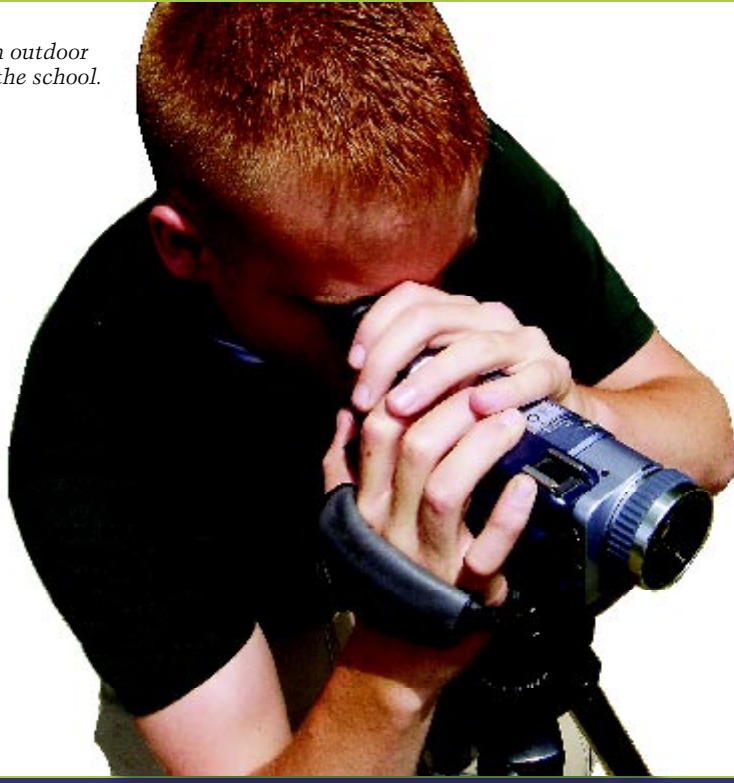


John shoots an outdoor scene behind the school.



# Independently Active Teaching Video in High School

David Gran

**T**hrough sight, spectacle, and sound, the moving image is capable of immersing viewers in a different reality. It is no longer the case in our society that we are simply influenced by the media culture; it is something which we are born into. My own earliest memory is of seeing *Star Wars* at a drive-in movie theater.

## Challenges of Film and Video

Movies are memorable, engaging, and thus a powerful medium. However, outside of being used as a tool for instruction, film and video are relatively ignored in most curriculums. It may be that they are often seen only for their entertainment value and their impact is overlooked, or that schools lack the budget. Film is prohibitively expensive for most schools. Video can be expensive as well but makes an excellent investment for schools for a number of reasons.

Marshall McLuhan described our

engagement with television as an "all-inclusive nowness." As a result, he said, children of media culture expect this "nowness," and it is better that educators understand and exploit this. A video education begins to build skills that can help students both create a filter through which they can deconstruct the daily barrage of media messages and engage in a new kind of communication. A recent *New York Times* article, entitled "Is Cinema Studies the New MBA?" highlighted an education in cinema studies for developing communication skills that would be relevant to many different careers.

## Why a Video Curriculum?

A video curriculum gives students the opportunity to investigate one of the most influential media of communication. In order to construct videos, we must first deconstruct them in order to learn about the technology and aesthetics that





Travis and Justin edit their final Narrative project using Final Cut Pro.

produce our intended results. What types of shots are being used? What is being shown? More importantly, what isn't being shown? We understand things better when we do them ourselves.

### The Anti-Commercial Project

Our "anti-commercial" lesson begins with a discussion of commercials that we see on the television and an examination of what exactly is being sold to us. Students easily recognize that commercials don't sell us the actual product as much as they sell a feeling or an experience. To illustrate this point, we watch classic television commercials from the 1950s and 60s. Seeing these commercials from a modern perspective can be very revealing; women are empowered by what kind of flour they bake with, and men are more masculine if they smoke the right cigarette. Because we are so detached from these outdated social constructs, it becomes obvious to see how advertising sells image over product.

Students begin their anti-commercial campaign by discussing a product and what the advertising promises. They describe what you actually get in the product. In one very successful project, two stu-

dents decided to parody the "super-sizing" of junk food using a combination of live action and animation. In this anti-commercial, we see a truck pull up to a drive-through window and order a super-sized meal. The store then drops a gigantic bucket of chicken onto the back of the truck. The commercial takes a critical look at this trend through exaggeration.

The anti-commercial project takes on media consumption in a direct manner. However, any video project can help students become critical thinkers about what they see

### A video curriculum gives students the opportunity to investigate one of the most influential media of communication.

in the movies and on TV. The filmmaker Maya Deren wrote that "the motion picture camera is perhaps the most paradoxical of all machines, in that it can be independently active and infinitely passive." Because we can record images with such seeming ease, it becomes easy, as passive viewers, to accept what is presented to us—because the audience, and by extension, the camera itself, is simply watching the action, so it follows that what we are presented with is an objective view. However, it is anything but objective.

The simple action of selecting what to film and how to film it reflects some kind of bias of ideology. It is an easy mistake to say that


Filmstrip images are stills from the videos the students created.

a video or film is presenting reality rather than presenting one view of reality. Students learn to construct a scene using different types of shots or camera angles. Through this process, they discover, for example, that shooting someone from below makes the subject appear bigger or more powerful, whereas shooting them from above makes them smaller or less significant. They discover that a scene can be edited so that an actor is removed, or someone who wasn't even there can be edited in on another day. Through these processes, students discover that "reality" in the world of video can be constructed.

### Benefits of Video in Our School

Once students understand the language of the moving image, they can begin to find applications that serve the wider school community. For example, we have produced videos that promote elective art classes and extracurricular activities. Another application has been creating a multimedia component to school plays. Our Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz* hid behind a giant and menacing video version of his own visage and a sing-a-long in *Pippin* featured a video bouncing-ball head of our lead actor as he sang the lines. Videos have created theatrical backdrops from realistic landscapes to surreal imagery on our stage and have become a mainstay in our school productions.

We are constantly bombarded by persuasive media images and

messages that tell us the way we should live. These messages can be revealed in the context of a moral from a television show or movie, or in the context of what products you need to purchase to be more efficient, more appealing, and more successful. Introducing video into the classroom helps adolescents, who are being saturated by the media, better discern and critique messages as they construct their own identities and worldview. 

### Resources

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press., 1994.

Van Ness, Elizabeth. "Is Cinema Studies the New MBA?" from the *New York Times*. New York: NY: The New York Times Company, 3/6/2005.

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### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students communicate ideas regularly at a high level of effectiveness in at least one visual arts media.*

### WEB LINK

[www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)  
[videoarteducation.blogspot.com](http://videoarteducation.blogspot.com)

*Andrew directs a scene for his video in front of the green screen starring Tom and Danielle. Backgrounds will be added in later.*

