

*“To be a good filmmaker you need to be a good storyteller, you must say something interesting and affect people in some way”*

*Andy Lawrence*



**The film production process**  
The filmmaking process can be broken down into the following five stages:

**From ideas to script -**  
The story/idea is researched and refined. The producer, director and writer will raise the money needed and write the script.

**Pre-production -** The practical planning stage involves casting actors and employing technicians, arranging locations and equipment and scheduling filming.

**Production -** The film is shot, working to a schedule prepared at the pre-production phase.

**Post-production -** The film or video footage is edited to produce the final film. Music, sound and finally the credits are added.

**Marketing and distribution -** marketing the films and screening it to audiences.

More advice and information about each of these stages can be found on the First Light website at [www.firstlightmovies.com](http://www.firstlightmovies.com)

*“Learning how to use the equipment was great fun”*

*“I enjoyed directing, it felt good to be in charge”*

## Getting it right at the start

Filmmaking requires a great deal of planning and thought. All the schools taking part in this project found that more time than they had anticipated was needed to carry it out successfully. The support of colleagues, and especially the head teacher, is vital to the project's success. One school dropped out at the last minute when it became evident that the organising teacher had no support from colleagues to help out with classes and supervision.



## Case Study: Croxteth's checklist

- Choose a creative and committed member of staff to oversee the project. They should be willing to give up non-contact and extra-curricular time to see the project through to a successful conclusion.
- Involve the students' parents from the very beginning. Once they're aware of the project many offer help in terms of lifts or even offering to come to the shoot either as a runner or a chaperone.
- Document all letters sent to the parents. Permission needs to be obtained legally at each stage for child protection as well as insurance purposes.
- Think about who you can approach in school about possible extra funding to increase the film's budget. Education Action Zones and Gifted and Talented Coordinators are helpful with regard to this.



- Get in early with heads of department or heads of year to explain that to plan, develop and shoot a film will need time and organisation. Once you've sought their help it's easier to announce via staff meetings or bulletins when your students might be missing lessons. Also, keep Building Managers aware of developments. Get them on your side.
- The long term benefits for the students and the school of being involved in the filmmaking process need to be clearly explained to more cynical or apathetic members of staff. It helps when you've got the head and senior management on your side.
- Keep a record of the whole process. Keep drafts of scripts, take photographs of the process as it develops and ensure that relevant e-mails are printed off and kept in your record.
- Go with your gut instincts in terms of selecting students to work with. Make sure that you don't shy away from using someone you spot with talent because they cause trouble in school. Making a film can bring out the best in anyone.
- It is important to look at the student's work and suggest ways of pushing further the idea that they have come up with. This is not to decry their work. It is essential to the development process and can be done positively.
- Give the pupils a free range to begin with. Let them learn from their mistakes by positive persuasion, rather than adopting a dictatorial approach out of fear that they are not getting things right.
- Don't be afraid to have an input, whether this be in terms of taking part or suggesting things to the filmmaker, if you are working with one. They are there to help you produce your film and want to ensure that the teachers and students feel they are part of the whole process, but don't forget that they have done this before and their advice is usually worth following. It is important for the teacher/mentor to get involved. The kids love to see this and it encourages them. Collaboration is the key.

## Stage 1: From ideas to script

Stories can help make sense of our lives and the world around us. We can't know what everyone is thinking or why things happen as they do. However, we can use our imaginations to understand things and to see the world from different perspectives. Films enable us to tell a story in a number of ways, through action, music, images and words. Nevertheless, at the heart of every good film is a good story, whether it's a documentary or a drama.

All the competition winners recognised how crucial it was to develop the story that said what they wanted to say - before they even thought about picking up a camera.

### The Story Outline

#### Questions for brainstorm

What's the film about? Will the main idea grab an audience? Is it unique? Don't tackle too much in a short film. Be prepared to throw away ideas in order to focus on one subject. Consider the type of story you want to tell - drama, comedy, thriller, horror? Remember you can make a serious point through humour, like Kingsbury's film *School Dogs*. What emotional response do you want from the audience? Construct the film around key moments of emotion.

#### Creating a structure

Plan the sequence of events/scenes by writing statements on cards describing key dramatic points. Juggle the cards to find the best running order. Use small groups to create structures from differing characters' viewpoints.

#### Tell each other the story

What works, what holds people's attention, does each scene move the story on in unexpected ways, where does it waver? Try telling your story in 25 words or less.

#### Eyewitness

Students work in pairs with one playing a character from the film. He/she tells the other about the action of the plot. Mock TV news interviews or police interrogations can be useful vehicles for this.

#### Freeze frame

Students can create key moments in the story through three frozen/still pictures, or tableaux. The viewers analyse the emotions being experienced to plot the emotional journey of characters and identify climactic moments.

### Developing characters

#### Questions for brainstorm

What kind of characters are involved in the story and how do the film's events affect them? What interpersonal relationships do they have? How do these relationships change during the film? Who is the main character - who is the audience cheering for? Who should they dislike or mistrust? What do the characters want? What obstacles must they overcome to get what they want?

#### Hot-seating

A student pretends to be one of the characters while the class asks questions about their thoughts, feelings and motives. For instance, the session could put the group in roles as journalists at a press conference, encouraging them to write questions and note answers.

#### Character profile

Write a character profile outlining: Name, age, gender, occupation, education, likes, dislikes, important life events, character motto.

#### Write a letter

Each student writes a letter pretending to be one of the characters, confiding their feelings about the events of the film. Compare the emotional reactions of different characters, using the letters as a basis to empathise with them.

#### Inner Voice

Students script the thoughts of characters at dramatic moments before, during or after the action of the film. This exercise helps them explore underlying causes and motives.

### Developing a setting

#### Questions for brainstorm

Where's the story set? How will you present the mood or atmosphere of the setting? What locations can you use?

#### Location file

Research potential locations by building up a location manager's file of pictures of local sites that give strong indications of possible settings.

#### Soundscape

Split the class into small groups. Get them to create a soundscape of the film's location, using just their voices, bodies and objects to create sound effects. Other students in the class describe the mental pictures created for them.

## Stage 1: From ideas to script (continued)

### Writing a treatment

Once you have the story outline, write a treatment. A treatment is a description of the story, including atmosphere and setting. It should communicate the story in about 200 words.

Here is a framework for your treatment:

**1 Title.** This can be the working title for your film.

**2 Log line.** This is one line that encapsulates the basic idea of your story, for example, 'Justice prevails because crime doesn't pay.'

**3 Market/audience.** Provide examples of two or three films that indicate the kind of audience you want to target. (You can give feature films as examples).

**4 Story setting.** Describe briefly the location and 'world' of your film.

**5 Background to the story.** Outline briefly the issues underlying your film.

**6 Outline of the story.**

Bob Overton described the start of the story creation at Mere Oaks:

"We talked about many subject areas in the Year 10 group and they agreed that the story should be about disability (obviously very experienced in this area) prejudice (also some first hand experience here), and honesty. Their own ideas related very closely to their own lives and opinions were strong, well argued and often highly emotional.

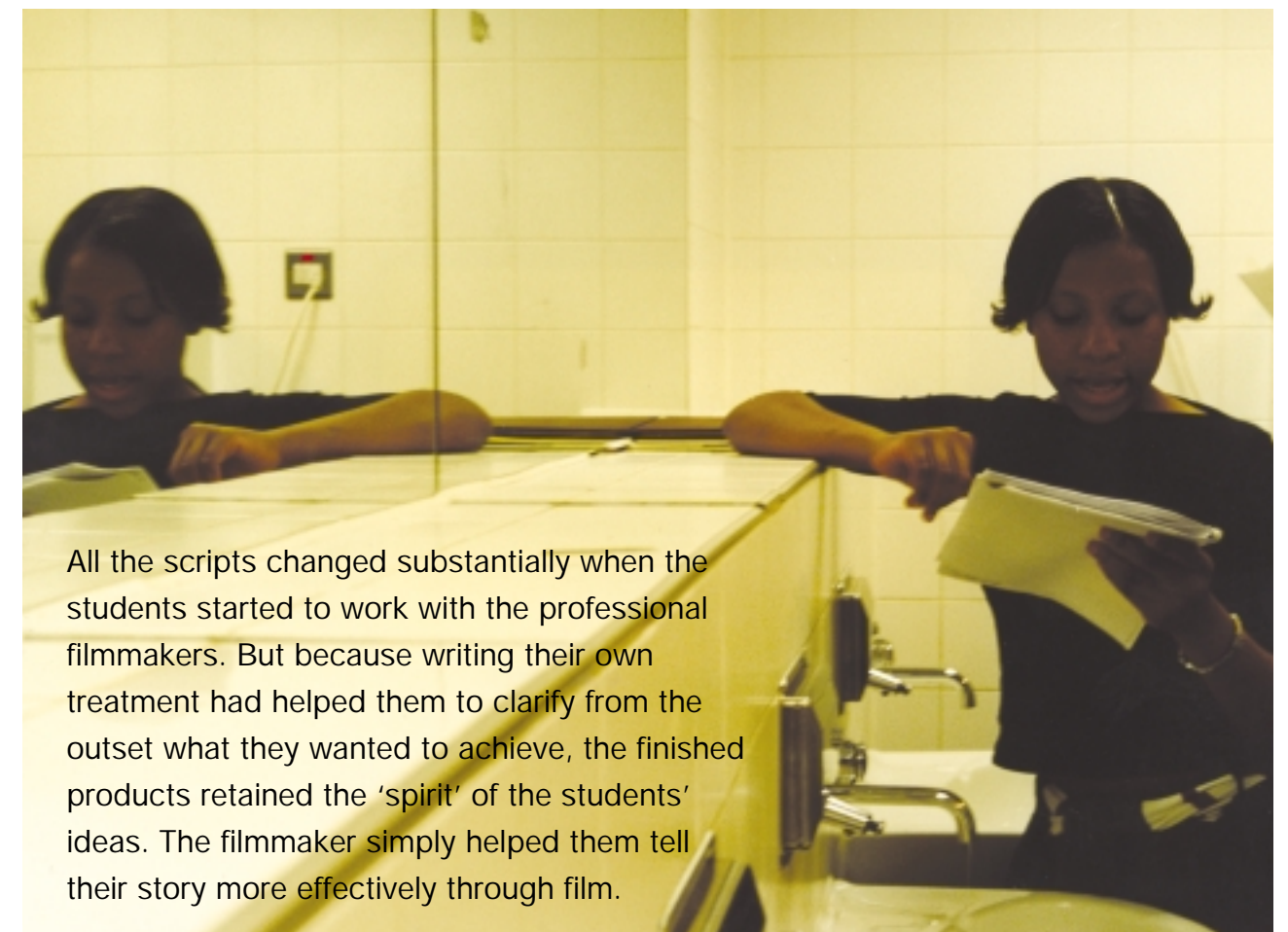
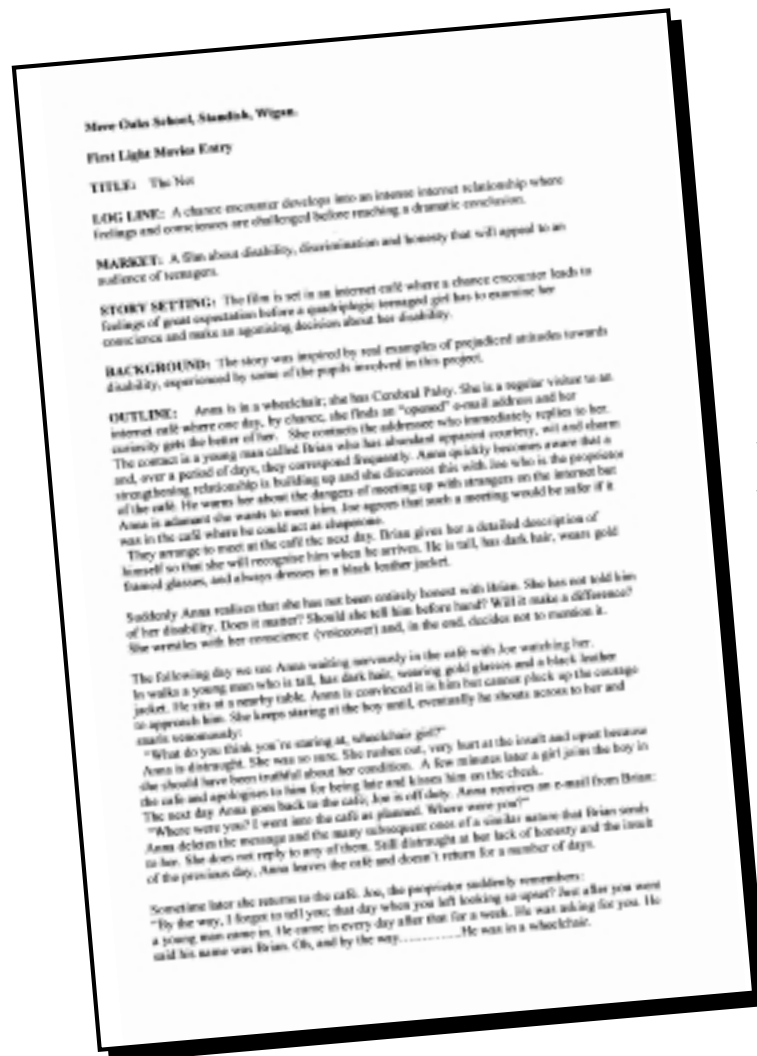
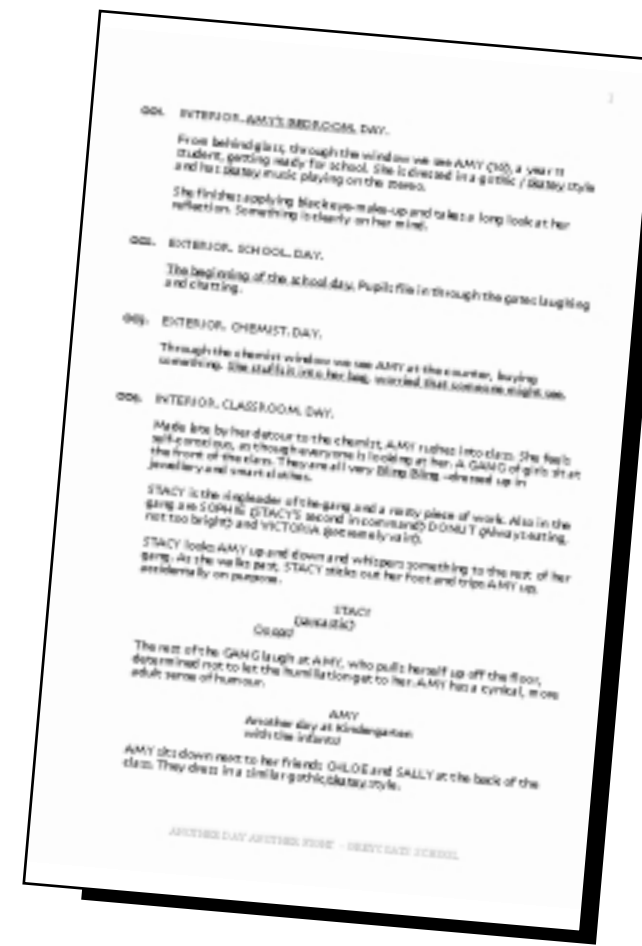
"Because the students were experienced in filmmaking and because they were working with issues they understood very well, they made few changes to their original story. The fact that one of the boys was going through a similar experience in real life added an air of authenticity to the story. Whilst working on the film, he started writing to a girl in America. Working on this story influenced his decision and in the end he was honest and told her about his disability. She never wrote back."

### First draft

#### Script example: Grey Coat School

One of the pupils said, "Our idea was inspired from past experiences from our own lives and our peers. We wanted to base the story on an issue that people of our age can relate to."

Once the whole class had decided on the key scenes and the order in which they would happen, a smaller group wrote a first draft of the whole film. Then following a read-through of the draft with the filmmaker, small groups took a section each to develop further. The script was refined during further read-throughs, discussion and small group workshops.

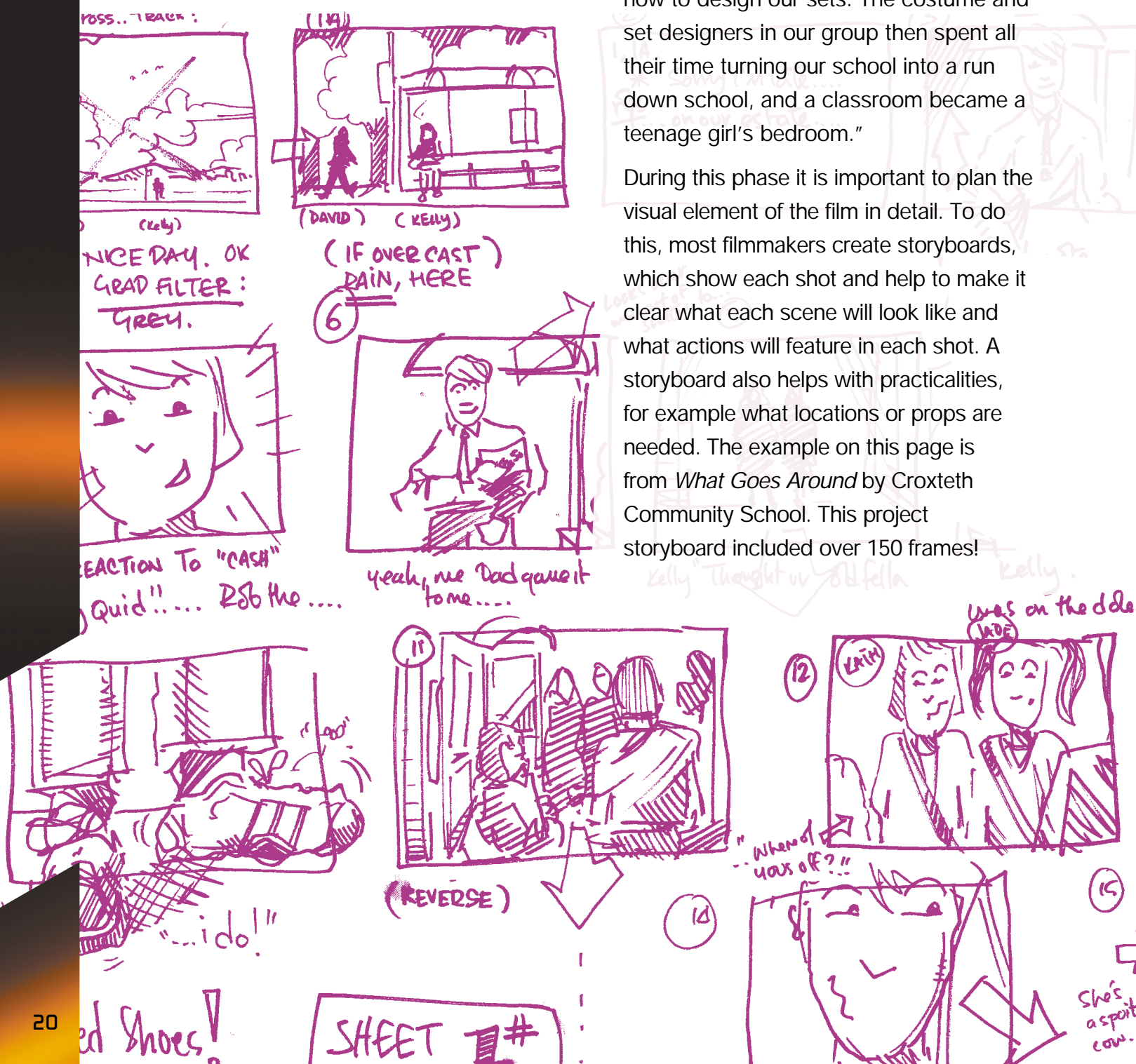


## Stage 2: Pre-production

Once the story has been developed and the script has been written, the pre-production of the film can begin: deciding on actors and technicians, props and costumes, locations and equipment.

A girl from Grey Coat' School commented, "The filmmaker assigned to us was brilliant. He helped us transform our ideas into a script. Eventually, three drafts later, we were able to start making it real. We began rehearsing and planning. We had a brilliant workshop from an art director who gave us ideas on how to design our sets. The costume and set designers in our group then spent all their time turning our school into a run down school, and a classroom became a teenage girl's bedroom."

During this phase it is important to plan the visual element of the film in detail. To do this, most filmmakers create storyboards, which show each shot and help to make it clear what each scene will look like and what actions will feature in each shot. A storyboard also helps with practicalities, for example what locations or props are needed. The example on this page is from *What Goes Around* by Croxteth Community School. This project storyboard included over 150 frames!



## Stage 3: Production

Because films are generally set in several different locations, it makes sense to film all the scenes in each location together, regardless of when they actually happen in the film. This will test the team's level of organisation as they will be filming out of sequence and asking actors to act out the story in the wrong order.

The following grid will help organise the filming schedule.

Day .....		Scenes .....		Location .....	
Scene	Characters	Crew	Equipment		

Within each scene there may also be several camera positions. In *What Goes Around* a scene at a bus stop includes four different camera positions: a wide shot of the children at the bus stop, a close up of their feet to show a pair of trainers, a mid-shot from the left to film a conversation and a mid-shot from the right to show the bus approaching and the children climbing aboard. The director will need to make sure all the shots that need to be taken from each position are filmed together, to cut down the time moving the equipment around - so they may be filmed in a different order from the way they appear in the story. In Croxteth's planning they used a list:

Day	Scene	Camera instruction
2 June	01A	MID SHOT: Kelly waiting at the bus stop
	01B	TRACK SHOT - WIDE SHOT: Kelly at bus stop, David approaching
	02	CLOSE UP: Dialogue
	03	MID SHOT: David pulling out note



### Stage 3: Production (continued)



A girl from Grey Coat School said, "I was assistant director. It was my job to make sure everything was in the right place and actors and equipment were there ready for filming. It was fun to be involved in a different area of filming.

"Much to our surprise we managed to get the whole thing filmed in two days. The first scene we filmed took seven hours (although the scene has now been edited to not much over a minute!) and by the end of it we were all exhausted, over heated, and probably not in the best of moods."

#### **A word about health and safety**

As with all projects that might involve students in activities off the school premises it is important to plan ahead.

The responsible member of staff should check out the locations in advance and conduct a thorough risk assessment. This should then be discussed with the member of staff responsible for trips in the school. It may be necessary to get permission from parents and a safe visit may also require additional supervision. Parents may be able to help if you have involved them and kept them informed from the beginning.

Students may be working with electrical equipment and this should be discussed with experienced technicians and filmmakers to ensure it is included in the risk assessment.

Does the school have a First Aid Officer who can be used whilst on location? Get permission in advance as soon as you develop a shooting schedule.

### Stage 4: Post-production

Editing is the process of assembling your film or video footage (known as the 'rushes') in the right order, adding music, graphics and effects.

You will probably be using a computer with editing software such as iMovie, Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premiere. It is important to plan your edit thoroughly before you start.

#### **Make a log**

Watch all the material you have filmed and make a log, noting the tape number, counter number and a description of the shot and what happens in it. Students can do this in pairs, each pair logging a different rushes tape.

#### **Making a paper edit**

You can use your logs to make a 'paper edit' of your film - a list of the shots you intend to use in the order they will appear. This will save you a lot of time in the edit suite.

#### **Sound effects and music**

Along with reorganising the images, sounds can be added at the editing stage too. Some sound effects are simply sounds that occur in everyday life. If you want a door banging, glass smashing or a baby crying, you may not always be able to reproduce the sound as you film on location. Such effects can easily be recorded and edited onto the soundtrack later.

Music can change the pace or mood of a film. But you have to be careful about what music you use. All recorded music is protected by copyright, which means you cannot simply use music from your own CD collection. Most of the schools in this project made their own music to accompany the film as it is easier and cheaper than trying to get permission from large recording companies. Details on music copyright can be found on the First Light website [www.firstlightmovies.com](http://www.firstlightmovies.com)



*"During the editing, I started to see all our hard work turn into a flowing piece of film. The way it came together was fascinating. Now I just can't wait to see it finished"*

## Stage 5: Marketing and distribution

Marketing and distribution is the process of taking your film to its audience. You should be thinking about this from the start of the project. Focusing on the audience when developing the film helps students to refine their ideas.

### Questions for brainstorm

Who has a stake in the issues addressed by the film? What messages do you want to give your audience?

### Audience profile

Many films are made with a specific audience in mind. Identify a range of audience members, for example:

Young person

Businesswoman

Elderly person

Divide the students into groups, each working on an audience type. Brainstorm the lifestyle of the audience member and create an audience profile.

### Poster

Having identified an audience, ask students to design a film poster/flyer/homepage. This will help them communicate the key concepts of the film.

### Croxteth's checklist: Promoting the project

- Contact local radio or newspapers when you are about to start a project. Local media coverage is important, particularly when the school is in an area that generally gets a bad press.
- Promote the work by making a display, if possible near the school entrance to engage the interest of people coming through the school.
- When it comes to premiere time, control the ticket distribution. Use posters advertising the event to get the film seen by as many people as possible from the local community. Engage other departments in the school.
- Finally, ensure you have a good time the night of the premiere. The kids will be looked after by their parents so it's time to let your hair down, and feel proud of your achievements.



## Evaluation

There are many ways to evaluate an active project like filmmaking:

### Evaluating the process

During the process of filmmaking, students will have had to collaborate and negotiate in order to work effectively with each other.

- This process could be assessed informally by keeping a video diary so participants can record how they feel.
- Students could use graffiti walls to keep track of how they feel. These could then be looked at later to review how things changed.
- Students could write down their expectations and concerns at the beginning of the project and review them at the end - discussing whether the areas they identified were relevant throughout, or whether priorities changed.
- Peer review could be encouraged so that students feedback their experiences of working with each other. This can be a sensitive area to develop and the teacher should use tact in leading discussions along these lines. Encouraging students to use a 'feedback sandwich' (good point/bad point/good point) helps to maintain a positive focus.

- Students could review their own participation by reflecting on a few key concepts or roles. For example ask them to think about:

- o Who took leadership roles and why?
- o Who helped sort out problems between other team members, how and why?
- o Who helped everyone get organised?

### Evaluating the film

As well as evaluating the process, students should also be concerned with the quality of the film. Does it achieve what they set out to do?

- Once editing is complete, students could view the film individually, noting comments about the film and their role in it. Students could then come together to discuss the film, identifying elements they are pleased with, and areas they would approach differently.
- At public screenings with other students or wider audiences, students could design a questionnaire asking for feedback about the film, or particular aspects.
- The project team could ask media studies students to analyse the film and give them detailed feedback.
- Feedback from this evaluation process could be collected and summarised, ready for the next filmmaking project.

And, when it's all over... CELEBRATE!