

Educational Activity

***Penning a Screenplay:
A Review Activity on Cinema in Quebec***

Guidelines

Silent Cinema in Quebec, 1896-1930

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PENNING A SCREENPLAY

A REVIEW ACTIVITY ON CINEMA IN QUEBEC

OBJECTIVES

Through the use of movie stills taken from *Pirate Gold*, have students produce a screenplay that respects early cinema's historical context and censorship rules.

This activity builds on students' knowledge gained from previous activities and is an interactive return to the extraordinary adventure of cinema in Quebec between 1896 and 1930.

DETAILS

- ❖ Length: 120 minutes
- ❖ Materials: movie stills drawn from *Pirate Gold*
- ❖ Instructions: students work in groups of four

Fourteen stills drawn from *Pirate Gold* are provided in PowerPoint form (option: download stills in PDF format). Produced by Biograph in New York and shot in the Quebec City region in September 1912, *Pirate Gold* was released for theatrical exhibition in January 1913. Unfortunately, no complete version of the film exists today. Only the raw negative footage has survived. From this raw material, fourteen stills have been drawn.

The version of *Pirate Gold* distributed at the time was in the standard format for the period. The entire film was on one reel, running from 12 to 15 minutes. About a hundred prints were made, distributed and exhibited in theatres. These prints were then destroyed. At the time, few people imagined these films would become important historical documents for both studies in film history and North American culture. The problem of their preservation was further compounded by the fact films at the time were made of nitrate celluloid, an unstable, highly flammable material that decomposed relatively quickly. Approximately 80% of films made during the silent era have vanished.

In this activity, students will play the role of the budding screenwriter. Their goal will be to recreate film history by crafting a screenplay for this film that is appropriate **to for** the conditions of the period.

PREPARATION

Clips from “animated views” of the period should be shown.

GUIDELINES

1. Below each film still, students should write a scene description (which advances the narrative) that will be accompanied by dialogue (or a monologue).
2. During the writing process, the regulations of the Office of Censorship must be respected in terms of themes, subject matter and content.
3. The historical context of 1912 must also be taken into account.
4. Of course, there should be no mistakes in the grammar or spelling.
5. The duration of the new film should be no longer than 10 minutes (the length of a reel of film at the time).
6. If appropriate, music can be added to the screenplay.

QUIET ON THE SET, ROLLING!

APPROACH

- ❖ Four groups of four students will be asked to respect a proposed sequence of stills (1 to 14)
- ❖ Four other groups can create a new sequence. Stills can be used more than once or discarded

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

Provide information on censorship and historical context (see attached sheets).

GROUP REVIEW OF ACTIVITY

1. Share the different screenplays.
2. Was the historical context respected?
3. Does the script take into account censorship restrictions?
4. Who won the Oscar for best screenplay?

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

Historical context

- Difficult working conditions: accidents, long workdays, six-day workweeks, meagre wages.

- Place and role of women: wives, homebound, raising children, some women begin entering workforce.
- Prominent place of the Catholic Church: Mass, prayer before supper, control of education and health care.

Censorship

Censored themes and subject matters: immoral scenes, vulgarity, lewdness, improper behaviour, armed robbery, violence, murder, fighting, ridiculing religion or its ministers, anti-patriotism, excessive display of the American flag.