

Researching Women and Film for A2

The topic of 'Women and Film' is a research option for OCR A2 Media students in Unit 2734. It could also form a topic for AQA Unit 5 or WJEC Unit 4 (but these must refer to contemporary media). A woman director could be the basis for an auteur research project for WJEC Film A2 Unit FS3. In these three pages, *itp* offers a range of guidance and resource information to help in supporting student research into the topic.

We are very grateful that **Vivienne Clark** has given us permission to publish some of the material she first prepared for the BFI Conference in July 2001 which addressed OCR Unit 2734. She has since updated and 'uploaded' material to OCR's website at http://ital-dev.ucl.ac.uk/listsupport/ocr-mediastudies-a/docs_html where a complete version can be found.

General Points

- Check your chosen spec and its support advice carefully for definitive requirements – the specs have crucial differences.
- Women and film' certainly need not mean exclusively 'feminism and film', nor should it be dominated by secondary research into academic sources.
- You could encourage students to investigate the relationships between women, film and other media, such as the music and fashion industries and in magazines (for men, women and film fans), on television, in games software and on the internet.
- Devising their own individual research briefs is essential before students start, together with meaningful consideration of primary research sources and methods of evaluating them.
- At Ravens Wood School (which has the full range from grade U to A students), we will not be teaching any topic content at all.
- Every student will prepare an individual research brief and title (we've designed our own proposal form), each one will be different, even if they choose

to study the same topic.

- They've been given a free choice of topic initially, we just went through what the possible areas of study could be under each of the eight topics, but they seem to be narrowing down to five so far.
- Our emphasis is to make this project accessible - consider the level of your own expectations of this paper.
- Students are asked to a) write an account of how they went about their research, the strengths & weaknesses of their research methods, what kinds of primary and secondary research they used and b) what they learned from it – had their original research brief changed? What were their conclusions – a manageable and flexible aim. The more focused, the better!
- Lesson content will be occupied with monitoring individual progress and teaching/practising research and writing/ timed response skills etc.
- We won't provide all research resources, but pointers to sources and skeleton bibliographies to get them started.
- Differentiation by task is an important opportunity here to ensure that each student has a manageable and engaging research project.
- The OCR spec for this unit does not require a text-based answer – it is more thematic by nature, although texts may be referred to as evidence or as locations of discussion.

Suggestions

These are not titles, just ideas to suggest the potential range of research for this topic and to suggest how differentiation by task can be achieved.

Look for opportunities for active primary research for every proposal. They will need some help to understand what primary research means.

- Choose a female actor or director and consider issues (industry, creative, thematic, audience reception, representational etc.) in their work – this invites consideration of equality of opportunity and what obstacles (cultural, financial, institutional) they might

encounter and their responses to their positions in the industry. Kate Winslet might be a good choice who has worked in mainstream and non-Hollywood contexts and has been written about frequently regarding her image. A comparison of the work of directors Jane Campion and Kathryn Bigelow is a different approach.

- Identify industry strategies (high concept marketing - how women are used to sell films etc.) or preoccupations (such as star and body image) and their effects on spectators (female and male). e.g. how do female spectators respond to female heroes such as Ripley and Lara Croft, compared with male responses?
- Female roles, archetypes, casting, examining how (and why) they change over time.
- Look at critical and popular criticism of men and women in films (the two *Sight and Sound Readers* - see Page 15 - offer excellent material to contrast) and account for the differences and similarities.
- Consider national variations in gender representation or stars (e.g. France, China, Bollywood etc.) and offer reasons.
- Examine synergy of fashion, film promotion, men's and women's magazines, marketing and music (*Destiny's Child, Charlie's Angels, Tomb Raider, Ericsson mobile phones* etc.).
- Consider the relationships (thematic, industry, marketing, star etc.) between television and film (e.g. Sarah Michelle Gellar – *Buffy/Cruel Intentions/Maybeline cosmetics*).
- Women as spectators (of any kinds of film) - at the cinema and at home.
- Students will be able to offer their own titles if they understand the wide possibilities. The key thing is to focus on the **relationship** between women and film, as variously defined above. (Editor's Note: Vivienne will be offering INSET on Women and Film in the Summer and a student event in the Autumn – contact BFI Education, details on back cover.)
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