

# StrictEternum Lesson Ideas

## Questions

- Where is the film set?
- What do you think the film title means?
- How is pace increased as the film progresses?
- How many patterns and mathematical symbols can you spot, what are they, and what do they represent?
- What philosophical view does the film offer of married life and/or human existence?

## Activities

*Please note: It is suggested that this film is suitable for all secondary school students. That said these activities are intended simply as suggestions for the type of activities that might be used with this film for a variety of different age groups. They should therefore be adapted by the teacher to the age and experience of their specific class.*

### Pre-Watching Activities

- Develop a vocabulary list relating to a house and its contents.
- Develop a vocabulary list relating to key mathematical and geometrical terms.
- Look at the use of French prepositions and compare them to English ones.
- Research the interest in philosophical concepts such as the Absurd and Existentialism in the work of French authors like Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir or in the work of filmmakers working in France, such as Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson or Luis Bunuel.

### Watching Activities

#### Sound and Image

- Play the film as audio only.
  - What images are brought to mind?
  - What story have they suggested?
  - Where is the film set?
  - What is the order of events?
  - How many words/phrases can they understand?
  - List any words they recognise.
  - What impressions or information does the soundtrack give?
- Repeat the listening exercise.

- How many more words or phrases did they recognise?
- Now play the film with audio and image.
- Where is the film set and why do they think this?
- Even not understanding the language totally, did the film tell its' own story?
- Ask them to watch carefully and remember the sequence of events. On a sheet ask them to identify the main sequence of the film either in pictures or words. Then ask them to identify which sounds relate to which section.
- Watch film up to moment where man and woman strap selves into chairs (05:40).
- Play true/false game using vocabulary pupils already know to do with houses, weather and activities, with teacher making a statement and pupils showing a piece of paper with a tick or cross to indicate whether statement is true or false.
- Ask pupils to write their own sentence about the life/clothes/house from the characters and play the cocktail-party game to see if they can find someone with the same sentence or with a contradictory sentence.
- Watch film again in small segments, stopping at 01:15, 02:13, 03:20 and 05:40. Ask pupils each time in English what they think is happening and what clues they can pick up that this is not natural.
- Talk about music-box soundtrack and various examples of world-within-worlds (Russian dolls, boxes, mirrors, matching wallpaper and dress), repeated objects and phrases, and so on. At end ask what they think will happen next.
- Watch film to end. Talk about 'Infini' on side of boat. Ask pupils in pairs to draw and label in French another house or world that the boat and sauna might be within.
- Watch without sound and without subtitles. After watching the complete film, talk about their reactions.
  - What did they think was the story?
  - What sounds do they imagine would be in the film?
  - Now watch with sound without subtitles
  - What are the reactions now?
  - Ask each group to tell their version of the story,
  - Were there any words they knew?
  - How much did the soundtrack inform the watcher as to the story?
- Now watch with sound and subtitles.
  - Compare their versions of the story to the film.
  - Did they guess what was going to happen?
  - If so, how did this happen?
  - Describe the elements which go together to help to tell the story.

## Freeze Frame

- Use the video pause button to help the class discuss each shot. Discuss What they can see in the 'frozen' image; how the elements of the image are positioned in the frame; how lighting and colour affect what is seen. Distance between camera and subjects; camera angle; movement of the camera during a shot.
  - How many shots are there? How does the sequence of shots build up information and ideas or impressions?
  - What and/or who can you see in the shot?
  - Why is the shot composed like this?
  - What difference would it make if it were composed differently?
  - Where do you think the camera is?
  - How many cameras do you think there are?
  - Why is the camera positioned in this way?
  - What difference would it make if it were somewhere else?
  - When does the camera move from one shot to the next?
  - How does one shot differ from another?
  - What can you tell about the time, place and setting?
  - How does the setting/ lighting contribute to the atmosphere/meaning of the shot?
  - What can you tell about the characters from how they are dressed?
  - What impression is given of the characters by their costume/ body language?
  - Does it say anything about their status or relationship?

## Spot the Shots

- After their first viewing of a short moving image sequence, pupils guess at the number of shots used.
- On second viewing, they mark each change in shot, scene location and sound (use pause button if necessary).
- On third viewing they look carefully at how the shot transitions are created, e.g. cuts, mixes, fades, wipes and whether the sound transitions happen at the same places. They should also time each shot.
  - Does the camera show us something new each time the shot changes?
  - Why does the shot change at that point?
  - What new information or impression does the change provide?
  - Did you notice more than one way of moving from one shot to the next?
  - Did the length of the shots get quicker or slower at any point in the sequence?
  - Why are the shots of this length? Does the overall time scheme of the shots build up a rhythm or a pattern?

## Camera Movements

- Camera movements in this film are highly significant in terms of building the theme, pace, revelation and character self-recognition. Use the pause button to discuss the different types and shapes of the movement and what they do. Remember that camera movements can follow a moving object or a still object to different effect. They can also be combined with zooms or focus pulls to convey even more specific meanings.

## Analysing

- Working as a class carry out a full grid analysis on the film (Similarities, Surprises, Patterns and Puzzles) to try and determine the different themes and meanings of the film. To help you in this process here is a list of prompt questions to help the process along:

## Cinematography, Editing and Production Design

- Watch the film several times.
  - How is the camera used to denote speed and movement?
  - How is it used to show emotion and suspense?
  - How was the movement of the camera used to denote the loop of time and existence the characters were in?
  - How many cameras were involved in the filming?
  - Do you think the camera was handheld at any time?
- The use of colour is very carefully chosen. What style of design does it reflect?
- What feelings did the colours of the fabric and wallpaper evoke?
- Did the colours of the work-suit of the man complement or clash with the main colour scheme?
- The boxes were a different colour to the wallpaper. What impact did this have on the expectations of the viewer?
- Watch the film without the sound and list the different edits. Time the edits and note how the next section of film is presented e.g. fade or dissolve.
- Now watch the film again with sound and note how the edits link with music or sound effects. Watch the film at high speed to get another insight into the editing process.

## Sound

- The soundtrack is an integral part of the film. Listen several times to the soundtrack without the visuals. What story does it tell?
- How does the soundtrack help the narrative along?
- What feeling does the soundtrack evoke?
- Are there any sound effects and if so, what are they and when do they occur?
- Watch the film without sound – what difference does it make to your understanding/enjoyment?

## Character

- There are two main characters in the film. What are your reactions to them?
  - What does his spotless and colourful work suit tell us about the role of the man?
  - Why does he look cautious as he enters the house?
  - Why does the man look uncomfortable when he opened the boxes?
  - Identify the range of emotions the woman goes through and how are these conveyed?
- There is a third character which appears to be like an elephant in the room. What is the doll/girl there for? And why do the eyes open?
- What glimpses do the couple reveal as to how they arrived in the house?
- What is their understanding of their situation?
- There are photographs on the mantelpiece. What do these tell the audience?

## Narrative Structure

- What are the main elements of the story?
- Could you simplify and re-tell the story in three sections?
- Could you do this again using simple French?
- Change one event in the story and discuss how this might change the outcome.
- When the first twist to the story is made apparent, how do you think the story will be resolved?
- After the second twist, what did you expect to happen next?
- What do you think to the ending of the film? Did you find the ending satisfactory, intriguing or incomplete?
- What alternative endings could you use?

## Setting

- When the film starts, where do you think the film is set?
- Does the landscape give any clues as to where specifically the action is taking place?
- When the man walks into the house, what is there which is odd about the place?
- The interior of the living room is set in a particular way. Can you identify as many odd or strange things you would not expect to see in a living room?
- When we watch the film, are there any clues to tell us which country or decade the film is in?

## Symbolism

- There are many symbolic references in the film. Can you identify these?
- Which is the strongest reference?
- There is also a highly symbolic camera movement, can you recognise what it is?
- What does the 'doll' in the corner represent? What part does the television with only one programme play in the story? What did the gnome represent?

## Inference

- The clothes of the girl/doll were not in keeping with the style of the decor. Why do you think she was dressed in this way?
- What was the connection between the large size doll/girl in the room and the doll in the smallest box? There were 3 references in the film to the girl/doll. What were these? The woman looked at the girl/doll once. What did her look tell us? How were the Russian dolls in the room linked to woman and child?

## Extension Activities

- Watch the film twice from 03:20 to 04:20. Ask pupils in pairs or groups to create and possibly perform a dialogue for the two characters in English.
- Ask pupils to imagine the rest of the house this couple might live in and to create an estate agent's description for it using a dictionary where necessary.

## Follow-up and Cross-Curricular Activities

### Writing and Reading

- Read the lyrics from Little Boxes by Malvina Reynolds (1962) and write a modern version
- Talk about boxes and write a poem about the images.
- Look at metaphors which refer to boxes or being hemmed in.
- Describe a box.
- Write a short story about finding a box and what happens if it is opened.
- Think about eternity and infinity. Write a passage describing your feelings about these ideas.
- Research world folklore on labyrinths and mazes.

### Literacy

- Write a synopsis of the film.
- Research several French philosophers and their interpretation of eternity and infinity.

- Design a poster advertising the film.
- Research words linked to geometry infinity and eternity.
- Write a short poem in French based on repetition of sounds or phrases.
- Listen several times to the conversation between the man and the woman and identify any changes in the gender of the words as they address each other.

## RMPS

- Secrets:
  - Why are so many boxes within boxes and cupboards hidden from view?
  - Why was the girl/doll never mentioned?
  - What did the family photograph tell us?
- Communication
  - How much do we really listen and how much do we really say? Use the film as a springboard to talk about communication.
- Eternity
  - What does 'eternity' mean in everyday, mathematical and religious terms?
  - Is there such a thing as eternity?
- Matriarchy and Fertility
  - The Russian dolls are supposed to represent the matriarchal structure as well as fertility. Are there any symbols available in French or UK culture that refer to matriarchy and fertility today?