

Unit:	<b><i>Pitch to the Student Film Project</i></b>		Teacher:	
Term:		Duration of Unit:		Class:
<p>This exercise could easily be utilised in English, Drama, Digital Media and Photographic classes.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Outcomes: <u>(English)</u></p> <p>4.3 responds and composes texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis and pleasure</p> <p>4.4 uses and describes language forms and features, and structures of texts appropriate to different purposes, audiences and contexts</p> <p>4.5 makes informed language choices to shape meaning with accuracy, clarity and coherence</p> <p>4.11 uses, reflects on and assesses individual and collaborative skills for learning</p> <p>5.6 experiments with different ways of imaginatively and interpretively transforming experience, information and ideas into texts</p> <p>5.9 demonstrates understanding of the ways texts reflect personal and public worlds</p> <p>5.11 uses, reflects on, assesses and adapts their individual and collaborative skills for learning with increasing independence and effectiveness</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Outcomes: <u>(Drama)</u></p> <p>5.1.1 manipulates the elements of drama to create belief, clarity and tension in character, role, situation and action</p> <p>5.1.2 contributes, selects, develops and structures ideas in improvisation and playbuilding</p> <p>5.1.3 devises, interprets and enacts drama using scripted and unscripted material or text</p> <p>5.1.4 explores, structures and refines ideas using dramatic forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques, theatrical conventions and technologies</p> <p>5.2.1 applies acting and performance techniques expressively and collaboratively to communicate dramatic meaning</p>				

5.2.2 selects and uses performance spaces, theatre conventions and production elements appropriate to purpose and audience

5.3.1 responds to, reflects on and evaluates elements of drama, dramatic forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques and theatrical conventions

5.3.3 analyses and evaluates the contribution of individuals and groups to processes and performances in drama using relevant drama concepts and terminology

Outcomes: (Photographic & Digital Media)

5.1 develops range and autonomy in selecting and applying photographic and digital conventions and procedures to make photographic and digital works

5.2 makes photographic and digital works informed by their understanding of the function of and relationships between artist-artwork-world-audience

5.3 makes photographic and digital works informed by an understanding of how the frames affect meaning

5.4 investigates the world as a source of ideas, concepts and subject matter for photographic and digital works

5.5 makes informed choices to develop and extend concepts and different meanings in their photographic and digital works

5.6 selects appropriate procedures and techniques to make and refine photographic and digital works

## **Welcome to the Dungog Film Festival's Oovie Student Film Project.**

Dungog Film Festival and Oovie are running a film mentorship program, where your school could make a short film, utilising a package of goods and services valued at \$47,600.

To get involved your students need to write and submit a pitch for a 5 minute short film. Then three schools will be selected to proceed through the mentorship program.

To get you started, we've devised some lesson plan ideas. These are our thoughts for educational ways to incorporate this project into classes, where your students can learn about pitching, story structure and filmmaking.

We hope you find this useful, productive and fun and remember every famous director, actor and writer honed their skills on short films.

### **1. What is a pitch?**

Before a screenwriter or filmmaker can make a film, they need to be able to convince a whole bunch of people that their idea is worth getting behind financially or artistically. These include the all important producers, investors, actors and funding bodies who facilitate an idea becoming a film.

With every idea, the first step is to write a pitch that outlines the writer's thoughts and intentions:

- The pitch is a summary of the idea for a film – it's intended to intrigue and captivate.
- It is usually no longer than one computer page in length, and is delivered as a 2-3 minute live 'pitch' or speech.
- A pitch is not a blow-by-blow account of a film's plot (aka synopsis)
- It should include a couple of key concepts, images and characters that are fundamental to the film
- It should tantalise and leave people wanting more

### **2. What to include in a pitch?**

- Very brief summary of the plot – an overview of the beginning, middle and end
- How is the theme, *Tell Us Your Local Secret*, incorporated into the story?
- Where is it set - what time and place?
- Does your film have a special meaning or message for audiences that give it an edge? If so, tell us what that is.
- What is the film's audience? This is often a hard question, but it's an important one.
- Summary of the main characters – why will audiences enjoy watching them and their story?
- Describe your characters, we need to empathise with them and understand their motivations, so help us get to know them a bit.
- Remember that this film is only 5 minutes in length

### **3. Suggested Class Activities:**

#### PRACTISING PITCHES

- Nominate an Australian film that all the students would know – *Crocodile Dundee* for example
- Students spend 10 minutes writing a short pitch for this film
- Going around the class, each student stands up and delivers their pitch – in two minutes only
- You'll be amazed by how different the pitches can be for one film

#### VISUAL PITCHING

- The class is presented with 5-10 large colour photographs or magazine cuttings
- In groups of 3-5, students come up with a story drawn from these images
- Each group then tell their stories to the class, using those photographs in any order that they wish

#### ACTING OUT A PITCH

- Students choose their favourite Aussie film
- Working in pairs, the students decide on a 2 minute scene in the film
- They make up the dialogue as best they can and rehearse it
- They act it out for the class and at the end, the class has to guess the film

#### Discussion Points:

- Which story worked best? Why?
- Who was able to be the most creative with their ideas?
- How were these ideas best conveyed to the audience?
- What distinguishes an effective pitch from an ineffective one?
- Would you invest your money and time in this new idea?

## **THE STUDENT FILM PROJECT PITCH:**

If you've tried one or more of the above exercises, or any variation, your class will be ready to write their pitch for the Student Film Project.

Here are the basic steps – students can work in groups, or they can work alone. We recommend groups, so that the pitches that are submitted by each school allow a range of people's ideas to be involved. Filmmaking is a collaborative process, but that said, a lot of writers are alone when they begin with an idea.

1. The theme is *Tell Us Your Local Secret*
2. Students should be encouraged to use their imagination, but to be careful of using real names or situations – the best writers use real life and change it, embellish on it – it's called 'artistic license'
3. The one page pitch should be made up of approx. 250 words about the story and approx. 250 words about the main characters – these are a guide, but the entire pitch should be 500 words max
4. Students should remember to talk about the setting and images they want to present to an audience, it's not just about the dialogue or plot. Film is a visual medium!
5. Once you have looked at the pitches, you may choose up to 3 of the most exciting and dynamic ideas (you can submit 1 or 2 as well)
6. By Monday 13 December, 2010 you must email a completed Entry Form per pitch to [students@dungogfilmfestival.org](mailto:students@dungogfilmfestival.org)

## **What is a short film?**

Short films operate under many of the same rules as narrative features – the key components are character, structure and composition. The integral aim to short-form filmmaking is to capture an audience's attention. Filmmakers need to clearly establish their characters and convince an audience to fully invest in the world they have created.

The films that students will be pitching for the Student Film Project are to be approximately five minutes in length. This doesn't leave much room for fat – everything in the film (and therefore every pitch) should be specific and relevant to the idea. Anything that helps streamline the story is a good thing – everything that can be discarded should be! One of the most important tools in ensuring that a short film is as taut as it can be is a good understanding of *script structure*.

## **What is script structure?**

Good script structure is essential for every screenplay and every film. A strong structure provides a film with forward momentum, and makes characters and story clear to an audience. Think of the foundations of a house – if it's not well built, everything on top of it will crumble. The classic three-act script structure is important to know, and is invaluable when writing any kind of film: short or feature length. Here is a brief summary:

- ACT ONE sets up the story, orientates the audience to the characters and their world and (hopefully) captures the audience's interest. The first minutes of any film are vital – often the filmmaker uses images and music, without any or sparse dialogue, to ease the audience into the film. A dialogue heavy-scene first off might confuse an audience instead of intriguing them! The first act of a film is when the CATALYST occurs and the film's CENTRAL QUESTION is established.
  - \* CATALYST: the big event that gets the film off and running, and which effectively starts the film's story (e.g. A murder occurs)
  - \* CENTRAL QUESTION: The key question, usually connected to the central character, that will be answered at the film's climax (e.g. Will Harry and Sally end up together? Will the man find his wife's murderer?)
- ACT TWO is the meat of any film – it is the section in which the film and its characters are explored and expanded (back story, motivation etc). Though there is no hard and fast rule regarding where each act ends and another begins, a general indicator is the key TURNING POINTS that occur in your story. Each turning point in a film raises the stakes and adds a sense of urgency to a story, as it moves toward its conclusion.
- ACT THREE. The climax to any film is usually followed by a RESOLUTION that ties up all the loose ends. Sometimes, of course, a film's RESOLUTION works in a very different way, opening up as many new questions as it answers (*Memento*) or forcing us to completely re-evaluate everything we have just seen (*The Sixth Sense*). Conventionally, however, a film's CLIMAX and RESOLUTION is where the central question is answered and the tension finally eases, thereby allowing the audience to experience relief or CATHARSIS.

### **Suggested In-Class Activities:**

- Many students may have never seen, let alone made, a short film. Dungog Film Festival's trailer could be shown to the class as an example of a short film (three minutes long) that although it is part documentary, the stories are told cinematically via a narrator.
- In groups of 4-5, students come up with an idea for a short film that incorporates the theme 'Tell Us Your Local Secret'. Each group then has to present their idea to the class in no more than five minutes.

### **Discussion Points:**

- What were the trailer/film's strengths? Weaknesses?
- What worked and what didn't in the students' pitches?
- Was the theme 'Tell Us Your Local Secret' used in an original manner? Was it a central part of the film or an afterthought, tacked on?
- Which pitch held the audience's attention most successfully? Why?

Each student should now have the tools to write their pitch. Good luck and thanks for entering the Student Film Project. See you at Dungog!