

### **E.T. Style and Cinematography**

When asked during an interview if he did anything special to prepare for a directing project, Spielberg was quoted as saying, "Before I go off and direct a movie, I always look at four films. They tend to be: *Seven Samurai*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, and *The Searchers*. It is interesting that Spielberg is so influenced with films that are considered story-driven films. In each of the examples that Spielberg mentions, the directors allow the scope of the story to drive the cinematic style that they use to bring the story alive on film. Spielberg does the same with *E.T.* Realizing that the majority of the story is told from the point of view of Elliott and E.T., Spielberg decides to let the camera give his audience the experience of witnessing the story unfolding from their point of view.

One of the most outstanding and noticeable cinematic choices that Spielberg made while filming *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* was to shoot most of the film from the eye-level of a child to allow the audience to further connect with Elliott and E.T. To further focus the audience on the children, with the exception of Elliott's mom, Spielberg allows no adult faces to be shown until the last half of the film. The reasoning behind this choice is very practical in nature. Spielberg understood that if the audience didn't develop an emotional attachment to the children and E.T. by E.T.'s death scene then the entire climactic chase would be lost on the viewers.

Spielberg made an interesting choice in the style he used in shooting the film. He decided to shoot *E.T.* in chronological order. Again this was for very practical reasons. Spielberg hoped that by letting the story unfold in a normal fashion it would help the children actors to become more emotionally attached to E.T. This would invoke a more real and believable response from them when E.T. departs for home at the end of the film. While filming the final scene, Spielberg simply let the cameras roll and captures his cast's real emotional responses. This choice also yielded one unexpected bonus for the director. While filming E.T.'s death scene, the reactions from both Henry Thomas and Drew Barrymore were so strong and real that it is considered one of the most touching moments of the film.

One of the aspects that set *E.T.* apart from many other "alien visitation" films that had come before is Spielberg's determination to give his audience a realistic feel to the world he has created. Starting with his choice to make Elliott's family a single parent home, he gives the viewer a very modern and familiar feel to the world in which his little alien finds himself. Perhaps Spielberg's efforts to make *E.T.* a believable film can be best illustrated in his attention to detail in E.T.'s death scene. In the scene the doctors are fighting to keep E.T. alive. In order to give the scene more realism, Spielberg uses real doctors instead of actors. None of the dialogue was scripted, the scene was just the doctors giving normal orders and performing normal procedures that would be required in a life threatening emergency room situation. The real doctors and nurses bring a sense of urgency to the scene that had never been captured on film prior to this. Another example is found in the fact that the communicator E.T.'s builds in the film actually worked. Spielberg hired Henry Feinberg, an expert in science and technology, to construct E.T.'s communicator out of household items to prove the alien could do the same.

To handle the final editing of *E.T.*, Spielberg tapped Carol Littleton. She was an unusual choice because Littleton had just recently completed work on her first major Hollywood film, *Body Heat* the year before. Spielberg, who was known as a perfectionist, usually only worked with experienced editors. Normally Spielberg worked exclusively with Michael Kahn, his editor from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, who had won an Oscar for his work on *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. But Spielberg had assigned Kahn to work on *Poltergeist* and Spielberg was forced to bring in Littleton. Littleton brought a lighter and fast paced touch to *E.T.* than had been seen in any of Spielberg's earlier films. Littleton was rewarded for her efforts by receiving the only Oscar nomination of her career.