

Understanding Film Technique Essay : Assessment 2

Jurassic Park and little Miss sunshine

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The question I'm going to be talking about in this essay is to **'Discuss the use of visual storytelling in TWO essential texts, examining the way in which the various cinematic elements e.g. framing, lighting, camera movement, are effective in developing the Narrative.'**

The first film I'm going to discuss is Jurassic Park. Spielberg is a master of visual storytelling and uses scale and Framing as a large aspect to the film. Spielberg uses both the aspect ratio and camera movement to capture the large scale dinosaurs, building structures and mountainous areas around the Island. in order to show the audience how extreme the Jurassic period would be.



Firstly, aspect ratio has been used extremely well by Spielberg as most action films are shot in the 2.35:1 aspect ratio, It makes tight shots feel even tighter and the greater emphasis is put on lateral movement, in which most action films are built around. Jurassic Park on the other hand was shot in a 1.85:1 aspect ratio, giving the audience and extra 24% more in the frame. This extra 24% is used to an extreme advantage in Jurassic Park as it fully shows off the sheer scale of the dinosaurs in comparison to the size of the humans. Whenever it's only people in shot they usually scaled in a medium shot however when the dinosaur is introduced Camera tracks the people in shot towards the dinosaur in the background. By doing this, Spielberg is able to capture the difference in scale of both the people and dinosaurs. For example, in the film there is a scene where the characters Alan Grant (played by Sam Neil) and Ellie Sattler (played by Laura Dern) stand up in the Jeep (looking in shock), climb out, and walk to the right of the frame the camera tracks their movement and when doing so the tail of the dinosaur and slowly the rest of the body joins the shot. The brachiosaurus is placed further back in the shot in order for the audience to see the full scale of the dinosaur, the greater aspect ratio allows the audience to witness the Dinosaurs full scale as it stands up on two legs. Also the Jeep is shown at the start of the shot instead of the two characters walking into frame as it also helps the audience to visualise the comparison of the brachiosaurus to a large vehicle. Spielberg has perfectly used not only humans but the everyday objects around them to



represent the full scale size are real life dinosaur and to do this has all come from change in aspect ratio.

Spielberg uses many different cinematic elements throughout the film to make the characters feel small or in other words the audience. Before the characters get to the island most shots medium/medium close-ups, however when the characters get to the island, low angles and extreme close-ups are used continuously. This change in style is to intensify this new reality of dinosaurs being real and instigates the horror side of the film. In order to keep this intensity running throughout the film Spielberg uses a mix of three subjects that are continuously used whenever trouble occurs. These subjects include the people, the dinosaurs, and everyday environments e.g. a kitchen, Jeep and the resorts facilities (T-rex in the museum type area). In each



of these locations a person is interrupted by dinosaur and Spielberg created this horror feel by including both the people and the dinosaur within the same frame. The first T-Rex attack has the T-Rex (that enters the shot coming through the roof of the Jeep), a jeep (1 of 2 in the scene) and both the two kids, all in the same shot in order to create more suspense as if the audience is really there. All three of the different facilities mentioned have both the humans and the dinosaurs in the same shot to continue the suspense however the framing would change so that the audience could only see the people being hunted. Spielberg does this to keep that horror theme going as the audience it's made to feel like the characters, not knowing where the



dinosaur is. There will then be a slow track to either sides of the characters where the dinosaur will be waiting causing a jumpscare. Like I previously said, the dinosaurs near the start of visiting Jurassic Park's Island was shot from a distance to capture the pure magic of dinosaurs becoming alive, however with the more antagonistic dinosaurs, Spielberg shots has both the characters and the dinosaurs up close for a

more dramatic effect for the viewer to feel as though they are right in front of them. Even though the aspect ratio is larger than most films, the dinosaur still fills up the whole screen e.g. in the Jeep scene focusing directly the tyrannosaurus' eye.

My final points on the visual storytelling in Jurassic Park, Spielberg's frames within a frame, Shooting close-ups of the dinosaurs which are surrounded by a virtual frame from the surroundings. an example of this would be in the kitchen scene with a velociraptor comes up to the window with it's eye



glaring through in which it breathes heavily on the window just before entering. The use of shooting the dinosaurs through objects such as Windows Hopes to blend this effect in with matching their reality with our own. The frames within a frame belittles the characters as it shows the point of view from the characters therefore asserting that the dinosaurs have the dominance.

Overall the visual storytelling in Jurassic Park is a masterclass of Steven Spielberg's work through his cinematography, Framing and camera movement/placement. Both the people and dinosaurs at least very specifically to capture the size and of the dinosaurs in both and magnificent and terrifying way. Spielberg's use of these elements ensures the audience to question whether they're real and how they're making themselves feel.



I am now going to talk about my second choice of film, 'Little Miss Sunshine'. In the opening scene of the film visual storytelling was effectively used through the visual elements of camera movement, shot sizes, editing pace and camera angles. These elements help the audience to visualize each emotion and want that each character has, only showing this within the first 3 minutes.

The opening instantly introduces the audience to Olive's need and want, to become the next little miss sunshine and does so by starting the film off with an extreme close-up of Olive's (played by Abigail Breslin) eyes with a reflection of the TV showing the show on her glasses. The extreme close-up helps the audience to understand her obsession and desire to be a part of/win the beauty pageant as well as how much the competition has consumed her. The following shot to this is a low angle mid-shot of Olive watching the TV, showing her overwhelming confidence and powerful urge that she has towards winning this competition. This shot is also centralized and almost symmetrical in order to have the audience's full attention on her potentially foreshadowing the audience's attention to Olive by the end of the film just in a different manner. This shot also slowly tracks towards her to create a sense of focus Olive has, again keeping the viewer's attention solely on her by showing how driven she is even at such a young age of 8.



In a separate scene another mid-shot starts off the scene where Frank (played by Steve Carell) encounters his former lover at a petrol station. In this shot Frank's back is shown towards the camera with his hands behind his back, closely holding them together. The distance between the two characters is quite far apart symbolizing the differences in both of their lives, creating an alienating feel from society and confidence loss. Compared to his former lover, who shows how wealthy and developed he is by presenting himself with open arms and a large smile.

Furthermore, in this same scene diegetic sound is used as his former lover leaves the petrol station and Frank goes to buy the porn magazines. The song is well placed to show Frank's distressed feelings of envy after his recent turn of events. The song is about a heterosexual man who loves his wife. As a homosexual man without a partner, the song further adds to his emotional decline and makes him feel though he has failed at accomplishing various different goals in his life, wanting to achieve in the enigma of living in a capitalist society.



Editing pace is used by directors Valerie Faris and Jonathon Dayton as a way to show the increasing chaos that continues to occur to the family. At the start of the movie the editing between Olive watching the beauty pageant show and her dad Richard (played by Greg Kinnear) presenting his 9-step theory is very slow and controlled to represent both the characters being calm and relaxed to the audience. However, this soon changes in the scene where they're setting up the dinner, the family get ready for dinner in a chaotic

manner which is shown by the quick cut editing. The audience at this point is used to this slower paced editing shown at the start of the movie, so once the faster paced editing begins, it reflects confusion and loss of control to the viewer. Furthermore once the family sit down, both Olive and Richard talk about the beauty pageant and the 9 step theory, further showing how consumed both characters are by their goals and how the obsession has taken over them. Instead of talking more generalistically to their family, they just want to talk about what they want/like.

During the dinner seen after everyone's sat down beginning to eat. Once conversation starts, each camera angle of individual people are medium close-ups with the subject placed slightly to the left or right of the centre of the frame. This has been done for each of the family members, in order to create a sense of the family not being whole. The first opening shots consists of Olive, Richard and Dwayne (played by Paul Dano) being central to the remainder of the frames, this is to show the focus and power in which they feel they have over their obsessions. So when the camera framing changes at the dinner table it represents the family being disjointed, not believing in each others dreams. Therefore also to create discomfort towards the audience when Frank begins talking to Olive about why he chose to attempt to kill himself, as well as Richard making strong, close minded comments about the subject in order to get Frank to stop. This whole scene becomes less comfortable to watch as soon as the characters placed to the sides of the frame.



Overall the visual storytelling in Little Miss Sunshine is presented through various visual elements in order to represent each of the characters emotional desire and how their goals have consumed them, leading themselves further away from the bond with their family, however by the end, each of the characters give up their obsessions and become closer as a family sending an overall message to the audience about societies control through career driven choices.