

Purpose: Use this modeled example of the Week 5 Written Assignment to explore the elements that make this an exemplary submission. Hover over the number or scroll to the end of the text to read about what the student has done well in this assignment.

Final Film Critique: Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace

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ENG225: Introduction to Film

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Final Film Critique: Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace

Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace is a powerful story that showcases expert use of narrative elements and cinematic techniques. In the following film critique the author will analyze the Star Wars theatrical presentation through the lens of the formalist theory. The formalist theory enables critics in analyzing how meaning is conveyed through study of a film's form. By aligning the theory with plot structure, editing style, sound elements, camera techniques, and overall mise en scène it is clear that *Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace* is a must-watch action adventure learning experience for all science fiction aficionados. I will also reflect upon how my personal film analysis capabilities have developed throughout this course. Lastly, the author will conclude with an explanation of why Star Wars: The Phantom Menace is an eloquent entertainment experience in excitement, thrill, achievement effect and virtue familiarity.

The Phantom Menace has many different themes intertwined throughout the story. The most influential and encompassing of the many themes is the 'confrontation with evil' unique subject matter and the manner in which it is derived from and leads to subthemes (i.e. fulfilling hope, honoring trust, respecting friendship, valuing honesty, controlling ambition, garnering respect, etc.). The heritage, legacy, culture, and family dynamics of the theatrical presentation enhance the central 'conflict with evil' theme for a first-rate, top-quality lesson in structuring faith, developing compassionate understanding, and appreciating egalitarian esteem. The analysis will address contextual information, story and plot anatomy, aesthetic choices and social affect.

Contextual information means basic identifying elements such as title, director, and cinematographer. *Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace* is directed by George Lucas. Mr. Lucas, as the director, guides technical teams and controls the creativity skills of actors in

script interpretation. The cinematographer, David Tattersall, is in charge of the camera crew and carries team collaborative responsibility in technical artistry. Choreographer/stunt coordinator, Nick Gillard, arranges and plans action sequences such as lightsaber battles. The editor, Paul Martin Smith, is technically responsible for connecting shots into a consistently cogent sequence. Major actors and actresses include: Anthony Daniels, Kenny Baker, Natalie Portman, Ewan McGregor, Oliver Ford Davies, Frank Oz, Jake Lloyd, Ian McDiarmid, Liam Neeson, Samuel L. Jackson, Keira Knightly, Ahmed Best, Pernilla August, Silas Carson, Sofia Coppola, Ray Park, Hugh Quarshie, and Dominic West, (*Star Wars*, 2001). Their roles in the overall design process include creating a sense of culture and species diversity. *The Phantom Menace's* concept design relies upon a galactic community theme with subsequent political complexity subthemes. The identifying information in the eighteen named major actors, from the author's perspective, assist in conceptualizing the blockbuster's multi-theme sophistication. Released in 1999, the science fiction, multi-million dollar, epic, space soap opera is rated PG and has an average runtime of one hundred thirty-six minutes.

A brief summary of *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* will serve as an overview of the plot and story, and orient the treatment of theme. Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn and Jedi apprentice Obi-Wan Kenobi are sent to distant planet Naboo to save its monarch, Queen Padme Amidala, from an invasion by the evil Trade Federation. After escaping Naboo with Queen Amidala, the Jedi's spacecraft is damaged which causes an emergency landing on the planet Tatooine. On Tatooine, Jedi Master Jinn discovers a child slave with tremendous force powers. Named Anakin Skywalker, the child slave wins a Tatooine vehicle podrace, establishes his freedom, and joins the Jedi in their trip to the planet Coruscant. After undergoing unsuccessful political attempts to stop the Naboo invasion, Qui-Gon Jinn, Obi-Wan Kenobi,

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Queen Amidala and Anakin Skywalker return to Naboo. On Naboo they separate to engage in the story's ultimate thematic plot correlation: Queen Amidala and Anakin versus the invasion force, and, Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi versus Darth Maul. After sacrificially winning their thematic battles the heroes (sans Qui-Gon Jinn) become aware that the Naboo invasion is just the beginning of an elaborate Sith plan to revive the Dark Side's control of the galaxy.

The differences which indicate a film's story and a film's plot are sequence and method. The writer transcribes the story, or sequence of development/action, into a plot, which retells the story in a certain way (Goodykoontz, Jacobs, 2014). In transcribing the *Star Wars Episode 1* story into *The Phantom Menace's* themed plot, writer/director George Lucas organized the David Tattersall camera team and each actor/dialogue/setting sequence toward intended narrative ideology development. The narrative ideology, computer-generated imagery and live action, is fast-paced and full of critical moment scenes.

An example of Mr. Lucas' directorial plot methodology recapturing the Episode One story sequence, and a scene from the aforementioned film summary, is Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi saving Queen Amidala from the initial Trade Federation invasion. The techniques and design elements, as they apply to the overarching theme of confrontation with evil are correspondingly represented in setting changes, character movement, camera angles and editing styles. As the film transitions from the evil sneak attack destruction of the spacecraft, the audience sees Trade Federation droids communicating with a hologram Darth Sidious who commands them to kill the Jedi Master and apprentice Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi. The following cinematic events support the four areas of in-depth film analysis and is but one of many which work together to convey the central Episode 1 themes.

The setting, a Naboo guest quarters annex, is low-key lighting and smoke-filled with greys and vibrant blues as the Trade Federation droids gas then approach the slowly opening doors of the Jedi's guest room. The diegetic and non-diegetic sounds correlate the computer-generated droids' 'command and control' conversation and the suspenseful background music. The scene transitions to an over-the-shoulder camera angle of the droids' perspective and silence as a servant droid walks out of the room. The editing sequence from that moment shifts back and forth from the droid perspective to the open guest room doors to heighten expectation of a Jedi appearance. Instantly laser blasts sound, two lightsabers appear, heroic theme music plays and Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi appear deflecting laser projectiles and defeating the droid attack. The Nick Gillard-styled coordinated character movement, the Paul Martin Smith-styled fast-paced camera angles of David Tattersall styled close-up, medium, and full 'battle sequence' shots helped make sense of the twisting and turning loyalty shifts and mise en scene chronological changes. The efficacy in the specific editing, sound, and computer-generated imagery (CGI)/special effects mixture gives the audience a clear interpretation of thrilling action, comprehensible excitement and protagonist 'heroic triumph over evil' engagement. In furthering the focus of the overall 'confrontation with evil theme', the CGI effects devise a unique Star Wars subtheme aesthetic that promises a superior advantage.

The social impact of *Star Wars: Episode One – The Phantom Menace* begins with the popular science fiction escapism of the 1970s and 1980s. Released two years after the end of the Vietnam War, *Star Wars: Episode Four – A New Hope* broke all-time box office records and garnered a multi-faceted, dedicated and vastly expanding science fiction fan base and culture. The theatrical presentation was such an awarded success that the culturally demanded sequels, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983) created even more intense multi-

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faceted social demand. As the Star Wars response to the extreme popularity and demand of the aforementioned blockbusters, *Episode One – The Phantom Menace* satiated the expectation, anticipation and excitement of the legendary space soap opera. When fans anxiously awaited the premiere of the theatrical presentation back in 1999 the elation of a new Star Wars overrode any critical disdain in the mind of superfans (Kickham, 2015). The social impact is in adding to the Academy Award record-breaking potential of the Star Wars franchise and invigorating a multi-faceted (artificial intelligence, aeronautics, health, audio engineering, astronomy, physics, genre sophistication, etc, (Gent, 2015) theoretical science culture.

The author's ability to analyze movies has increased sufficiently according to previous study and course terminology definitions and descriptions. The completion of English 225: Introduction to Film enables the student in explaining how movies incorporate meaning beyond story events. Quite professionally, the author is able to better distinguish cinematography variations and differences and recognize like elements in portraying similar themes. An effective refinement in differentiating story and plot gives the author greater appreciation for engaging audiences with socially-sensitive narrative elements and uniquely interpreted literary devices (such as metaphor, conflict, foreshadowing, symbol, point of view, tone, etc.). A better understanding of the relationship among directors/writers, actors and technical teams changes the author's use of film theory and criticism by prioritizing the application of cinematic innovation in attracting and retaining audiences. The author's skills, developed in the English 225: Introduction to Film course, are central to an in-depth understanding of a filmmaker's use of actors. In recognizing the difference among actors and characters, the author can better determine the applied aspects in effective realistic or stylized acting. Recognizing the types of actors and the

interdependency in acting styles effectuates what the author considers promising and proficient professional acting skill.

Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace fashions meaning through an elaboration in optimistic promise and objective consequences in moral significance. The formalist approach directly highlights narrative elements and cinematic techniques for focusing thematic collaboration and definitive comprehension correlation. As a must-watch action adventure for all science fiction aficionados, the highly recommended theatrical presentation expertly represents human ‘good versus evil’ ideological interaction on its finest scale.

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- Star Wars. (2015). Episode 1: The Phantom Menace. Retrieved Dec. 25, 2015 from: <http://www.starwars.com/films/star-wars-episode-i-the-phantom-menace>

1. The author has written a strong introduction that gives a clear sense of the topic and purpose. Additionally, a strong introduction explains how the purpose will be accomplished – in this instance, what techniques and methodologies will be explored.
2. The author makes a claim about the theme of the film under discussion and then indicates how this claim will be proven in the succeeding paragraphs.
3. Following the guidelines for this assignment, the author has delivered required contextual information – and has done so fully with complete sentences that explain how even this information links to the overall concepts under discussion.
4. A plot summary is just that – a summary of the important events and currents of a film. Here, the author covers the broad strokes of the plot without getting bogged down in too many specific details. Additionally, the author is sure to signal how the plot connects to the theme.
5. The author provides specific examples, including scenes from the film, to support the viewpoint being discussed.
6. These specific examples, used to support the claims made throughout the paper, are closely analyzed scenes and shots from the film itself. The author has used the proper terminology to discuss these techniques which demonstrates mastery of course content.
7. A reader won't believe what you're saying unless you give clear and direct reference as support. In this class, that support often comes from specific scenes or shots from the film itself.
8. The author begins a discussion of the social impact of the film by appealing to an understanding of the culture at the time, showing the delicate interconnections between film and society.
9. Even though the film under discussion is primarily meant as entertainment, the author explores this topic fully – considering the many ways a film may interact with the larger culture. Additionally, outside resources have been brought in to enlarge this discussion.
10. The author has integrated his required personal reflection, showing how the work done in this paper is an integral capstone to the learning accomplished in class.
11. The author has written a complete conclusion that serves to look back at the entire paper and gather the various ideas and concepts that have been discussed. Additionally, the conclusion is linked to some specific information from the film.