ART DIRECTION:

The VISUAL LANGUAGE *of* FILM

ACT 1

2003 NOMINEES
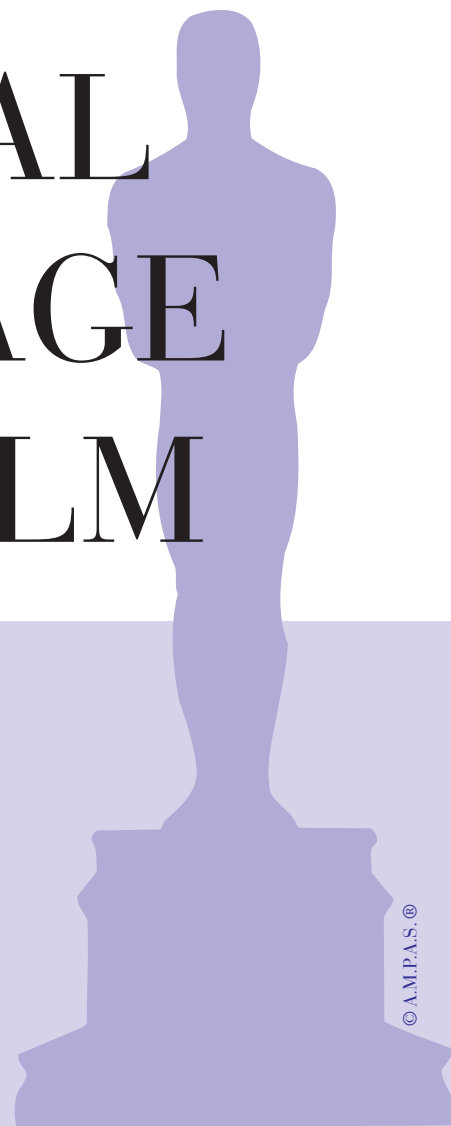
TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

Dear Educator,

Youth Media International, in cooperation with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, is proud to present the most recent edition of annual study guides that focus on the different branches of the Academy.

This guide focuses on art direction, one of the many craft areas involved in the collaborative endeavor of creating a motion picture. Students will learn about art direction (or production design, as it is also known) as they complete the activities in this kit, which is intended for students in secondary school English, language arts and communications courses. The activities are designed to capitalize on students' natural interest in current films and the excitement generated by the Academy Awards to teach valuable lessons in critical thinking and to develop visual literacy skills.

The Academy, organized in 1927, is a professional honorary organization composed of more than 6,000 motion picture craftsmen and women. Its purposes include advancing the art and science of motion pictures; fostering cooperation among creative leaders for cultural, educational and technological progress; recognizing outstanding achievements; and fostering educational activities between the professional community and the public at large. Academy members are the people who create movies—the cream of the industry's actors, animators, art directors, cinematographers, costume designers, directors, documentarians, studio executives, film editors, make-up artists, composers, songwriters, sound and visual effects experts, and writers.

Please share this material with other teachers in your school. Although the material is copyrighted, you may make as many photocopies as necessary to meet your students' needs.

To ensure that you receive future mailings, please fill out and return the enclosed reply card. Also, feel free to e-mail us at schoolroom@aol.com to comment about the program at any time. We welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Roberta Nusim

Roberta Nusim, Publisher

Program Components
1. This instructional guide
2. Four student activity masters
3. A four-color wall poster for classroom display
4. A response card for teacher comments

Target Audience
This program has been designed for students in secondary school English, language arts and communications courses.

Program Objectives
1. To enhance student interest in and knowledge about the motion picture development and production process.
2. To encourage students to use critical thinking as they learn how production designers contribute to the process of creating a motion picture.
3. To engage students in an exploration of film as a medium of communication.
4. To help students become more visually literate.

Introduction
The first Academy Awards were handed out on May 16, 1929, just after the advent of "talkies." By 1930, enthusiasm was so great that a Los Angeles radio station did a live, one-hour broadcast, and the Awards have enjoyed broadcast coverage ever since.

The number and types of awards have grown and changed over the years to keep up with the development of the motion picture industry. Awards of Merit—Oscars—are presented in each (or in sub-divisions) of the following categories: acting, animated feature, art direction, cinematography, costume design, directing, documentary film, film editing, foreign-language film, make-up, music, best picture, short film, sound, sound editing, visual effects and writing. In an age when awards shows seem as common as nightly news programs, the Academy Awards are unique because the judges—Academy members—are the top filmmakers from around the world. The question, "Who gets the Oscar?" is decided by a true jury of peers.

The awards process provides a wonderful opportunity to teach your students about the many craft areas—and the many communications techniques—that play a part in creating a motion picture. Filmmaking is by nature a collaborative process, with each creative area supporting and being supported by the others. Because our space is limited, this kit focuses on just one of those areas—art direction.

Selecting Films for Student Viewing
Students may select the films they wish to view during the following activities.

The following films have won Academy Awards for art direction and may be appropriate for your students: *Moulin Rouge* (2001), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Titanic* (1997), *Star Wars* (1977), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) and *Citizen Kane* (1941).

The following films were nominated for Academy Awards for art direction and may be appropriate for your students: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings* (2001), *Pleasantville* (1998), *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *Apollo 13* (1995), *A Little Princess* (1995) and *Forrest Gump* (1994).

Activity 1
CREATING *the* LOOK
Art direction is a broad concept encompassing many visual elements of film production—set design and
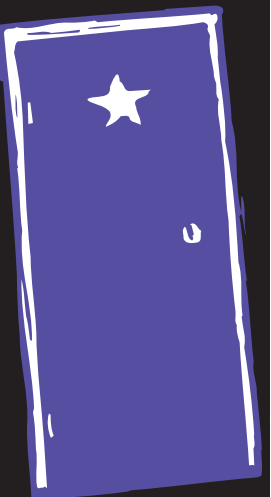
construction, locations, décor, props and costumes. Over the decades, the nature of art direction has changed considerably. The first film sets were devised by pioneer French filmmaker Georges Méliès at the turn of the 20th century. With their painted backdrops, Méliès' sets resembled traditional theater scenery—immovable and two-dimensional. In 1916, D. W. Griffith's silent epic *Intolerance* made cinema history, in part because of its full-scale sets. Unlike his predecessors, set builder Frank Wortman considered Griffith's moving camera when designing for *Intolerance*, devising a completely integrated, three-dimensional space.

William Cameron Menzies, designer on such classics as *Gone with the Wind* (1939), is considered the father of modern production design. Menzies' sweeping cinematic vision and distinctive personal style helped elevate the art director's position in the Hollywood hierarchy. In the 1950s, as film production became more costly and complex, the scope of art direction expanded. Studios recognized the need for full-blown production designers—artists who would be responsible for the overall look of a film—not just the sets.

Production designers collaborate closely with the director and cinematographer to visualize the screenplay. Together they determine how visual components can best be combined to tell the screen story. As award-winning production designer Patrizia von Brandenstein notes, "The most beautiful ballroom on earth means nothing unless it helps the context of the story." When devising sets or considering locations, production designers must first determine the volume, or overall size and shape of a space. Does the scene call for a large, rectangular space, such as the Xanadu mansion in *Citizen Kane* (1941), or a claustrophobic enclosed space, such as the submarine in *U-571* (2000)?

Just like painters, production designers exploit perspective to direct the viewer's eye toward a particular spot in a set or to create a sense of depth. Scale can be used to evoke feelings about a space. The stairway in Scarlett O'Hara's Atlanta mansion in *Gone with the Wind,* for example, is outsized. Its large size suggests Rhett's excesses and his power over Scarlett. This sense of power becomes especially obvious when Rhett forcefully carries Scarlett up the stairs to the bedroom. Although architectural elements apply most significantly to sets, they can also be used in location filming. The mental institution in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* was a real place, but its chain-link fences and barbed wire were manipulated to emphasize the inmates' feelings of oppression.

Ultimately, what separates production designers from their theater equivalents is the camera. Every set or location must accommodate the camera's changing three-dimensional view. Whether the camera itself is moving, or the framing is changing, the set should facilitate the movement. A good designer will consider how the set or location will look from various angles and distances, and in different lighting conditions, as demanded by the script.

Encourage your students to "see" the architectural components of production design by studying photos or paintings by artists like Vermeer and Giotto and point out examples of the defined architectural terms. Then have them focus on one scene in a selected film and discuss how camera movement and lighting work with the basic set design.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY: Have students videotape a short scene in various locations around school, including at least one outdoor setting. Screen the tapes and discuss how the architectural elements in each setting affected the scene. Alternatively, have students photograph or draw various locations around school and discuss how a scene could be set in each setting.

ACTIVITY 2
SETTING *the* STAGE

Once the architectural elements are in place, production designers must decide how to decorate their sets and locations. Set decoration includes all props and furnishings, including foliage and food, used in a given scene. Sometimes individual props and furnishings can be crucial to the story: the witch's hourglass in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), or the sled in *Citizen Kane*, for example. More often, however, the effect of set decoration is collective. As in real life, we make assumptions about film characters based on their environment. How characters decorate their living room, or what they put into their medicine chests, can tell us as much about them as the dialogue or action.

To get the most out of set decoration, production designers study the script's characters. Whether the story is contemporary, futuristic or period, designers strive to create a credible everyday world. For period pieces, designers conduct research at libraries and archives to help them achieve authenticity. For futuristic or fantastic stories, they consult with scientists and engineers to create sets that are both imaginative and believable. Sometimes, however, designers choose drama over realism, selecting props or furnishings that may not be absolutely accurate, but are emotionally true.

Students can learn about the connection between set decoration and visual storytelling by creating a detailed environment for a specific character. To test whether they have picked appropriate details, have them share their descriptions with their classmates.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY: In teams, have students research a recent past decade (1950s to 1980s), then find or make props that represent the period. Have them create mini-sets and videotape a scene using their set.

ACTIVITY 3
COLOR *and* TEXTURE

In addition to architectural elements and set decoration, production designers rely on color, tone and texture to help realize their vision. Often the main characters in a script are assigned color and fabric palettes. When choosing a palette, designers consider the characters'
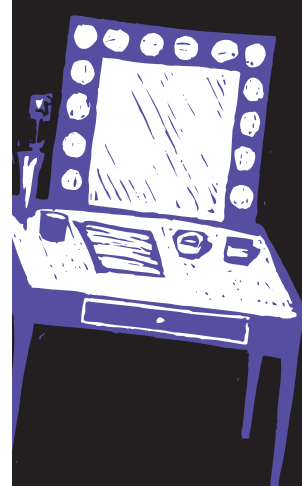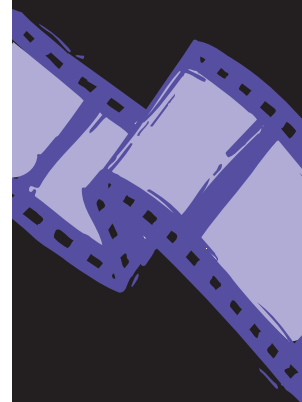
emotional journey as well as their social and cultural background. The chosen colors may show up in the characters' costumes, in the props they use, or in the décor of their habitat. Colors can have culturally specific symbolic meaning. In Western cultures, for example, red usually denotes danger; white denotes purity. In the Chinese culture, white is the color of death, and red signifies happiness and health.

Colors can hint at the emotions or states of mind of a character. As used in the story sequences in *A Little Princess* (1995), for example, the bright oranges and purples, when contrasted with the grays and browns of the rest of the movie, suggest the happiness in Sara's past. Certain colors can even suggest physical states. To bring out the theme of drought in the script of *Chinatown* (1974), production designer Richard Sylbert chose white buildings for many of his locations, because "white makes you feel hotter."

Color tones and shading are also important in art direction. Saturated, deep colors convey a sense of seriousness and intensity, while bright colors suggest lightness and delicacy. Black-and-white photography reproduces the world exclusively in tones of black, gray and white. Therefore, a production designer working on a black-and-white film must be aware of how the colors of his or her set are going to translate into those tones.

The texture of a wall, prop, furniture piece or costume is another tool of the production designer. Along with color, the choice of materials can add to the overall design concept. For *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, for example, production and costume designer Catherine Martin separated the Capulet and Montegue families through choices of color, pattern and texture. She selected dark reds and blacks and fabrics like leather and denim for the Capulet family, and bright-colored Hawaiian shirt patterns for the rival Montegues.

To illustrate how colors affect how we view a film, have your students observe and describe places in their everyday world in terms of color. Ask them how the colors of their classroom, bedroom, doctor's office, etc., make them feel. Then have them write a scene set in their school or neighborhood and describe what colors and textures they might use to heighten the drama.

Supplementary Activity: Have students pick a favorite novel and devise palettes for the main characters. Palettes may be done as a collage or a chart, but should include color chips and fabric swatches from local paint or fabric stores. Ask students to explain how their palettes connect to the story's characters and development.

Activity 4
LEARNING *from the* BEST

How production designers operate depends in large part on the director, the budget and other practical constraints. Budgets, for example, can determine how many scenes will be shot on location.

Art departments have two main divisions. The first focuses on the drawing board, where sets are designed and blueprints produced. The second division deals with furnishings, costumes and props. The production designer oversees both divisions, although most films employ a separate costume designer. In the past, special effects, such as miniatures and matte paintings, were also in the production designer's domain. As effects became more complicated, with computerized images and other technical innovations, independent special effects departments evolved.

For most production designers, the collaborative process begins with storyboards, sketches and models. Storyboards are drawn on panels and depict in continuity the main action of a film scene or sequence. Have your students study set sketches from *Pleasantville* and compare them to the final film. Then have them create their own storyboard or set sketches for a story that they have read in class. Finally, ask them to view one of the films nominated this year for art direction and analyze it in terms of how its architectural elements, set decoration and color contributed to the story.

Each year, the film industry produces an array of outstanding new releases. Some are appropriate for families, some are appealing to teens, and some are geared toward adult audiences. If you or the parents of your students feel that some, or even all, of this year's nominees might be inappropriate for viewing by young people, you can modify this activity in several ways. They can view Academy Award nominees and Academy Award-winning films from past years to complete the exercises. A list of some past nominees and winners appears at the beginning of this teacher's guide.

CREATING *the* LOOK

Production designers are responsible for the overall look of a film, including decisions about overall style, set design and construction, location selection, and set decoration. Many production designers begin their careers studying architecture or theater design. Understanding fundamental design concepts, such as an architect might learn, is vital to effective art direction. Along with the basic shape, designers must decide on the volume, or size, of their space, as well as its depth. The designer must also decide if the space is going to be realistic or stylized. In the movie *Babe*, for example, hyper-realistic spaces were used to enhance the fairytale quality of the story. As with a painting, a set's depth can be enhanced through perspective. Adding windows and doors, for instance, can increase the sense of depth. Scale (or the relative size of objects) can be manipulated for emotional effect. In *The Secret Garden*, Stuart Craig made the mansion sets huge in proportion to the girl to emphasize her feeling of powerlessness. Production designers also consider how the camera is going to be used in a given set or location. Is the camera going to be moving all through the space at eye level, for instance, or looking down at a single, fixed angle? How will the set or location be lit? Natural light from the west? Artificial overhead light?

From a magazine, book or the Internet, select a photograph or painting that contains a room that is visually striking. Consider the following questions: What is the first thing you notice about the room? What is its overall shape and size? Are the elements within the space in proportion to one another? Is the space shallow or deep? If there are windows and doors, how do they function in the set? Basically, how does the space help the filmmaker tell the story?

Name or general description of painting or photograph:

_____

Artist: _____

Describe the architectural elements of the room—shape, volume, scale, depth—and suggest how they work together to create a feeling about the space:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Pick an indoor scene from a film that was recognized for achievement in art direction. As you watch the scene, try to focus on the architectural elements of the art direction and their relation to the camera.

Title of film: _____

The scene I will observe is:

_____

_____

Describe the set's architectural elements:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Where is the camera in the scene?

_____

Is it moving or fixed? _____

Do you think that the scene was set in a real location or a space constructed for the film? Why?

_____

_____

_____

Now imagine the scene in a different setting. Describe the new architectural elements:

_____

_____

_____

How do your changes affect the way the camera moves in the scene?

_____

_____

_____

ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF SET DESIGN
PERSPECTIVE: The way things look from a given point according to their size, shape, distance, etc.
SCALE: The apparent size of a represented object in proportion to the actual size of that object
VOLUME: The amount of space inside something

SETTING *the* STAGE

Set decorations—the props and furnishings that fill out a set or location—are key elements of production design. They include not only furniture and its accessories, but paint color, wall hangings, greenery and food items as well. The décor of a room is its overall style and is suggested primarily by the furniture. Common décors include modern, traditional, rustic and European, but the décor of a specific set may be more haphazard or mixed. Set decoration conveys valuable information about a script's characters and helps tell the story visually. Consider, for example, a scene set in a lawyer's office. The décor of the office is ultra-modern and hints at success. We wouldn't be surprised to find a wall of hardbound law books there, but if we noticed dust on all the books, we might assume they weren't getting much use, or cleaning. Chinese takeout cartons and an electric shaver on the lawyer's desk, a toothbrush and toothpaste on his filing cabinet and a blanket on the couch tell us the office doubles as a living space. A desk calendar with a lot of blank space suggests business is slow.

Taken together, these set details describe not a successful lawyer, but one who has no clients and has to live in his office to make ends meet. Sometimes details like these are mentioned in the script, but often they are added by the production designer. As production designer Dean Tavoularis (*The Godfather* trilogy, *The Outsiders*) notes, "Whether it's a period or a contemporary story, one should always think about what possessions characters might have in their environment."

Invent a character or pick one from a favorite novel. Imagine a room (bedroom, living room, office, etc.) that your character might spend time in. What type of room is it?

_____

Describe the décor, or style, of the room. Is it funky? Conservative? Is it cluttered or sparsely furnished? Neat or messy? Are the walls bare or covered?

_____
_____
_____

Describe four props in the room related to your character and explain how those items suggest your character's occupation, hobbies and tastes:

1. _____
_____

2. _____
_____

3. _____
_____

4. _____
_____

Share your room details with a classmate. Based only on these details, have your classmate guess the sex, personality, occupation and social background of your character.

Now, using your props, create some action for your character in that room. Describe what your character is doing and imagine how your set enhances the story:

_____
_____
_____
_____

ELEMENTS OF SET DECORATION:
DÉCOR: Style or mode of decoration, as of a room, building, or the like
PROP OR PROPERTY: Object used by an actor or displayed as part of a set

COLOR *and* TEXTURE

In addition to architectural elements and set decoration, production designers rely on color and texture to realize their vision. Often designers devise color and fabric palettes for the main characters in a script. Palettes include fabric swatches and color chips and are usually displayed on a board. Colors can reflect the social and cultural background of a character, as well as his or her personality. A character who always dresses in grays and browns, for instance, is most likely serious and conservative. Colors can also be used to emphasize themes and moods in a story. A set decorated all in red might heighten the violence of a story, while a white set might underscore a theme of purity and innocence.

Sometimes colors work by directing the viewer's eye towards a particular spot in the frame. In early Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies, Fred Astaire used to be dressed in a brighter white shirt than the chorus dancers so that the audience would immediately focus on him. Designers also think in terms of tone—how light or dark, bright or dull each color will be. Although more subtle than color, textures, such as you might find in fabrics, can also enhance storytelling. Coarse fabrics, such as burlap or canvas, might correspond to a rough character. A room filled with smooth, shiny objects, like mirrors and stainless steel appliances, might suggest a reflective, bright personality.

The fantasy picture *Pleasantville* (1998), in which two 1990s teenagers are transported inside a black-and-white 1950s television show, demonstrates the complexity of color in art direction. As the modern-day teenagers alter the dull, predictable 1950s television world, the black-and-white environment gradually takes on color. Production designer Jeannine Claudia Oppewall had to decide which objects or actors in each scene should be "colored." The first object to take on color was a single red rose. In the scene, red represented physical passion.
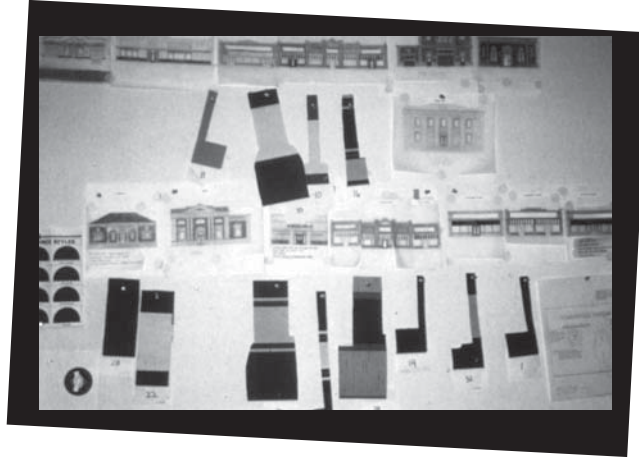
Imagine your classroom entirely in black and white. List which objects you would color and how you would color them, to show the following:

Anger:_____

Joy:_____

Sadness:_____

Strength:_____

What textures do you see in your classroom?

_____

_____

_____

Scout your school or neighborhood and select three spots for location shooting, giving special attention to color.

The locations I chose were:

1._____

2._____

3._____

What were the outstanding colors of each location?

1._____

2._____

3._____

Based on the colors you listed above, describe what types of scenes (love scene, fight, chase, etc.) might be played in these locations and why:
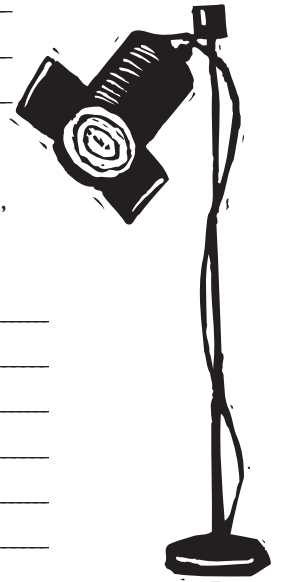
1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

ELEMENTS OF COLOR AND TEXTURE:
PALETTE: A range of colors used for a particular purpose
**TEXTURE:** The visual and tactile quality of a surface
TONE: A tint or shade; hue

LEARNING *from the* BEST

Storyboards are a chronological layout of sketches or photographs that outline the main action of a film scene or sequence. They provide information about the physical requirements of a particular set or location as well as an outline for the action in the shot. A storyboard sketch indicates not only which characters are in a shot and their general locale, but camera angles, movement and framing as well. In addition to storyboards, production designers use detailed sketches in creating their sets. The sketches are turned into blueprints and given to construction crews to realize. Models of sets, built to scale, help the filmmakers visualize the three-dimensional space in which they will be working.

Below are storyboard sketches from *Pleasantville*, designed by Jeannine Claudia Oppewall. As a class, compare the sketches to stills of the set from the finished film:
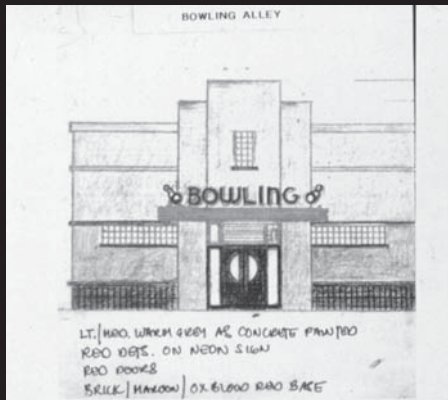
In the previous activities, we learned about the many ways in which art direction, as envisioned by production designers, can help tell a visually stimulating story. Now it's time to look at the films that were nominated for art direction this year.

List the nominees for best art direction in the space below:

1._____
_____

2._____
_____

3._____
_____

4._____
_____

5._____
_____

Pick one film that you would like to see from the list of nominees. As you watch, think about how the film uses architectural elements, set decoration and color to enhance the story.

After viewing the film, describe why you think the Academy chose to recognize the art direction in that film nomination and whether it was or was not appropriate.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Now using the scene you wrote in **Activity 2**, draw your own storyboard on the back of this sheet, indicating what the viewer will see in the first eight shots. In addition to your character, be sure to include as many details of your set as possible.