

# Film and Citizenship





# First Light

INSPIRING YOUNG FILM

## First Light

First Light was launched in May 2001 to fund and inspire the making of short films by 7 to 18 year olds, reflecting the diversity of their lives. First Light is an initiative supported by the UK Film Council with Lottery funding and managed by Hi8us First Light Limited.

First Light has enabled thousands of young people across the UK to work with organisations and filmmakers to write, act, shoot and produce hundreds of films, covering a myriad of topics and genres, using digital film technology.

## 'Film and Citizenship' - The project

To coincide with the introduction of citizenship to the curriculum, a competition for secondary schools was launched in the Autumn term 2002. The schools were invited to come up with ideas for a short film around the subject of citizenship. Four schools won the opportunity to make their film with the help of professional filmmakers. Each school submitted a brief story outline which was developed during visits by the filmmaker and eventually resulted in a completed script.

The schools could also choose a theme for a day's Masterclass, when another key industry professional (for example a set designer, scriptwriter or actor) came in to give further help and advice. The films were made in the summer term 2003, at the end of the first year of citizenship in the curriculum. These films all use drama and so the case studies in this pack reflect this, but the experiences and processes outlined here can be adapted to help with documentary filmmaking too.

We hope that their stories and the films they made will inspire you to explore filmmaking as an exciting and challenging means to bring citizenship education to life.

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## What Goes Around...

### **The School: Croxteth Community School, Liverpool**

Croxteth successfully uses film to inspire and engage young people. This is especially impressive in an area with generally low academic achievement and high levels of poverty. With limited funds and no specialist equipment on site, teacher Mike McGrath has worked with students to make three films before this one.

Croxteth runs a summer school to help pupils bridge the gap between year 6 and year 7. Mike and colleague Andrea Ward let the students develop the film idea during the summer, before they officially joined the school. They won the competition and started work on the film when they started in year 7.

### **The Teacher: Mike McGrath, Head of Year**

"Though I teach PE now, I taught English when I started at the school nine years ago, and that's when my interest in scriptwriting first developed. I really enjoy working on script and character development because it is a great way of engaging students' interest, plus it really is an area where you can work together with no definitive answer to

questions posed. The open-ended nature of writing puts the student and the teacher on an equal footing, which improves the quality of the work.

"This process has improved the students' speaking and listening skills, their confidence and their patience. The list could go on and on. It is very pleasing to see students who've been 'victims' in the past suddenly become role models."

### **The Filmmaker: Andy Lawrence**

"I trained as a documentary filmmaker at the Granada Centre, and submitted my graduation film to festivals where it won awards which opened doors for me. I then started making short documentaries for TV and freelancing as a cameraman.

"I like films for different reasons; I love *Star Wars* because when I was six it amazed me and when I was 20 I understood the symbolism and enjoyed it more.

"To be a good filmmaker you need to be a good storyteller, you must say something interesting and affect people in some way. I think to do that you need to feel your way through the film and be honest with yourself and your audience about what you are feeling."

## "I liked being a star!"

### **The Story**

David is given £50 by his dad to buy new trainers. On the bus into town with his friend Kelly, two bullies snatch his money. Kelly and David decide to get the money back and follow the bullies to the fair. The bullies spend the money on rides and sweets, then one snatches a wallet from a ride operator. David and Kelly see the crime and tell the man. When he checks his pocket, he stops the ride, leaving the bullies dangling in mid-air. Money drops from their pockets which they return to the man. At the last minute it seems as if David and Kelly's perseverance pays off...



### **Questions to think about in class:**

- Why didn't all David's friends pursue the bullies?
- How did Kelly support David?
- What would have happened if Kelly had also decided to leave?
- Why did Kelly behave differently?
- Why do you think the bullies might have behaved in this way?
- What would have happened to them if David and Kelly had not followed them?
- How do you think you would have reacted if you were:  
(a) David (b) Kelly (c) A friend of the bully
- How might this have gone wrong for Kelly and David?
- Why might people not stand up to bullies?
- What is a crime?
- What crimes are committed in the film?

### **Bullying in school:**

- How can schools deal with bullies and help their victims?
- What does your school do to tackle bullying?
- What changes would you like to see in your school?
- How would you go about getting your ideas heard?

*"It was good to think about what's right and what's wrong... showing people what it feels like"*

*"You have to get it exactly right"*

# School Dogs

## The School: Kingsbury High School, London

Kingsbury is a culturally diverse school with around 2000 students. An Arts Mark Silver School, its Performing Arts Department is thriving, running extra curricular activities including drama clubs for all Key Stage 3 students.

During the Autumn Term of 2002, a year 9 drama club prepared a performance about the work of school councils to present at the National Junior School Councils Conference held in London. In December 2002, they performed to 150 students from around the country. This drama became the starting point for the film.

All the students involved have opted to take Expressive Arts at GCSE.

## The Teacher: Ema Bilgora, Head of Drama and Performing Arts

"Working on this project allowed the students the opportunity to see different aspects of life outside the school curriculum. It gives them the opportunity to look at various career paths that many of them would not otherwise consider. The project meant I could work with students in a more informal manner and gave me the opportunity to work with students I don't necessarily teach."



## The Filmmaker: Nigel Levy

"I have spent all 15 years of my working life in television - beginning in documentary and moving into drama. After university, I began as a researcher at the BBC.

"One of my favourite films is *The Ice Storm* by Ang Lee. It is very moving, very modest and has great atmosphere, which is one of the most important and difficult things to achieve on film.

"My tip for someone wishing to get into film or TV is to keep interested in the world around you, and the relationships you have. If you are honest about what you feel, and understand that it is your opinion that people want to see, then the stories you tell are going to be unique and moving."

*"Sometimes it's glamorous, sometimes it's low class"*

## The Story

Laura attends the school council meeting, leaving Josh bored outside waiting for her. He thinks the school council is a waste of time and would rather spend the time dozing in the corridor. He dreams about Mr Sprat's history class, in which students are humiliated and bored. Josh masterminds a plot to kidnap Sprat and his goldfish, Ethel. He and his accomplices plan to hold Sprat to ransom, and have an array of wet fish that they are prepared to use to torture Sprat if their demands are not met. They demand that the teachers begin to listen to students' opinions and involve them in decision making. But Josh's plans come to nothing when the head teacher storms the building and Ethel's goldfish bowl smashes on the ground. Waking with a shock, Josh decides that joining the school council to pursue his campaign might not be such a bad idea after all.



*"I never knew how complicated it was"*

## Questions to think about in class:

- How does humour help get the message across?
- Why do you think Josh thinks so little of the school council?
- Do you agree that students should be involved in decision making in schools? Why?
- To what extent do you think your school lives up to Josh's ideals?
- How do you think your head teacher would respond to Josh's list of demands?
- What problems might prevent schools from living up to Josh's standards?
- If you have a school council, how effective is it?
- What would you change about the way your school makes decisions?
- How would you go about it?
- What problems might arise if you kidnapped a teacher and threatened to slap him with a wet fish?
- How can students campaign for change in school?

# Another Day Another Fight

## **The School: Grey Coat Hospital School, London**

Grey Coat is a Church of England comprehensive girls school with 1,000 students. The school has several choirs, Art, Dance and Drama clubs and many opportunities to participate in school and public performances. There is an active school council and senior students undertake community service as part of the Duke of Edinburgh and ASDAN award schemes. Within the school community older students help younger ones, as reading partners, peer counsellors and by organising clubs.

This film was made by a year 10 drama group during their lessons.

## **The Teacher: Caroline Duck, English and Drama**

"The Film and Citizenship project has been a fantastic opportunity for the students who were able to get a real taste for the professional world of filmmaking. The students gained much from the opportunity to see their ideas develop into a very successful short film and from working with professional people and equipment. The project has definitely created more interest in film in general which I'm sure will help to promote Film Studies as an important subject in our syllabus.

"I am passionate about filmmaking and try to incorporate this into my drama classes as much as possible. A short film produced by a class is a useful teaching resource. I often film practical work in drama and then show the students the final product. This seems to be a good way to draw their attention to particular areas of performance. It is excellent for students who are not confident enough to perform to an audience. Filmmaking in the classroom can be done with a range of abilities and promotes group discussion and communication within the class."

## **The Filmmaker: Justin Edgar**

"The first job I got was when a local TV company rang up the university asking for a director to make an insert on disability for regional TV. Since then I have mainly worked in disability or social issues TV. I also make comedy films and wrote and directed the feature film *Large* for Film Four.

"My favourite film changes all the time. I like films that have something to say and I think my favourite at the moment is *Lilya 4 Ever*.

"My top tip for aspiring filmmakers is not to lose sight of your vision. When you make a film, a lot of people will try and tug your idea in different directions. Always remember what makes your film exciting and special to you."

## The Story

As Amy arrives late for school we see that she stands out from the rest of the class - her hair and clothes are different. Stacey, the class bully, trips up Amy and the rest of the class laughs, but Sophie doesn't see the joke. The teacher arrives and tells the class about the start of a peer counselling project - which none of the girls seem interested in. Later, we see Amy in the toilets, clearly upset, but Sophie's attempts to talk are unsuccessful. As Amy leaves, Sophie looks at the package she has discarded in the bin and discovers a pregnancy testing kit. When Sophie sees Stacey beating up Amy, she tells them to stop because Amy is pregnant. Without her friends to back her up, Stacey runs away and Amy confides in Sophie that the test was negative. Later Amy appears at the peer counselling project where Sophie reveals that she, too, once thought she was pregnant.

**NOTE:** This film deals with the controversial issue of teenage sex and pregnancy. Students should be made aware that, whilst sex is illegal for young people under 16 years of age, there are services they can turn to for help and advice. Governors will have established a sex education policy in every school and these guidelines should be followed in facilitating conversations about this issue.

## Questions to think about in class:

- Why do you think Stacey picks on Amy?
- What problems does Amy face in the film?
- How does Sophie help her with these?
- What problems do you think Amy will still need to deal with at the end of the film?
- How could the school help students deal with these problems?
- How could other students help people deal with these issues?
- What does your school sex education policy say about teenage pregnancy?
- What should teachers do if they find out students are having underage sex?
- Where can young people go for advice and information about sex or pregnancy?
- Why do you think Stacey has a gang?
- Why do you think the others follow Stacey?
- What difference do you think the gang makes to Stacey's behaviour?
- Why do students set up peer mentoring schemes?
- What advantages does peer mentoring have compared to adult run projects?
- What do you think would make a good mentor?



# The Net

## The School: Mere Oaks School, Wigan

Mere Oaks is a mixed state-funded day school within the metropolitan borough of Wigan for students with physical disabilities and some complex medical difficulties. There are currently 100 students, used to working with video and with a good understanding of the processes and the language of film. The experience of working with a professional film company has helped them develop this.

The group involved consisted of ten pupils, including six wheelchair users. The students had a wide range of academic abilities.

## The Teacher: Bob Overton, Arts Coordinator

"I teach Art and Drama to Key Stage 3 and 4 students. I've always been interested in filmmaking, it is highly motivational across all levels of ability. It's great for team building and cooperative working. It gives children absolute ownership of their work and develops a sense of pride, achievement and raises self-esteem. For physically disabled children it opens an access route into the expressive arts that is difficult via traditional routes of live performance in drama and dance. Children are able to examine their work, modify it and add special effects and soundtracks."

## The Filmmaker: Tony Lloyd

"After a brief stint in art college, I went to film and video college in Surrey. Over the years I've worked as a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd assistant director on numerous commercials in and around London. I returned home to Liverpool to concentrate on directing. I have worked as director for many corporate clients as well as TV commercials and documentaries.

"My favourite film would be split into two periods of my life. The first, when I was nine, and taken to see *Planet of the Apes* and *2001 A Space Odyssey* in one week! Secondly, at nineteen, when I was truly despairing of ever entering the industry, I went to see Polanski's *Tess* and was so blown away that I rediscovered my zeal for film again.

"My tips for aspiring filmmakers are watch films, persevere and above all, enjoy it!"

**"We had a laugh"**

**"We held on to our original idea, it felt good telling Tony [the filmmaker] how we wanted the film to be made"**

## The Story

Anna makes an Internet contact and starts an email pen pal type relationship. She wrestles with her conscience about whether to tell her friend, Brian, that she is disabled. In the end she doesn't and this leads to complications and an unexpected outcome. After a failed attempt to meet, it turns out that Brian is a wheelchair user as well.



NOTE: It is important to emphasise that *The Net* is NOT primarily about internet safety although the issue is raised and should be dealt with in discussion. The story is about disability, prejudice and honesty. Whilst writing the story the students were aware that they were dealing with dangerous territory and didn't want the safety issue to be dominant or give out the wrong message, so ensured that café proprietor, Joe, acted as chaperone in the film.

## Questions to think about in class:

- Do you think Anna should have told Brian about her disability straight away?
- Do you think she made the right decision?
- How many other disabled characters have you seen in a film?
- Have you ever seen a disabled character in a film that wasn't about disability issues?
- Why do you think there are few images of people with disabilities in the media generally and films in particular?
- What are the risks of meeting people over the internet?
- What guidance should people follow to be safe on the internet?
- Find what the Home Office guidance is at [www.wiseuptothenet.co.uk](http://www.wiseuptothenet.co.uk)