the 1920s who has been told their voice is unsuitable for talking film. Tell the class how you are feeling.
Prepare a two-minute presentation.
Include several reasons to support your point of view.
Give your presentation to the class. Answer questions and get feedback.