**Year 12 A level Film Studies Transition Work**

Your transition work for A level Film Studies will enable you to consider key aspects of film form and their impact on meaning and response.

The focus, appropriately enough for the very beginning of the course, is on opening sequences of films.

Opening sequences are interesting and rewarding to study as they are the initial point of contact between the film and the spectator. The opening few minutes of a film is where the film is beginning to ‘teach’ the spectator what kind of experience to expect and how to engage with it. It is also where the spectator is keen to ‘learn’ what kind of pleasure the film is offering them.

**Step One**

Read through the pdf document on ‘What do opening sequences do?’

**Step Two**

Read through the article called ‘Wonder Woman and the importance of movie opening sequences.

**Step Three**

Use the document ‘Looking at the opening sequence of *Hell or High Water* *(Mackenzie 2016)* to make organised notes on the key features of the sequence.

**Step Four**

Choose the opening sequence of a feature film which you feel engages you effectively as a spectator.

Write an analysis of the sequence (between 1 and 5 mins) considering how it establishes the visual style of the film and introduces the viewer to some of the things we discussed in induction:

* Characters
* Location
* Narrative/Plot
* Genre
* Themes
* Aesthetics (the ‘look’ and’ feel’ of the film – the ‘sensory spectacle’)

The two words to remember when conducting this analysis are *meaning* and *response*. Ask yourself how the features you are discussing create meaning and generate a response in the spectator. What are the connotations of the things you describe and what impact do they have on you as you watch and listen? In doing so it is ok to use the personal pronoun ‘I’ in phrases like *‘I felt curious and anxious at this point as the music was tense and seemed to suggest that something bad was going to happen’.*

Aim to write at least **1000 words** and include some screengrabs from the sequence to help to illustrate the points that you make.

NB The best way to approach this task is as a moment by moment analysis, so that you begin with ‘The sequence opens with…’ and end with ‘…..the sequence closes with’. Try to integrate the key aspects like character, location, narrative etc. into this moment by moment analysis, rather than giving them each separate paragraphs in a more traditional essay fashion.

**Wonder Woman and the importance of movie opening sequences**

The opening scene of a movie is the most important of any film. It establishes the kind of movie that the audience will be seeing and sets the tone for the next 2 hours.  
  
The Dark Knight opens with a bank heist, establishing the movie as a dark and gripping crime drama. Mad Max opens with a shaky chase through a cave, establishing the chaotic and anarchic tone of the movie. Wonder Woman is the latest film to give this a go.  
  
Directed by Patty Jenkins, Wonder Woman is the fourth instalment to Warner Bros. shared DC Expanded Universe based on the characters featured in DC comics.  
  
The question arose to how this film would open, compared to the rest of the DCEU so far. Man of Steel opened with a Sci-Fi battle on the planet Krypton. Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice opened with the murder of the Wayne’s, leading into another Sci-Fi battle above the city of Metropolis. Suicide Squad opened with a smaller music video-styled montage that introduced each of the main characters.  
  
Would Wonder Woman open with a sequence depicting the Amazons at war with the God of War - himself, similar to the opening sequence in Warner Bros. Animation’s Wonder Woman? The answer: No.  
  
The movie has an opening sequence of two parts. The first provides a look towards the quieter moments of the film with a scene showing Diana Prince in modern day Paris looking through her old war-time memorabilia. The second part takes the audience straight into the heart of the Amazon’s culture, with a young Diana racing through the streets of the beautiful enchanted island of Themyscira, to catch a glimpse the warriors training for the day Ares, the God of War, will return.  
  
While it isn’t the first film to feature a training sequence of such scale, it is a unique sight to witness the sight of the Amazon women training in such scale and force will come as a bit of a surprise to the general audience, but fans of the comics and TV shows will feel at home.  
  
This is the first female led superhero movie since 20th Century Fox’s Marvel movie: Elektra in 2005, so the bar has been set low for this to be a good movie. Fortunately, Wonder Woman not only surpasses it, it knocks it out of the park with super strength. It is also the first female directed superhero movie since Punisher: War Zone in 2008, and also became the highest grossing debut for a female director, defeating Sam Taylor-Johnson with Fifty Shades of Grey.  
  
Patty Jenkins has crafted a well told story and shows off what she is capable of doing with the opening scenes. It is possible that she utilised a few ideas from her draft of Marvel’s Thor, which she was initially going to direct before dropping out. Using sweeping panning shots and slow motion to capture every detail of the Amazon’s in action.  
  
The action on display shows off how skilled the Amazon’s are at combat, whether that’s with swords, spears, shields, bows and arrows as well as hand to hand, foreshadowing how skilled Diana will be, making her, what Geoff Johns referred to as: ‘The best fighter in the DC Universe’. It is also the first clue that this addition to the DCEU will be much more entertaining and enjoyable.  
DC, having learnt from the mistakes from the past (along with the aid of creative consultant Geoff Johns), encapsulate the fun of the comics, filling the screen with bright colours, brilliant displays of stunt work and well integrated use of CGI effects.  
  
That’s not something well known in the DCEU just yet, with their preference to desaturate the colours on screen until the majority of colours on display are grey and blue. And while it doesn’t make it a bad looking movie, it certainly needs more to grab your attention, which Wonder Woman does beautifully, but also doesn’t abandon that initial colour scheme, helping to cement its place in the DCEU.  
  
One small overlooked aspect is the stunning score, brought by composer Rupert Gregson-Williams, who also scored big blockbusters such as Hacksaw Ridge and The Legend of Tarzan. It fills the cinema with a true cinematic soundtrack to join the ranks as one of the best.  
  
The general consensus for Wonder Woman has been overall positive, which hopefully means good things to come. It established itself, not as a superhero movie, but as an enjoyably believable, character-driven war movie. The opening in this movie is a powerful message that DC are changing for the better, that movies are evolving for the better and that there is a good reason why Wonder Woman has been around for over 75 years.  
  
Man of Steel may not have been the symbol of hope that the DCEU needed, but thankfully, Wonder Woman is.

**Looking at the Opening Sequence of** [**Hell or High Water**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyA4n23nsP8) ***(Mackenzie 2016)***

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| **Feature** | **Evidence from the opening sequence** |
| **Character** |  |
| **Location** |  |
| **Narrative/Plot** |  |
| **Genre** |  |
| **Themes** |  |
| **Aesthetic**  **(style)** |  |