

# Part 1: Learning to Look at Images

Students jump into working with video cameras by conducting a visual scavenger hunt in which they locate particular scenes and use different shot types. The class then analyzes movie clips to determine how stories are told through moving images.

**Length**  
5 50-minute sessions

## Activity 1A: Video Scavenger Hunt

Students get hands-on experience with cameras by conducting a video scavenger hunt. In the process, they learn about cinematography, the different ways that shots can be framed, and the purpose and effects of different types of shots.



### Sequence

<b>1A.1:</b> <i>Introducing the Activity</i>	Students are introduced to the unit. They learn about the visual scavenger hunt they will conduct, discuss cinematography, and learn and practice the basic skills needed to use a video camera.
<b>1A.2:</b> <i>Conducting the Scavenger Hunt</i>	Teams conduct their scavenger hunts on the school grounds.
<b>1A.3:</b> <i>Looking at the Footage</i>	Students watch and analyze one another's scavenger hunt videos. They talk about the process of making the videos, and identify challenges to watch out for as they create the unit's other video projects.

### Materials Needed

- Handout 1: Unit 2 Overview
- Handout 2: Video Scavenger Hunt
- Video Production Handbook Part 1: The Language of Cinematography
- Video Production Handbook Part 2: Camera Operation
- Handout 3: Unit 2 Journal Assignments

## 1A.1: Introducing the Activity

### 1. Introduce the unit.

Give students **Handout 1: Unit 2 Overview**. Explain that students will learn about the technical and creative aspects of using moving images to tell a story and will learn skills that are used in film, TV, and related industries. Briefly describe the three works that students will create during the unit:

- Video scavenger hunt
- Video of a silent story
- Video documentary that tells a story about “the best” or “the worst” of their community

### 2. Describe the scavenger hunt.

Give students **Handout 2: Video Scavenger Hunt** and explain that they will work in teams to locate and record the shots listed on the handout.

Distribute **Video Production Handbook Part 1: The Language of Cinematography** (located in **Appendix B**) and have students read the descriptions of the different types of shots. Tell students to use this information to shoot video for their scavenger hunt.

#### **Teacher’s Notes: Using the Video Production Handbook**

Tell students that they will receive relevant sections of the *Video Production Handbook* throughout the unit (unless you have decided to distribute the complete handbook at the beginning of the unit).

Explain that students can use the information in the handbook as a reference throughout the entire unit.

### 3. Go over basic camera operation and care.

Distribute **Video Production Handbook Part 2: Camera Operation**. Divide the class into teams of four and give each team cameras, tripods, and any other video equipment that they need (such as white balance cards).

Go over basic camera operation with students, teaching them, for example, how to do the following:

- Turn the camera on and off
- Insert tapes
- Avoid time code breaks
- Set the white balance
- Set shutter speed
- Set the exposure
- Manually focus the camera

- Use the tripod
- Pan and tilt with the tripod

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**Note:** For this activity, students do not focus on sound, so there is no need to discuss techniques for using microphones at this point.

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Have students practice using their cameras by shooting footage of one another. Make sure that all students are able to correctly use the camera. Give them guidelines for caring for the equipment.



## Handout 1: Unit 2 Overview

*Moving images are a powerful tool for telling stories—they draw us in, pull us along, and bring out our emotions. Think about a scene from your favorite movie. What was it about the scene that made it special? The acting, the framing of the shots, the lighting, the soundtrack? Chances are, a combination of all these factors, along with other ones you may not have thought about, made the scene memorable.*

*In this unit, you will learn the skills you need to successfully tell a story using moving images. You'll learn about the visual "language" used in movies and TV shows and the story arc that these shows typically follow. You'll also learn technical skills, such as how to use a camera and edit footage. For your unit project, you will create a documentary video that tells a story about "the best" or "the worst" of your community.*

*Your work in this unit will revolve around the following questions:*

- *How can I tell a story effectively through moving images?*
- *What are the underlying elements of storytelling in movies and TV?*
- *How do music and sound effects support and enhance a story being told through moving images?*
- *How can I use editing techniques to create a powerful experience for the audience?*

### Unit Project

Working in a team, you will identify "the best" or "the worst" of your community—something you especially like about your community (such as a teacher who inspired you) or something you think needs improvement (such as a lack of places for teens to hang out). Your team will create a documentary video on one specific vignette or angle of your story. You will shoot this story, focusing on images and action (although you can also do some voice-over narration and use short interview clips). Your team will edit the footage and add titles and a soundtrack. At the end of the unit, the class will present a showcase of the video and audio work you have made during the course.





## What You Will Do in This Unit

**Complete a video scavenger hunt.** To get experience with the camera and learn about different shot types, you'll take part in a scavenger hunt to find and shoot specific kinds of images.

**Analyze the effect of different shot types and camera angles.** Look at movies, TV shows, and the footage you have created to determine the effect that different shot types (such as medium or close-up) and camera angles have on the viewer.

**Learn about story arcs.** Analyze movies and TV shows to determine how their stories are typically structured (and how filmmakers sometimes deviate from this structure).

**Write a weekly critique.** Write a weekly analysis of a clip from a movie, short, or TV show that you view outside of class.

**Create a silent story.** Develop a simple story with a story arc, and shoot footage of your teammates acting out the story—without dialogue. Edit the footage to create a short video.

**Choose a community story to tell in a video documentary.** With your team, choose a story that illustrates “the best” or “the worst” of your community.

**Learn more about the stages of production.** During work on your silent story and your video documentary, find out more about the three stages of video production:

- **Pre-production:** Identify potential stories, conduct research on your chosen story, write treatments, and create scripts, shot lists, and storyboards
- **Production:** Organize and prepare equipment, light the scene, and shoot footage
- **Post-production:** Import footage, organize digital files, edit footage, add titles and transitions, add a soundtrack and sound effects, and export the completed video

**Shoot footage for your video documentary.** Go out into the community with your teammates and shoot the footage you will use to tell your story.

**Edit your documentary footage.** Determine which clips from your footage will most effectively tell your story, use software to arrange the clips in an order that makes sense for your viewer, and add titles and transitions.

**Add sound to your completed video.** Learn how sound can be used to enhance a story and evoke emotions, and choose appropriate music (and, if you like, sound effects) to add to your video.

**Showcase your work.** Help put together a public screening of the audio and video work that you and your classmates have created during the course.

**Keep a journal.** In your journal, record your assignments, notes, and sketches on the development of your ideas, research, and reflections.





## Vocabulary Used in This Unit

**Angle:** A way to refer to the height and location from which the camera is shooting.

**Axis of action:** An imaginary line running between two characters interacting in a scene.

**Cinematography:** The art of using a camera for motion picture photography.

**Continuity:** The consistency of characteristics of persons, objects, places, and events seen by the viewer.

**Continuity editing:** A style of putting together video or film clips in such a way that events seem to happen in a chronological, logical sequence.

**Establishing shot:** A shot that shows the setting in which a scene takes place. Usually a long (wide) shot.

**Focus:** The sharpness of an image. On a camera lens, the point where all the light hitting the lens converges.

**Framing:** The arrangement of space, people, and objects within the frame of the film or video.

**Shot:** The basic building block of movies and other works that use moving images; the continuous footage that appears between cuts, fades, or other transitions in a film or video.

**Shot scale:** A way to describe the distance between the camera and the objects and people being recorded, or the relative size of objects and people on the screen. (For example, close-up or wide are ways to describe the scale of a shot.)

**Transition:** The shift from one piece of footage (one shot) to another.

**Treatment:** A short synopsis of a media production's story.



## Handout 2: Video Scavenger Hunt

Work with your team to locate and shoot video footage for each shot described below:

1. An extreme close-up shot of a familiar object that looks different or unrecognizable when shot from close-up
2. A close-up shot of a facial expression showing an emotional shift (for example, from anger to sadness)
3. A long shot—found, rather than staged—of one or more people completing an action
4. An extreme long shot that could be used as an establishing shot for a movie about your school
5. A panning shot that follows a person or an animal, such as a bird
6. A hand-held tracking shot of a person walking from one place to another
7. A shot of a person from a high angle
8. A shot of an inanimate object from a low angle
9. A medium shot of two people interacting

Use *Video Production Handbook Part 1: The Language of Cinematography* to help you understand any unfamiliar terms (such as *close-up shot*). As you shoot, observe the following rules:

- Each shot's footage should be between 5 and 20 seconds long.
- Each team member should operate the camera for at least one shot.

### Log Your Footage

As you complete the scavenger hunt, create a chart in a notebook to log your footage. This will make it easier to find different shots later on. The time code should be visible on your camera's display—ask your teacher for help if you can't find it. Your chart should look similar to this:

Time Code	Scavenger Hunt Shot Number	What Our Team Shot
00:01:25:00	2	<i>Close-up of Suzanne's face shifting from nervousness to relief as she reads her test results</i>

## 1A.2: Conducting the Scavenger Hunt



**Note:** This activity provides a good opportunity for formative assessment.

Have teams complete the video scavenger hunt on the school grounds, shooting 5–20 seconds of footage for each shot, logging their footage, and giving each team member a chance to operate the camera. Ask students to keep track of challenges they face as they capture their footage and the techniques they use to meet those challenges.

**Note:** Students learn about taking on different production roles in Part 2. For this activity, students can distribute responsibilities as they see fit; you can discuss how successful they were at this distribution during Activity 1A.3.

## 1A.3: Looking at the Footage



### 1. Play students' footage and discuss the shooting process.

Play excerpts from each team's scavenger hunt video on a monitor.

#### Teacher's Notes: Playing Scavenger Hunt Videos

It's ideal to play different teams' interpretations of the same shot one after another so that the class can compare them. You can set up more than one monitor to switch between the videos more easily.

Alternatively, you can play excerpts from each team's scavenger hunt video, making sure that each scavenger hunt shot on the list is represented at least a couple of times.

Discuss the following questions with the class:

- For each team's video, which shots had the most interesting framing, and why?
- If you were making a film, when might you use the different shot scales (long, medium, close-up, etc.), and why?

**Possible answers:** Long shots are often used to tell the viewer about the scene or to show action. Extreme long shots can also be used to emphasize the vastness or beauty of a landscape. Medium shots can be used to show dialogue or action, allowing the viewer to focus on the characters while still giving them information about the character's surroundings. Close-up shots can be used to show emotion or detail and to pull the viewer into the scene.

- How did the high- and low-angle shots “feel” to you as a viewer? What differences did you notice in the two types of shots?

**Possible answers:** Shots from a low angle tend to make people or objects seem looming, more powerful, or even ominous, while high-angle shots can make a person seem smaller or more vulnerable.

- What challenges did you face? Did you use any techniques to overcome these challenges? Would you try something different next time?

**Possible answers:** Challenges might include shots that were blurry or not focused, shots that came out too light or too dark, or shots that were shaky. Techniques might include making sure that the autofocus is off, zooming in to the subject to check focus, making sure that the exposure on the camera is correctly set, using a tripod rather than hand-holding the camera, using a stabilizer if the camera is hand-held, and making sure that the camera’s image stabilization is turned on.

### Teacher’s Notes: Lighting Challenges

Students learn more about lighting techniques in Part 2. For now, you may want to share the following information with them:

- It’s more problematic to overexpose video than to underexpose it. Overexposure results in the loss of image data. Underexposure can often be corrected in post-production.
- Overexposure can happen when the camera is set to auto mode or if the cameraperson fails to change settings to compensate for changes in light. Using the zebra striping function (available on most video cameras) helps avoid overexposure by letting the cameraperson know if the image is overexposed.

- How did your team members divide responsibilities? Did this arrangement work? How might you change it next time?

## 2. Give students Handout 3: Unit 2 Journal Assignments.

Have students complete Journal 1 outside of class prior to Activity 1B.

**Note:** Students will use the second part of this journal assignment—a description of a TV show’s plotline—during Part 2.

## Journal 1

Watch an episode of a scripted TV show (not a reality show) that you like.

- Choose one minute of footage during the show (any footage except the title sequence or credits) and identify at least three different shots. For each shot, describe what's in the shot, the shot scale, the angle, and any camera movement. Create a chart like the one below to record your notes. You can use Part 1 of the *Video Production Handbook* for help with the language of cinematography.

Shot Number	Shot Description (What's in the frame? What's the scale of the shot? What angle does the camera use? Is there any camera movement?)
<i>Example</i>	<i>Close-up shot of a man talking on his cell phone, shot from a low angle; camera pans to the left to follow the man as he walks</i>
1	
2	

- Write a brief description of the episode's plotline. What happened at the beginning of the show? What happened in the middle? What happened at the end?