



Professional Development for the CLLP

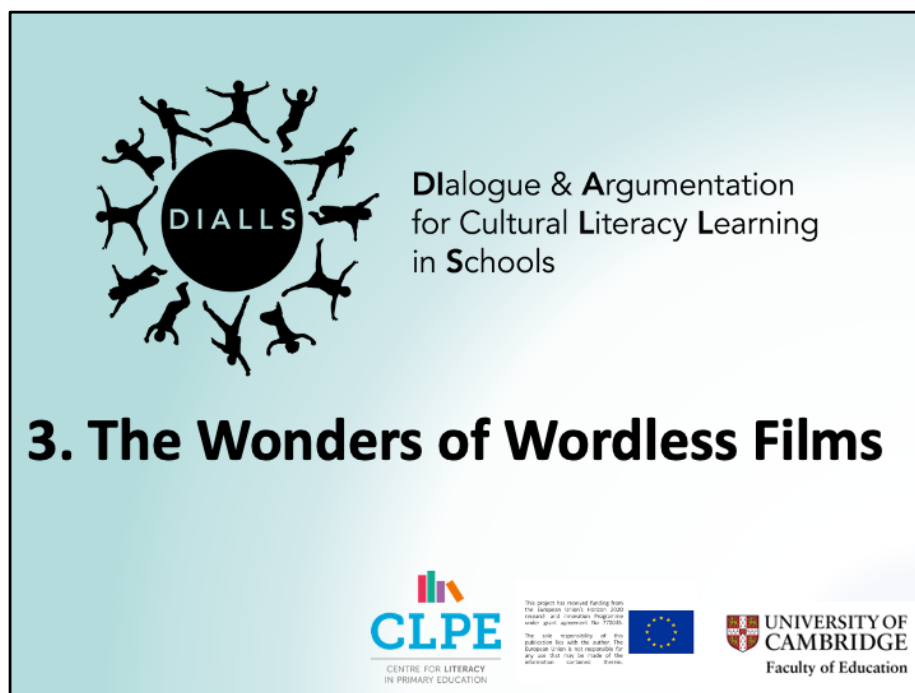
3. The Wonders of Wordless Films

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation Programme under grant agreement No 770045.

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**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**
Faculty of Education



This is the third session in our Professional Development package. In this session we will explore the wonderful world of the wordless! The session will use one of the films that we have included in the DIALLS library – it will help you to think about how we can support children to make meaning from film and make the most of the discussions that arise from the DIALLS materials. The notes will help you to plan your DIALLS lessons using the films in the CLLP. Be warned, looking at each one in this kind of detail would take a long time, but it is important to think about what is possible in making sense of film and all its multimodal features.

These notes about how to use film
have been produced with The Centre
for Literacy in Primary Education




The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education has worked with DIALLS to put together this workshop. Many of the ideas in this session come from their work on The Power of Reading.



Why use Film?

- The development of an increasingly broad concept of literacy for the 21st Century.
- Children are highly skilled readers of film texts.
- Using film can support children's development as readers.
- Using film can provide a strong link between home and school experiences.
- Using film is inclusive. All children feel able to contribute.
- Film encourages talk. Children feel more confident to take part in discussions.
- Films can provide a range of starting points for writing.

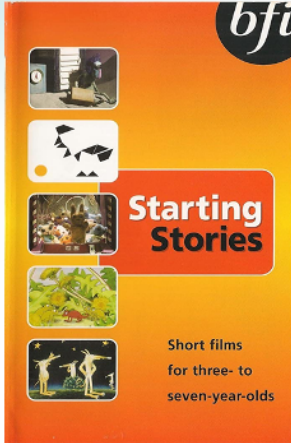
Film provides a starting point that will enthuse and engage most children. Younger children, who don't yet feel confident discussing written text, will feel able to contribute, and to contribute effectively, when discussing and exploring film and visual images. Just as many children surprise us with their insight when exploring illustration, in, for example, wordless picturebooks, children with a wealth of different depths of literary experience can feel confident to analyse and discuss the moving image.



Understanding Film

The six main elements that make a film work:

- Story
- Setting
- Character
- Sound
- Colour
- Camera



Skilled filmmakers use a variety of tools to convey meaning. Every choice will be deliberate in extending meaning in relation to the story. Giving children an awareness of some of the key terminology for analysing film in the classroom will help them better articulate their ideas and opinions in discussion.

Starting Stories, a UK school resource provided by the British Film Institute, summarised six of the main elements that work together in order to produce a story on film and explored the ways in which each of these aspects could be discussed and investigated by even the youngest of our pupils and therefore become part of the language for discussions about film.

These elements are STORY, SETTING, CHARACTER, SOUND, COLOUR and CAMERA.

The question prompts on the following slides, adapted from this work by the BFI, allow us to think more deeply about each of these six elements - in relation to a film from the DIALLS Library - The Grand Migration.



Story

- *What happens in the story?*
- *What are the main events?*
- *Do we know where the story takes place?*
- *Who or what is the story about? How can we tell?*
- *Do we know over what period of time the story might take place?*
- *What do you think happened before the story began?*
- *What might happen next, after the end of the story?*
- *Does this story remind you of other stories? How?*
- *How would you like the story to end or continue?*

It's likely that, to begin, children will feel most comfortable discussing the elements of the film that are most familiar to them from other narrative forms discussed in the classroom: foremost of these being the story that is being told.

These questions will help children to get inside the story.

You might want to pause the video to give yourself time to reflect on the questions.



Setting

- *Where does the action take place?*
- *Do you think the story is set in a specific place? If so, why might the story be set in this particular place?*
- *When and how does the setting change?*
- *How might the setting affect the characters and the way they might behave?*
- *How do you think the story would have changed if it happened in a different place or setting?*
- *Were there places you would have liked to have seen, but that you didn't see in the story?*

Based on what we see and what we hear – the situation, the character, and the story - we can consider where the action takes place and the impact that has on our interpretation and understanding of the story and any potential themes. Think about how these questions will help support understanding.



Character

- *Is there a main character?*
- *What do the main characters look like?*
- *How do they speak and what do they say?*
- *How can you tell what the characters are thinking or how they are feeling?*
- *How do they behave? How do they behave towards other characters?*
- *Do any of the characters have particular music or sounds?*
- *Which character interests you the most? Why?*
- *Do any of the characters remind you of those in another story or film? How?*

Most filmed stories will feature a main character or perhaps a cast of characters. We can explore this character the same way as we would in a story told in a written form. What do we find out about the character based on what we see, what we hear and what we're told? How does the character's behaviour inform us of their emotions and their thinking and vice versa?



Sound

- *How many different sounds do you hear? What are they?*
- *Is there music in the film?*
- *How does the music make you feel?*
- *When do the sounds change? What is happening on screen when the sound or music change?*
- *If you listened to the sounds without the pictures, can you tell what is happening?*
- *Are there any moments of silence in the film? When do they happen?*
- *What music would you add to the film?*

When focusing on the soundtrack, there are four components which might inform and affect our interpretation of the events, mood and genre of the film: the **music**, the **sound effects**, the dialogue or **voice**, and, finally, the use of **silence**. Of course, in the DIALLS wordless films there is no dialogue - but the soundtracks give many important clues for meaning making.

In the film that you are about to see, which of these four elements did you find had the most impact on your enjoyment or your interpretation of the film?



Colour

- *What colours do you see? When do the colours change and why?*
- *What do the colours tell you about the time of day the story took place?*
- *What are the main colours used in the film? Are some more important than others?*
- *Why do you think certain colours are used?*
- *Are any colours associated with particular characters?*
- *What would the film have been like if a different colour scheme was used, perhaps black and white, or in just one colour?*

Lighting and colour quickly create an atmosphere on screen. If it is dark and shadowy, we might be made to feel uneasy, as in a thriller; if the lighting is bright, we feel happy and confident, as in a comedy or family movie.

The filmmaker can use lighting to draw our attention to a person or object.... Or, equally, to hide them.

When you watch the film, think about the most prominent colours in it. How did they make you feel? What did they remind you of?

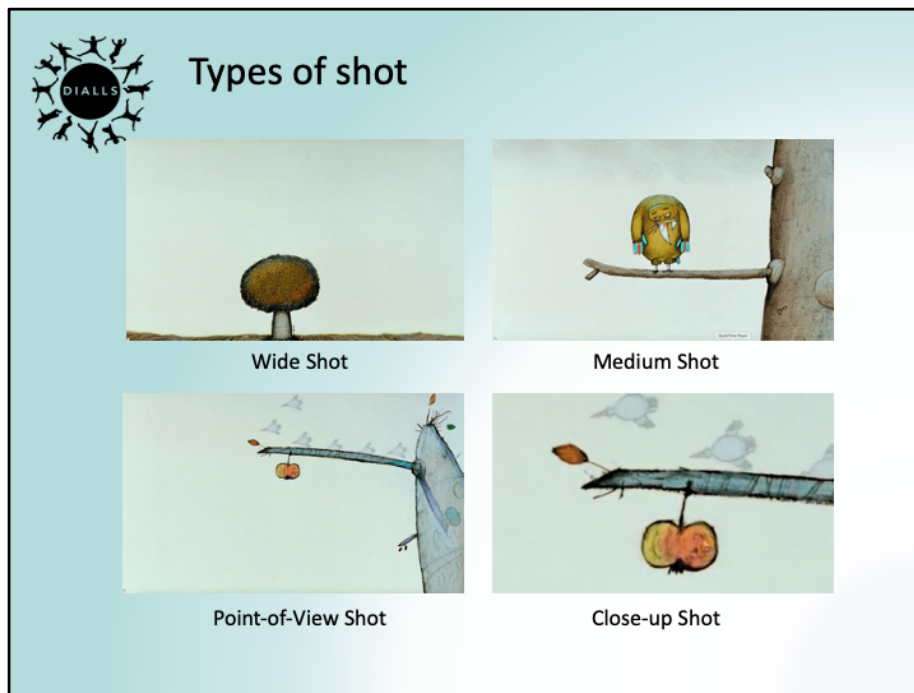


Camera

- *What shots can you identify – wide, mid, close-up, POV?*
- *What are the different shots used for?*
- *Through whose eyes did we see the story? When do we see different characters' points of view?*
- *When does the camera move and when does it stay still?*
- *How does it move – panning, tilting, crane, tracking, hand held*
- *How does the camera help to tell the story?*
- *How quickly does the film move between shots?*
- *Why do might certain shots have been chosen to follow each other, e.g. a long shot followed by a close-up?*

Because every element of a visual image can carry meaning, the shots in a film can be 'read' like other texts. Personal interpretation is important, distinct and valued, but all of the elements discussed so far might inform that interpretation including the positioning, angle and movement of the camera.

As you watch the film think about the camera angles.



Let's briefly review some of the main shot types that we might find in live action or animated film.

Often included at the beginning of a scene, the establishing shot – or **wide shot** - helps to build ambiance, may give a nod what's to come and indicates where (and sometimes when) the scene is taking place.

- How much of the character or subject can you see in the shot?
- The **Medium shot** also known as the $\frac{3}{4}$ shot, typically shows the subject from the knees up. It allows the viewer to see the background environment and the character's gestures, while still being close enough to capture their emotions.
- The **Close up** shot shows the subject's head/face which shows us their reactions and emotions without the distraction of the background.
- The **Point of View** Shot speaks for itself – it shows us the subject's point of view, and allows us to view the world from their perspective – we can get a better idea of what is important to them or see something that they have noticed...

Other shots you might notice are

- An **extreme close shot which** is so close that only one specific detail can be seen. It can show important details or really allow the viewer to experience the extremes of a character's emotions.

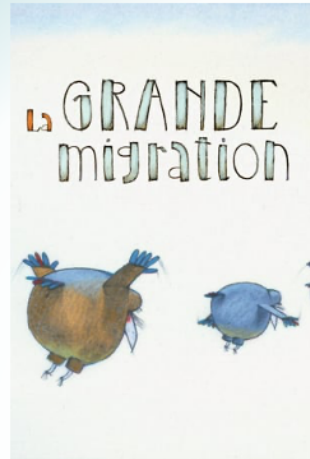
- **A bird-eye view or Down Shot** can make the subject seem vulnerable or powerless.
- **An Up shot or worms eye view** can give the impression that the subject is in some way powerful, heroic or even dangerous.
- An **Over the shoulder** shot is taken from behind the shoulder of another character and usually frames the subject in a medium or close shot. It is usually used in dialogue scenes and helps to establish which characters are speaking to each other.

La Grande Migration

<https://bit.ly/DIALSPD>

written and directed by Youri Tcherenkov (Folimage, 1995)


- *How would you summarise this story in one or two sentences? What are the most significant events? What are the most memorable?*
- *What are your initial impressions of the main character or subject of the film?*
- *What role does sound play in the film? What aspect of the soundtrack made the biggest impression on you?*
- *How would you describe the colour or tone of this film? How did it make you feel?*



Ok – it's time for me to stop talking and for you to watch our sample film. Follow the link on the slide to watch the film (the link is below). The link should take you to The Grand Migration on Vimeo. I suggest you pause this session for a moment while you go and watch the film. It's about 6 minutes long.

<https://bit.ly/DIALSPD>

As you watch the film for the first time, keep in mind a few of the questions that we have already discussed.



Initial Responses (using Aidan Chambers Tell Me frame)

Likes What did you like about the book / story / picture?	Dislikes Was there anything you disliked about it?
Puzzles Was there anything that puzzled you?	Connections / Patterns Does it remind you of anything? Did you notice any pattern?

Aidan Chamber's Tell Me frame is a useful tool to gather these initial understandings (and to clarify any parts where the children did not understand the story).

Primarily, at this stage, we are interested in personal responses to the film. We want to demonstrate that we value what children like and dislike about the film, what patterns or puzzles they might have seen.



Discussion prompts about the film

- What happened in the story? What are the key events?
- How did it make you feel? Did your feelings change while you were watching? What caused your feelings to change?
- Does it remind you of anything you have seen before in real life, in stories or film?
- Was there anything surprising or unexpected?
- Why do you think the writer/director chose this title for the film? Did you think it was an effective title? Why/why not?
- What might the word 'great' signify? What different meanings does it have? In French, the title is *La Grande Migration* – what does 'grande' translate as?

In addition to the Tell Me Framework, you might use further prompts to further children's discussion around elements of the film overall, before returning to specific, selected moments from the film. The CLLP lesson prompts include questions that will direct the discussion towards the cultural themes of DIALLS – firstly by looking at the films' meanings and messages.

It might be that you return to short sequences or to screen shots that can be explored and investigated more slowly – just as you might pore over a double page spread from a picturebook. These could be moments that you have selected and prepared in advance as well as moments that children found most significant or puzzling or interesting.

The Opening Shot



Here's a screen capture of the establishing shot of the film.

The filmmaker – and in this case the director, animator and screenwriter roles were all taken by the same individual – had to decide what they wanted the audience to see as the film began. Why do you think they chose this shot?

- What might this shot tell us about the story or the setting?
- Where do you think this could be? What makes you think that?
- What do the colours and shapes tell you about this place?
- How do you think this image was created? What materials were used? How can you tell?
- Where does the perspective place you as a viewer?
- Why do you think the tree has been surrounded by so much empty space? How does the size of the tree make you feel?
- How does the image make you feel? What might contribute to that feeling?



Character

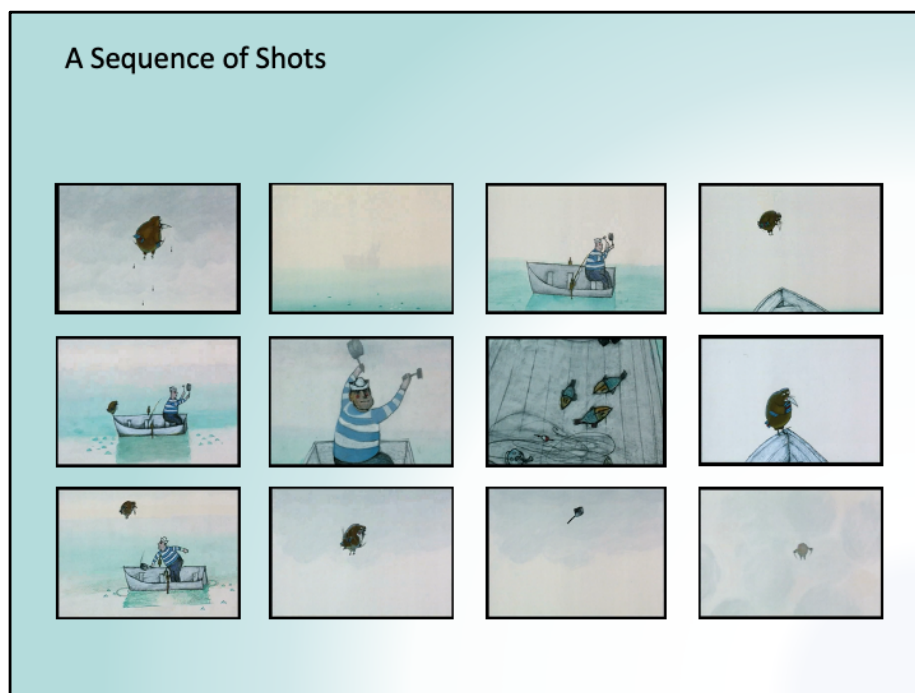
- What words would you use to describe the character's behaviour, appearance or other characteristics?
- What have you seen and heard to make you think that?
- What different actions does the character behave in? What might each of these mean?
- When does the camera shot change? Why do you think it changes? What impact does it have on the story or on our understanding of the character?
- Do you have any questions about the character? What would you like to find out?



You could rewatch the start of the film to ask:

- What are our initial impressions about the main character?
- How do they behave or react?
- What can we tell from their facial expressions and body language?
- How do you think they feel? How do we know?
- What might they be thinking / hoping / wanting? How do we know this?

Are there any elements discussed earlier that inform our reading of the character – setting, sound, colour, camera?



In addition to single shots from the film, it's possible to explore multiple sequential shots which represent a short, deconstructed scene. We can use this to support our understanding of how meaning has been created through the moving image.

Select and play a short sequence from the film. Every time the camera shot cuts to a new shot, pause and screenshot that moment. Soon you will have a sequence of shots which summarise the selected scene from the film. How does the order of the shots create the meaning? Look at the sequence of shots I've selected from the film:

- Does the camera move within the same shot or is the camera static? When does it move? Why do you think it does that? What might it indicate?
- Why do you think the shot has been composed like that? Could it have been done differently? What impact would that have had?
- Why do you think the bird lands on the boat? How might it feel? What does it want? How do you know?
- Who is the person in the boat? What do we know about them? How do you feel about the character as a viewer? What makes you feel that way?
- If you wanted to show the same event with fewer shots, what would you remove? Why?
- How did the scene make you feel? Could you change it to provoke different potential feelings in the viewer?
- What role does *sound* play in this section of the film? Why do you think the filmmaker chose not to include any music in this short scene?
- Are there any moments when we are seeing things from a character's point of view? How do we know?

If children develop an understanding of how scenes are put together using a series of shot choices like this, they will be able to use what they have learnt to storyboard and film their own short films – whether live-action, animated, programmed or stop-motion. Just as an author chooses their words, phrases, and sentences with care, just as the author considers the sequence, the impact, the emotion, the pacing, the cohesion and the fluidity of an effective paragraph... the filmmaker chooses their shots for the same purpose. Just as reading and writing inform each other in the classroom, the skills developed from the reading of a film are transferable to the pupil's work in more traditional literacy tasks.



Sound

Re-listen to a section of the film without looking at the images.

- Can you visualise what is happening?
- How do you feel as you listen? What do you think makes you feel that way?
- What are you picturing in your mind's eye?
- What sound effects can you hear?
- Is there any music? How would you describe it?

Play the same section and look at the images while listening to the sound.

- Is it the section you visualised?
- Did you picture anything differently? Why?

To support children in focusing on the impact made by the sound, try separating it from the film.

Children could watch a scene without any sound – how is our impression or response altered when the music or sound effects are removed?

Different music could be played instead – Does that alter our response? If so, how?

The screen could be turned off, so that we listen to the music without being able to see the images.

How does the music make us feel now? Does the combination of sounds help you to picture the events, the actions, the setting?

If the children haven't seen a short film yet, they might be introduced to it via the soundtrack only. What are their impressions? What genre of story do they think it might be? Does the music imply drama, romance, action, comedy, tragedy? What do they think might happen?



Breaking the Rules

What happens when filmmakers choose to deliberately confound our expectations?

In all areas of filmmaking – camera positioning and movement, character, colour, sound, etc. – we can consider:

- What options were available?
- Why was this one chosen?
- What impact did it have?

Sometimes filmmakers play with our expectations. And this can have an impact on us as viewer.

The Ending



Towards the end of The Grand Migration, we become as disorientated as the bird, as it flies through the storm.

The last few shots of the film show our bird reunited with the flock and continuing their journey – but wait a minute – why is that drop of rain falling ‘upwards’? As the shot widens we realise that the filmmaker has been playing with us – not only is the world flipped upside down, but that tree looks very familiar....



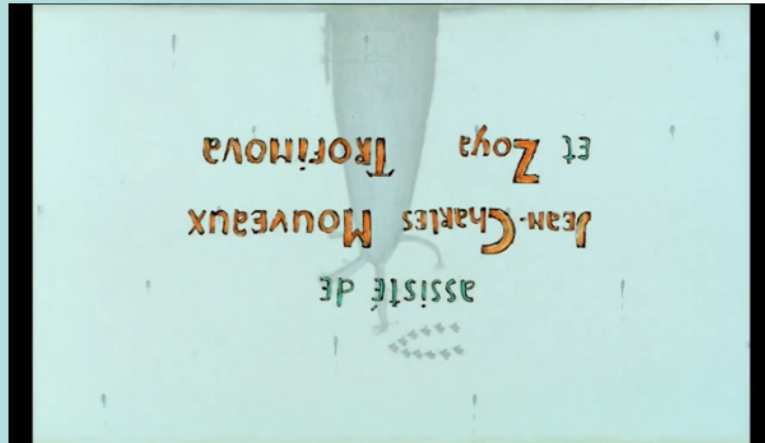
The Ending

- Did you like how the film ended? Why/why not?
- Why do you think the film's creator chose to end the story at that point?
- What do you think happened to the birds? What makes you think that?
- Do you think they've ended up back where they started? Why/why not?
- What do you think might happen next, after the end of the story?
- How would you like the story to continue; or would you like to suggest an alternate ending?


Before reflecting on the film overall, share your thoughts about how the story ended....

- How did you feel about the end?
- Did you see it coming?
- Were you pleased or satisfied with this ending? Why/why not?

The Ending



Children may even have some comments about the unusual credit sequence...



It is important to take time to explore the meaning of the film in the light of the cultural themes – there is always lots to discuss to make sense of a wordless text

Moving Beyond the Film

But it is also important to move beyond the film to talk about these ideas more generally and to relate them to our lives

LESSON PROMPTS

The House

Dialogue and Argumentation:
Encourage the children to build on each other's ideas in order to reach shared ideas

Cultural Theme
Understanding what home is and ideas of 'belonging'

Discussion Prompts


About the film:

- Why do you think the family decided to leave the place they used to live at?
- How did their decision affect their old house? Why did the old house feel like that?
- Why do you think the old house went looking for them?
- Where was 'home' for the family?

Beyond the film:
"Living in urban areas is better than living in rural areas. Justify your opinion, explaining why"

What does 'home' mean? Why do we 'belong'?

Ideas for Cultural Expression
Create a collage of ideas for how we define 'home' and 'belonging'



The DIALLS lessons for all age groups, primary and secondary, focus on discussions about cultural themes around social responsibility and living together, and use the films as springboards for these, but you could watch the films multiple times to draw out deeper meanings by drawing attention to the filmic mode.

We hope you've enjoyed this session. Why not explore some of the films that are part of the CLLP for your age group. What parts of the film will you draw their attention to? Make a note of the timing of key scenes that you might want to return to?

Discussions about the film are greatly enriched if children are able to use the language of film to describe key moments.



That completes our professional development for DIALLS. All the resources you need to implement the CLLP are on the website and the films are licensed to stream until April 2026. Don't forget to explore the extra films and discussion prompts in our library so that you can extend your lessons beyond the CLLP core sessions. We do hope that you enjoy DIALLS, we've certainly enjoyed working with teachers across Europe over the past three years as part of the project!