Documentaries

**STEM CONNECTIONS**
Technology: Creativity and Innovation

**DURATION**
60 Minutes

**MATERIALS**
- Tablets (1 per pair of students)

**SCHEDULE**
- Introduction: Composition (10 min)
- Object Filming and Mixed Composition (15 min)
- New Composition Techniques (30 min)
- Wrap Up (5 min)
OBJECTIVE
Student learn to plan the composition of their video and experiment with framing while making a short documentary about an everyday object.

ALIGNED STANDARDS
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.5
Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5
Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

21ST CENTURY SKILLS
• Communication & Collaboration
• Initiative and Self-Direction
• Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

HABITS OF MIND
• Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision
• Creating, Imagining, Innovating

KEY TERMS
• Composition: the frame of the image, or segment of film, and how the elements are arranged within that frame.
• Documentary: a type of film that shows true information or creates a factual report.
• Mise-en-scene: a French term used in filmmaking that means “placing on stage” and refers to everything within the shot including actors, lighting, props, costumes, etc.
• Rule of thirds: the idea that breaking the shot up into 9 equal sections and aligning shots along these guidelines creates a more interesting shot for the view.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
The first official documentary was created in 1922 by filmmaker Robert Flaherty. It was called Nanook of the North. Before this time, there were some experimental, avant-garde films produced but Flaherty’s film exemplified some of the identifying characteristics used in documentaries still today. As an ethnographic film it employed not only third-person narration and a subjective tone, but its focus was on an indigenous person whose role was the hero.

As documentaries have progressed, they all maintain similar elements that qualify them as such. Instead of creating fictional stories, documentaries’ main focus is to reveal true stories and real events, and because of this they are a great genre to use when learning about composition of shot! Composition of shot includes the depth, lighting and other elements on screen that combined create the specific type of feeling the filmmaker is trying to convey. Anything included in a shot is considered mise-en-scene!

If you want to prep yourself a little more, this youtube video is a great way to begin understanding composition, framing and other film aspects. It’s a bit too long, and is probably not appropriate for your students but it will give you a great background! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvLQJReDhic
DAILY PREP

By today students should have a little bit of experience with the tablet cameras, so they are going to learn more about composition through a documentary project. Documentaries are an important genre of film that tells stories in a unique way, so students are challenged to make a short documentary about an everyday object. Be prepared to give them a quick overview of what film composition entails, and allow them to freely experiment with these ideas during project time.

Prep Tips

- Make sure tablets are fully charged for today’s activity because students will need them for an extended period of time.
- Be prepared to partner students up, or let them choose partners.
- Remind students that today is the last day before they choose their genre and group for final camp project.

STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS FOR INSTRUCTOR

INTRODUCTION: COMPOSITION

Today focuses on composition of film in the context of documentary filmmaking! The idea here is to get students to think more about what they capture on film and what they keep hidden from their audience. While they will be limited to filming within your educational space, with depth and creative camera use they can still create masterful pieces of film!

Campers, today we are going to experiment more with filming on our tablets, and remember today is the last day before we will group up and start working on our final film projects to show on the final film festival day! Keep that in mind while we dive into documentaries and composition of film.

- When I say “composition of film” what do you think I mean? (Setting, camera angle, lighting…)

After some good brainstorming, share background knowledge to give students a good intro to not only documentaries but also composition of shot.

Does everyone have a pretty good understanding of what composition of film entails and how that can be used in documentaries? Great, let’s get started on our first activity so you can give it a try!
OBJECT FILMING AND MIXED COMPOSITION

Pair the students up and explain what to do in the first activity. Without revealing too many composition techniques just yet, have the students to find an object from around the room and film it in different ways. By experimenting on their own they should get a feel for different ways an object can be shown on film.

Alright, now that we have talked about what a documentary is, and what composition includes, I want you and your partner to find an object within the room and practice filming it in different ways. For example you can zoom out to create what is known as a wide angle shot, or can zoom in to create a close up shot. I will give you about 15 minutes to experiment with filming techniques! Be creative and remember that everything within the frame of the camera lens is considered part of the composition. Move your object to different areas of the room to create different compositions and tell a different story.

As the students begin filming their objects differently, go around to each pair and ask them what they are doing to create different compositions and why they are choosing to do so. Encourage them to think about how they want their viewer to see their object and what they think is important to highlight. This first activity is designed to get them thinking about different ways cameras can be used to tell a story.

NEW COMPOSITION TECHNIQUES

- After getting a chance to experiment with different kinds of filming, what did you notice?

Encourage a discussion here, and lead them to understand that oftentimes a close up can make the shot more meaningful as it draws attention to the tiny details. Also explain that a wider shot that shows more of the setting can help "set" a story. Have the students recall their favorite movies and favorite scenes and remember how each moment was "framed" by the director of the movie.

Next introduce the rule of thirds.

Before we begin the next activity, I want to introduce one more important film element to you: the rule of thirds. This rule divides the screen into 9 equal parts, or thirds running both vertically and horizontally. If you use these imaginary lines to divide elements on your screen it creates a more pleasing image for the eye.

If you have time, and the ability, show this quick youtube clip that explains the rule of thirds: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izX8EX6eYrM. This is a great way to prepare students for their final projects which they will start storyboarding for tomorrow.
Introduce the next activity: experimenting with composition while filming a short documentary.

Now that we have discussed specific ways to change your composition, you and your partner can use the same object or a new object to create a short documentary. We won’t be doing any editing, just filming, but be sure to accomplish these things.

1. Three successful shots with different compositions (more if you have time).
2. Show the object in a way that is not obvious, or tell a true story about it.
3. Don’t use any narration! Storytell through the lens of your camera (also see extension below).

Before shooting, brainstorm with your partner so you can plan what each shot will look like. You will have about 15 minutes to create these shots, so do them in order and delete any outtakes. Once there is about 5 minutes remaining, find another pair of students to show your mini-documentary to. Although it won’t be edited together, show them the clips in order so they get a good feel for what you were aiming to create! Share any questions or comments with one another.

While students are filming this project, continue to walk around the class and ask each group what composition techniques they are using and what they want to show in their mini-documentary. Answer any questions and encourage creativity as they work; this low-stakes project will help to create confidence in their filming skills before creating their final project!

WRAP UP

Have the students gather in a group and pass in their tablets before the final discussion. Ask the following questions:

- After learning specific composition techniques, did it change the way you approached your mini-documentary?
- Did it take more time to plan your shots because you had to think of composition rules?
- Will you look at movies differently now that you know all film directors keep these guidelines in mind when developing and filming?
- What was your favorite technique to use to change the way a scene looked?

Keep all of these new skills in mind tonight, because tomorrow you get to start planning out your final project!
CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

- What is a documentary?
- What elements create composition?

EXTENSIONS

1. If there’s extra time, have the partners get back together to review the mini-documentary they put together in the second activity. This time, while their clips are playing have them come up with a voice-over narration describing what is happening in the shot. The voice over narration can either be in first, or third person narration and can either be serious or funny!
   
   a. For example, if the documentary was about a #2 pencil the narration in first person might start out, “I am the pencil…” or as third person, “Observe the pencil in its natural habitat: the classroom.” Encourage creativity and teamwork to come up with a script to add to the story they told with their camera.

2. Ask the students to watch a movie when they go home tonight. It can be any genre, but ask them to closely pay attention to each shot and what is included in its composition. This can be turned into a short homework activity by having them jot down notes of what they noticed during the movie they chose.