

# The Pencils [*Les Crayons*] Lesson Ideas

## Questions

- How do the filmmakers tell us that everything is not as it seems?
- List any incongruous shots or other cinematographic signals.
- How would you describe the area of the city the children live in?
- How does the colour scheme in the film change as the true nature of the narrative is revealed?
- How would you describe the genre and tone of this film?

## Activities

*Please note: It is suggested that this film is suitable for Primary school students, as well as S1 and S2. The following activity suggestions are intended to be indicative of the type of activities that might be used with this film for a variety of different age groups. The activities should therefore be adapted by the teacher to the age and experience of their specific class.*

### Pre-Watching Activities

- Revise or learn names of classroom objects (furniture and items from pencil case) through a game such as 'Simon Says point to' ('Jacques a dit, indiquez la porte', etc...).
- Learn or revise words relating to where people live and the rooms in a house.
- Learn names of different shot, cuts and angles in French.

### Watching Activities

#### Speaking and Listening

- Only show the film up until she sits at the desk and just before the music changes.
- Watch the first half of the film and discuss what is happening and what do they think will happen?
  - What clues do they have about the genre from the music?
  - What do they think about the kiss? How did they react?
- Play the first 20 seconds after the music changes.
  - What does the change in music tell them?

- What is happening now?
  - Where are the voices coming from?
  - Talk in small groups, predict the next part and tell the rest of the class.
- Play the rest of the film.
  - Talk about their reactions to the film.
  - Did they like the twist to the direction?
- Alternatively, only show the film up until she sits at the desk and just before the music changes.
- In pairs, develop an identikit for the two children. Guess their names, age and where they live.
- Work with another pair and read out their versions to each other. If they are confident, they can write and read their work in French.
- Predict what will happen next.
- Play the second part of the film.
- As soon as the film finishes ask them to write 6 words to describe their feelings in large letters and hold up as they read them out.
- Ask them to search for French words which might correspond to their reaction. Think about an ordinary object (s) in the classroom and work out a story line which turns into a horror or thriller.
- Write a review of the film from the point of view as a crayon filmgoer or critic.
- Discuss with children how film communicates sense of romance (music, environment, old-fashioned cottage-like houses, close-up of faces, girl's clothes and hair...) and why setting and styling may have been specifically chosen by the filmmaker rather than stereotypical. Which fairy tale does her dropping the bag as she runs away remind you of?
- Watch again and tell children to try to remember as many items as possible from girl's bedroom. Freeze frame on overall view of bedroom.
- Ask children in groups to make a list of as many items as they can in French, from vocabulary they already know and by consulting dictionary.
- Play 'Jacques a dit' again introducing new vocabulary where it is available in classroom or on screen.

## Analysing

- Watch the film several times. Discuss the cinematic techniques used in the making of the film. To help you in this process here is a list of prompt questions to help the process along:

### Cinematography and Production Design

- What sort of camera techniques were used in the first part of the film when they were walking along?
- How do you think they filmed them walking without the image being shaky?
- Watch the film through several times and identify how many different camera angles were used.
- What were the main colours around them as they were walking?
- What colours were their clothes/hair/eyes?
- What colour was her bag?
- What were the dominant colours in the bedroom?

### Editing

- Look at the film closely. How many cuts are there?
- Choose 20 seconds and note the edits.
- Can you use the correct terminology to explain the sequence?
- Is there anything that you would have done differently?

### 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

- How important was the relationship between the boy and the girl in the story?
- What did the film tell us about them as individuals?
- What did the film maker want us to feel about the crayons?
- What do you think the crayons were saying to each other about the film? Can you identify different tones in their conversation?

### Narrative Structure

- What sort of story is this?
- What are the key events?
- What time of year do you think it was?

- What did you feel when you discovered the twist to the story?
- Did you like the way the story turned around?
- Can you think of more films/stories which went in a different way to expected?

### Setting

- Ask children what similarities and differences they can detect between the setting and a similar setting in the UK (differences might include letterbox, walking on right-hand side of road, no uniform if coming home from school).
- Where about was this film? Was it in France and, if so, how do you know?
- If not, where else could it have been?
- How different was their street and house to yours?

### Symbolism

- 'Sugar and spice'. 'Don't judge a book by its cover.' Look at English and French proverbs.

## Follow-up and Cross-Curricular Activities

### Art

- Work in pairs. Set up photographs to depict each person in a romantic, gentle setting and then the opposite – in a scary or terrifying pose. Use the images as the central point and draw/paint or develop a computer image to place them in. Look at examples of art from the Romantics and compare with portraits by Pablo Picasso or George Braques.
- Design their own images for Hansel and Gretel, Red Riding Hood, Beauty and the Beast, etc.
- Ask children to draw their own bedroom and label all the objects they draw in French or to write a description of their room, consulting a dictionary as necessary. Point out un/une/des and encourage to use correct form.

### Literacy

- Design a poster advertising the film using a few words or phrases in French.
- Cut out a red heart and put English and French words for love and romance.
- Draw and cut out the shape of a large crayon and repeat as above but words of horror/tension.
- Draw words to represent sound or meaning so love might be red/pink/fluffy shapes and scary might be thin and tight and blotchy.
- Revise vocabulary by asking children to draw four items from the room and play 'Loto' (bingo); using flashcards to play 'Kim's game' (where children try to remember position of cards turned face down), 'Pass the parcel' (where children name the item they draw from a hat), 'Derrière mon dos j'ai...' (where children guess which flashcard teacher is hiding), or asking children with named flashcard to stand ('La/le/les xxx, levez-vous').

- Ask children to work in groups to make a presentation about their bedrooms, each child beginning with 'Dans ma chambre j'ai...' and miming each item as they say the words.
- Use similar games to learn/revise vocabulary for items in pencil case.
- Tell children name for diary in French is 'un journal intime'. Talk about links between words in English and French (journal/journal, intime/intimate).
- Look at a diary. Use as an opportunity to revise days of week/months through songs and/or games.
- Using a folded sheet of A4, ask children to create their own diary. Design a cover, inside cover a page of 'Je me présente...', on facing page they could write a secret (in English) or older children could write a diary entry in French about something they have done/what they are wearing/what they have eaten using vocabulary they know.

#### Knowledge About Language

- Practice saying words or phrases in the style of their meaning (e.g. love/amour). These can be repeated in English and French.

#### Intercultural Understanding

- Look at some folk tales which combine love and horror/Gothic (e.g. La Belle at La Bête). Show an extract from Jean Cocteau's film and compare with the Disney animation Beauty and the Beast.
- How many stories do the class know which combine love and terror?
- Look at the fairy tales they know and identify the core juxtaposition of love/romance and scariness. Then read a few tales from France and compare differences/similarities.
- What are the essential ingredients which go to make a fairy tale?
- Use their own images (see Art) and design their own fairy tale around them.

#### Sound and Music

- Listen to a selection of romantic music from Beethoven to popular chart music.
- Describe why these sounds are associated with love and romance.
- Listen to some classic film romance themes and ask them to guess what the story is, where and when it is set.
- Now compare this with sounds used to set a horror or thriller scene.
- How important is the silence in between?
- Can they make their own romantic music?
- Compose their own theme tune for their fairy tale.
- Using their story and their images, work with a partner or individually to make a 30 second - 1 minute theme tune which incorporates romantic and scary music. Play the music to the class. An extension could be that a few combine to make a longer version.