Anatomy of a Scene from *East of Eden*

**Intended Classroom Setting:** AP Literature & Composition course, after reading *East of Eden*

**Rationale:** *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck is a sprawling, epic novel that follows the family history of the Trasks and Hamiltons. Due to its length, adapting the text to film is an ambitious undertaking. The 1955 film adaptation by Elia Kazan truncated the novel by focusing on Cal Trask and eliminating substantial parts of the text, such as the focus on the Hamiltons and the loyal character of Lee Chong; for that reason, watching the film (as is the case for most great works of literature) does not sufficiently act as a substitute for reading the novel.

However, this film version provides an excellent character study of Cal, and the various techniques employed by the director work well for a comparison of mood established in the novel versus the film. Many teachers will not have time for a full screening of the movie, but there are scenes that lend themselves to a close “reading” of the film, a revisiting of the text, and a thoughtful comparison. John Golden, teacher and author of *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom* mentions that students, without realizing, are already quite adept at analyzing film. These critical skills are similar to what a strong reader uses when analyzing text.

**Essential Questions**

What elements of film influence the mood of a scene?

How does a director interpret the source material, and how does it affect the audience’s understanding of the text?

**Common Core State Standards**:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5: Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Resources:**

Masterpiece Film in the Classroom: A Guide for Teachers:

<http://www-tc.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/teachers/guides/masterpiece_film_in_the_classroom.pdf>

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/learningresources/fic\_adaptation.html

Film Terminology/Topics/Assignments

http://mseffie.com/assignments/film\_unit/film\_studies.html

Anatomy of a Scene (PDF):

<https://static01.nyt.com/images/blogs/learning/pdf/2010/20100218anatomyofascene.pdf>

Anatomy of a Scene main page:

<http://www.nytimes.com/video/anatomy-of-a-scene>

Scenes from the movie

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoKRiuo8AWUbBCNyYKDBC_S>

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| [“Talk to me, Father”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpO_eNT9StE&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoKRiuo8AWUbBCNyYKDBC_S&index=1) | End of Chapter 38, pp. 446 - 447 |
| [“Nobody Holds Me”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG6C9JuB4YA&index=4&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoKRiuo8AWUbBCNyYKDBC_S)[“Get Him Out of Here”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6_Ti4ntV7g&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoKRiuo8AWUbBCNyYKDBC_S&index=2) | Chapter 39, pp. 458 - 462 |
| [“Say Hello to Your Mother”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2SskRLd4F4&index=8&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoKRiuo8AWUbBCNyYKDBC_S) | Chapter 49 - 50, pp. 542 - 546 |
| [“Give Me a Good Life”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfOrY7CidTA&index=7&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoKRiuo8AWUbBCNyYKDBC_S) | Chapter 49, p. 540 |
| [“You Stay With Me”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ro_k0jgMvKU&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoKRiuo8AWUbBCNyYKDBC_S&index=10) | Chapter 55, pp. 599 - 601 |

**Day 1 - 2**

Depending on the students’ level of experience with film analysis, the teacher may want to provide some background on film terminology. As a class, teachers and students should analyze a scene together. The Anatomy of a Scene activities from *The New York Times* are useful for such an activity, or the teacher may choose to start with a scene from *East of Eden*.

Homework: View assigned scene from *East of Eden* (selected clips are available on Youtube – or you may provide them viewing time in class)

**Day 3**

In groups, students will discuss/review the selected scenes from *East of Eden* and use the Anatomy of a Scene graphic organizer to break down the important parts. Ideally, the clips should be viewed multiple times – also try having students listen to the clips without the visuals to emphasize the dialogue and sound effects and watch the clips muted to focus on camera techniques.

Homework: Reread and annotate the scene from the text in preparation for a scene comparison discussion the following day.

**Day 4 – 5**

In the same groups, students will discuss the effect and mood created by the film version of the scene and compare and contrast it with what is provided in the text. Consider having students write a group essay or use a Venn diagram.

Teachers may choose to end the unit here, or move to the next activity:

**Day 6 - ??**

Either in the same groups or with student-selected groups, students will choose a scene from *East of Eden* to adapt using the film techniques they learned about. This will require:

- Adapting the text to a script with dialogue and stage directions

- Creating a storyboard

- Filming (can be done outside of class)

- Editing/Post-production

- Showtime!