

Education Resource Kit

The Fantastical Imaginings of Tim Burton

Education Resources



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THE FANTASTICAL IMAGININGS OF TIM BURTON



Tim Burton (American, b. 1958)
Untitled (Creature Series) 1980–1989.
Pen, ink, watercolour wash, and coloured pencil on paper
15 x 6" (38.1 x 15.2 cm)
Private collection
© 2010 Tim Burton



Introducing Tim Burton

Tim Burton is a master auteur whose illustrious cinematic career has spanned diverse genres and forms. He is also an artist, who is incessantly painting, photographing, drawing and doodling, exploring his wildly unique imagination and forming its content into wondrous cinematic worlds and characters.

An outsider growing up in Burbank, California, Burton went on to work as an apprenticed animator at Disney, where he began his filmmaking career with the short film *Vincent*. Throughout his career, Burton has always challenged the Hollywood formula and model to develop and further his own voice, his own vision.

The Fantastical Imaginings of Tim Burton investigates Tim Burton's enduring artistic practice as a filmmaker/artist and the collaborative nature of this practice. This resource references art movements within visual art history and the intersection of art with film genre within cinema history.

This resource includes plates of Burton's artwork with analysis of these works and a number of Burton's films. Extended investigations, research and activities are presented throughout the resource.

We hope that you find your journey through the wild and magical landscape of Tim Burton's world inspiring and that this resource encourages you to get active making art and viewing and reviewing the many diverse Burton films and visual art works.

The Fantastical Imaginings of Tim Burton is designed for lower to upper secondary school in the areas of Media Art, Visual Art and English.

SURVIVING BURBANK



Tim Burton (American, b. 1958)
Untitled (Ramone) 1980-1990
Pen, ink, marker, and coloured pencil on paper
11 x 9" (27.9 x 22.9 cm)
Private collection
 © 2010 Tim Burton

Timothy Walter Burton was born August 25 in 1955. He grew up in Burbank, California, near Hollywood. From a young age, Burton was mesmerized by popular culture and loved Sci-Fi and Horror films, the extraordinary horror-genre actor the late, Vincent Price being a particular influence and inspiration.

Burton studied at CalArts as an animator, and it was here Burton was noticed by Disney, (CalArts being set up by Disney). He was selected as an apprentice animator working on Disney films as an in-betweener, assistant animator and concept artist. Burton worked on *The Fox and The Hound* (1981), and was a conceptual artist on *The Black Cauldron* (1985). But the young Burton's artistic sensibilities tended to clash with the conservative 'house style' of Disney animations.

Whilst at CalArts, Burton studied the works of Courbet, Goya and the post-impressionists, Vincent Van Gogh being a favourite.

If I look at certain Van Gogh paintings, they're not real, but they capture such an energy that makes it real. – Tim Burton¹

Whilst Burton was at Disney, his talents were apparent and he was allowed the opportunity to create his animated stop motion short, *Vincent* (1982) and the live action short horror drama *Frankenweenie* (1984). *Vincent* was narrated by Burton's childhood hero, Vincent Price, and tells the story of a young boy who wants nothing more than to be just like Vincent Price. *Vincent* quotes from Edgar Allan Poe and the production design is classic 'Burtonesque' gothic, reminiscent of German Expressionist cinema.

Frankenweenie pays homage to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* but with a twist: having learnt about electricity and anatomy, young Victor Frankenstein decides to bring his dead dog back to life. Disney decided that it was not appropriate for young audiences and shelved the film. It can now be seen on the DVD release of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (as well as *Vincent*).

Italian horror director Mario Bava, as well as horror actor Vincent Price and American horror director Roger Corman are amongst Burton's cinematic influences, as well as the actor Barbara Steele who starred in Italian gothic horror films. Burton later paid homage to Steele in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999).

Discussion points

- Burton describes his working process as organic. What might he mean by this? Explain.
- What does *homage* mean? Can you think of an example of a homage? Discuss.
- Why do you think that horror films have remained globally popular across literature and cinema?
- Do you have a favourite horror film? Discuss.

Mise-en-scène and German Expressionism

German Expressionism was an artistic movement (encompassing film, theatre, painting, and other arts) that sought to give shape to psychological states through highly stylised visuals.²

In the horror film, the monster is a dangerous breach of nature, a violation of our normal sense of what is possible.³

In this section we explore the cinematic styles and genres which *Vincent* and *Frankenweenie* reference. In Burton's *Vincent*, we can identify art/cinema styles and genres such as Symbolism, German Expressionist cinema and Expressionist Art. Whilst in *Frankenweenie*, we can see stylistic connections to classic Hollywood horror films.

At the onset of World War 1, the German film industry was dominated by imported films on German screens. To combat this competition the German government began to support the film industry so that it could create its own propaganda films and also to ensure a German film industry. The industry benefited greatly from this support, securing financing for state of the art equipment and studios even in the face of global resistance as a consequence of the First World War. A number of prominent German filmmakers left Germany to work and make films in Hollywood in turn influencing the look and feel of horror in Hollywood.

Formal elements of German Expressionist films

According to Nancy West from the University of Missouri, Columbia, the formal elements of German Expressionist film include, but are not limited to, the following:

- chiaroscuro lighting: lighting that employs extreme contrasts of light and dark, thus creating dramatic shadows
- a preoccupation with mirrors, glass, and other reflective surfaces
- the use of anthropomorphism, which is the attribution of a human form, human characteristics, or human behaviour to nonhuman things
- an interest in abstractionism, which is a style of art that privileges internal form over pictorial representation.⁴

Quotes

'Not surprisingly, the iconography of the horror film includes settings where monsters might lurk.'⁵

Expressionist filmmakers use 'symbolism and mise-en-scène to insert mood and deeper meanings into a movie'.⁶

Expressionist filmmakers use 'set designs with wildly non-realistic, geometrically absurd sets, along with designs painted on walls and floors to represent lights, shadows, and objects'.⁷

Key aspects of mise-en-scène⁸

According to Nancy West key aspects of mise-en-scène include, but are not limited to, the following:

Decor

An important element of 'putting in the scene' is décor, the placement of objects and the setting of a scene. Décor can be used to amplify character, emotion or the dominant mood of a film.

Lighting

The intensity, direction and quality of lighting have a profound effect on the way an image is perceived. Light affects the way colours are rendered, both in terms of hue and depth, and can focus attention on particular elements of the composition.

Space

The representation of space affects the reading of a film. Depth, proximity, size and proportions of the places and objects in a film can be manipulated through camera placement and lens, lighting and décor, effectively determining mood or relationships between elements in the diegetic world.

Costume

Costume simply refers to the clothes that characters wear. Using certain colours or designs, costume is used in narrative cinema to signify characters or make clear distinctions between characters.

Acting

There is enormous historical and cultural variation in performance styles in the cinema. Early melodramatic styles, clearly indebted to the 19th century theatre, gave way in Western cinema to a relatively naturalistic style.

Most important, all of the elements of mise-en-scène interact graphically to create overall composition. Characters do not simply exist within a setting but rather form visual elements that merge with the setting. --- Bordwell and Thompson⁹

Expressionist films use simple lighting from the front and sides, illuminating the scene flatly and evenly to stress the links between the figures and the décor. In some notable cases, shadows are used to create additional distortion. --- Bordwell and Thompson¹⁰

**View Tim Burton's short *Vincent*,
(Which you can find on the DVD extras of 'A Nightmare Before Christmas')**

Discussion points: *Vincent*

- Why do you think that *Vincent* is shot in black and white?
- Listen to the sound of the film. How is the atmosphere of *Vincent* created via the sound design? Consider the sound effects and what they convey.
- Focus on the look of the characters, particularly Vincent. Consider what meanings an audience takes from his construction. Consider the shapes of his face and body, his appearance and his gestures.
- Why do we have a narrator and not character dialogue?
- Listen to the rhythm of the verse and think about how the narration of the poem relates to the actual on screen action. How would you describe the pace of the narration? Explain.
- *Vincent* was originally written as a children's story in rhyming verse like Burton's childhood favourite writer Dr Seuss.
- What do you think is the everlasting endurance of Dr Seuss's books? Discuss.
- Do you have a favourite Dr Seuss? Discuss.

Task: Close analysis *Vincent* + mise-en-scène

Freeze-framing a scene

For a clearer explanation and analysis of mise-en-scène, freeze-frame on a selected frame of a scene and discuss the mise-en-scène and its relationship to the narrative.

Consider the following in your discussion and analysis:

- Lighting: how are shadows and patterns created to represent Expressionist qualities?
- Framing: what is in the frame, what has been left out?
- Placement of objects within frame and why this is so.
- Setting/location: where are we?
- Where are the characters placed within the frame and why?

Task: *Vincent* + writing and recording rapping rhymes to Dr Seuss

Write a 5-8 line rap in the style of Dr Seuss about your favourite Burton film and or character. Audio record this and assemble the class raps into a podcast. Consider the following in your writing:

- The audience who will hear the rap: how will you engage them?
- The sound of your voice: intonation, timbre, pace, beats, rhythm of words selected
- How what you will say and the way you say it will convey information about the film/character.

Task: *Vincent* + German Expressionism

Identify the German Expressionist qualities of *Vincent* in the table below and explain why you think this is so.

GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST ELEMENT	EXAMPLE FROM <i>VINCENT</i>	ANALYSIS

Frankenweenie

Frankenweenie is based on an original idea of Burton. Lenny Ripp adapted the screenplay from Burton's story. Burton was 25 when he made *Frankenweenie*. Julie Hickson at Disney, a supporter of Burton's vision, produced the short film.

Frankenweenie is a re-working of James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) adaptation and the sequel *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). Shot in black and white, *Frankenweenie* references not only popular horror films but the gothic writer Edgar Allan Poe and stylistically references the cinematic genre of horror in its production design.

Discussion points: *Frankenweenie*

- Identify the themes of *Frankenweenie* and discuss how these themes are established in the opening sequences, explored throughout the narrative and then resolved in the conclusion.
- What role do the neighbours play in progressing the themes and issues of the narrative? Explain.
- Identify who the two most oppositional characters are to Sparky and Victor's family and then discuss how they are developed in the narrative.
- How is the mood of *Frankenweenie* conveyed? What production elements allow the mood to be conveyed? Discuss.
- When Victor is trying to re-animate Sparky why is it night-time and raining? What effect does this create for an audience?
- Could it be argued that *Frankenweenie* is a positive film about loyalty and love in the face of community prejudice? Discuss.

Task: *Frankenweenie* + photographing mise-en-scène

- In a sequence of no more than 5 shots design a mise-en-scène sequence according to German Expressionist film or Expressionist art elements.

Consider the following in your shoot:

- Lighting
- Shading
- Patterns
- Lines
- Shapes
- Props and or figures
- Position of props and or figures
- Setting

Further research

- Research the following writers/illustrators (listed below) who have influenced Burton and provided inspiration for his own art practice.
- Identify similarities and differences, by comparing and contrasting one of Burton's films or art pieces to a piece from each of these writers/illustrators.
- Also consider why their writings and artworks seem to have captured the imagination of so many Hollywood filmmakers who have adapted their stories to the screen.
 - Maurice Sendak
 - Charles Addams
 - Edward Gorey
 - Dr Seuss
 - Edgar Allan Poe
- Consider why Van Gogh may have captured Burton's imagination.
- Research the artwork of Vincent Van Gogh and consider whether you see connections between Van Gogh's work and Burton's visual art and his films.
- Research the art works of Courbet and Goya and consider their influence on modern art.
- Look at selected works of theirs and consider the subject matter of the pieces and the stories they tell.
- Look at the place of these artists in the history of art and their influence on the modernist art to come.
- Research the films of German Expressionism and if possible look at *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922) and *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920). Compare these to Hollywood horror gothic classics: *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931), *Frankenstein*, (James Whale, 1931), and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale, 1935).
- Do a comparative study of *Vincent* and *Frankenweenie* to the films above. Consider differences and similarities and identify the stylistic connections between Burton's early shorts and the films you have chosen to view.

THE WRITER AND THE 'BURTONESQUE OUTSIDER'



Tim Burton (American, b. 1958)
 Untitled (*The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*) 1998
 Pen, ink and watercolour on paper
 11 x 14" (27.9 x 35.6 cm)
 Private collection
 © 2010 Tim Burton

Tim Burton's characters and narratives often represent the 'outsider', the misunderstood, the lonely, and the rejected. Burton explores themes of the individual feeling outside yet looking in so wonderfully, Burton expresses pathos and understanding of his 'outsiders' these beautifully conceived characters and he respectfully cherishes them.

Besides being a prolific film director and visual artist, Burton also writes. *Vincent* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* were both originally written as poems. *Stain Boy*, like *Edward Scissorhands* was initially conceived and inspired from a sketch, Burton had drawn. His collection of short stories, *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*, once again combines his exquisite artworks with his equally exquisite written prose. Even in these short stories, we have the enduring recurring motifs, both visually and thematically, of the 'outsider' and the 'misunderstood'. These characters are integral to the emotional depth that is a signature of Burton's films and part of their enduring and wide-ranging appeal.

Stain Boy is a six-part web series about Stain Boy, 'a biohazard superhero'. Burton first introduced Stain Boy in his book, *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*. This series of flash-based animations was created specifically for the web and animated by Flinch Studios in 2000. In each episode, Stain Boy, working for the Burbank police, (who else!),

investigates and is asked to apprehend 'social outcasts' -- characters who exist in the other poems and stories of *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*, such as 'Staring Girl'. Each episode is 5 minutes or less.

*Burton's storytelling is characterised 'chiefly through striking visuals and indelible characters who personify the themes that recur and reverberate throughout all of his works – primarily the isolation of being disconnected from the world at large and the search for true identity. --- Jenny He*¹¹

Discussion points

- Why might Burton have decided to create *Stain Boy* for the web and for free?
- Do you think that it is important that artists and filmmakers create free work for the web? Discuss.
- What role do you think that the web should have in terms of the visual arts and moving image making arts?
- Do you have a favourite website or favourite animation site that you regularly visit? Discuss.
- Should the web be open and uncensored for the arts community? Discuss.
- Where do watch or obtain most of your moving image viewing? Discuss.

Tasks:

Viewing *Stain Boy*

You can watch *Stain Boy* episodes at

<http://www.timburtontcollective.com/multimedia.html>

When watching *Stain Boy* consider the following:

- *Stain Boy* is animated in flash for the web; do you think that this style of animation works best for the ideas and story of *Stain Boy*? Discuss.
- Consider if *Stain Boy* was animated as stop motion in clay or using puppets, would that work with this type of storytelling? Discuss.
- Compare and contrast the *Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories* with *Stain Boy* the animation. What differences and similarities did you notice? When you read the prose of the characters in the book, think about how the look and feel of the original prose is interpreted and conveyed from the literary to the moving image animation.

Reading *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*

Read Burton's magical collection of short stories *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*, choose your favourite story and visually interpret the story as either a short stop motion animation or a non-narrative visual poem.

Screen adaptations and short story writing

Write a short story of no more than 500-800 words on one of the following themes:

- The outsider
- The strange
- The feared

- The romantic
- The dreamer
- The misfit
- The quiet one
- The one who struggles

Reading and writing Dr Seuss and Roald Dahl

Read either *The Lorax* by Dr Seuss or *The BFG* by Roald Dahl and write a screen adaptation. Consider the following:

- What will your interpretation of the original story be? Why?
- How will you decide what remains from the original and what will be omitted and why?
- Will the adaptation be for a fiction or non-fiction moving image piece?
- What genre will the piece be?
- Will you use animation or live action, in which case will it be a documentary, drama, non-narrative piece and advertisement or a music video clip?
- What themes/issues from the original stories will you choose to convey and how?
- Who are the characters?
- Where is it set?
- In what time period will it be set?

Further investigations

- View the DVD extras on *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and take a look at the mini documentary on Roald Dahl called 'Fantastic Mr Dahl'.
- Travel through Flinch Studios' website to view more amazing animations from the studio that animated *Stain Boy*, and where you can also view *Stain Boy* episodes: <http://www.flinch.com/flash.html>

Further research

General animation

<http://www.acmi.net.au/animators.htm>

Writing for animation

<http://www.jeffreyscott.tv/>

<http://johnkstuff.blogspot.com/2007/03/writing-for-animation-keep-it-simple.html>

Children's literature

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children's_literature

ARTISTIC COLLABORATIONS IN FILM

Tim Burton often works with the same creative team; this ensures that his aesthetic is uncompromised. Frequent collaborators include film composer Danny Elfman, costume designer Colleen Atwood, animation character creators McKinnon and Saunders and production designer Bo Welch, among others. Burton and his highly creative team work collaboratively in a trusting and connected artistic relationship. In this section we explore just some of these relationships.

Burton likes to work organically, his ideas are released through his sketches rather than in extensive storyboarding. By working intuitively, Burton has said that he sees recurring themes and images throughout his works. 'It starts with a very good foundation and then kind of goes free.'¹²



Tim Burton (American, b. 1958)
 Untitled (Boy Series) 1980-1990
 Pen, ink, marker and watercolour on paper
 10 x 14" (25.4 x 35.6 cm)
 Private collection
 © 2010 Tim Burton

The director and the actor: Johnny Depp

I feel a strong connection with Tim and trust him completely. It's amazing to be invited into his world. – Johnny Depp¹³

Burton and Depp have worked together on numerous films and have developed a strong, trusting working relationship and friendship, which helps ensure a continuing successful screen partnership. The relationship between the actor and the director can be a tenuous one, often due to conflicting egos and the privilege of individual rather than collective visions. But this is not the case with Burton and Depp.

It was fortuitous that Depp was given the role of Edward Scissorhands, as the ongoing collaboration between the two has produced some memorable screen performances.

Story elements

Many of Burton's characters are specific archetypes that Burton has developed and cultivated over the years, and that help to define his personal vision. Two significant recurring archetypes are the flawed father and the misunderstood outcast. – Jenny He¹⁴

Characters are one of the main strengths of Tim Burton's films. How would you approach a character study of Burton's long filmography?

Task: Character mapping

One approach might be to do a character mapping exercise. Take one of Burton's films in which Depp is the main protagonist and write the following character map:

- Character's name
- Description of appearance, costume, physical attributes, suggests what about them?
- Sound of voice (tone, inflection, and timbre) suggests what about them?
- Their role in overall storyline.
- Description of personal traits.
- Description of their motivations, fears, desires.
- Relationship to other characters.
- What effects has their behaviour had?

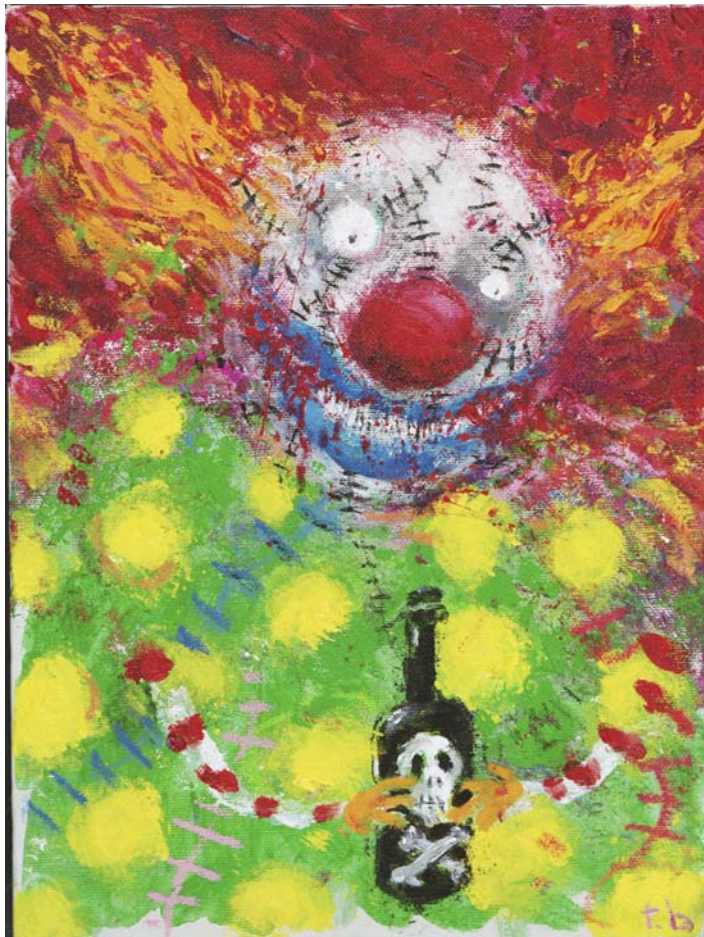
Task: Close analysis and comparative study

Compare and contrast two films from the following in which Depp is the main protagonist.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory with *Edward Scissorhands* or *Sleepy Hollow*, using the information table as a guide.

TITLE OF FILM

CHARACTER	ELEMENT	SCENE/SEQUENCE	DESCRIPTION OF ELEMENT	EXAMPLE



Tim Burton (American, b. 1958)
 Untitled (Clown Series) 1993.
 Oil on canvas
 12 x 9" (30.5 x 22.9 cm)
 Private collection
 © 2010 Tim Burton

The director and the composer: Danny Elfman

Long-time collaborator Elfman was originally a member of LA performance art musicians, Oingo Boingo, whom Burton would go and hear regularly. The two became friends and began working together, *Pee Wee Herman's Big Adventure* being the first time the two collaborated.

Discussion points

- Burton has said that music is always important but that in *Pee Wee Herman's Big Adventure*, the music was like a character.
- How can music be a character? Think of an example in which music you have heard sounds like it is a character and discuss.
- In *Batman*, Burton faced studio pressures in terms of the sound design. The soundtrack had to include popular songs of the time, alongside the dark moody orchestral score of Elfman.
- Burton has said that using Prince's songs in the soundtrack of *Batman* "didn't work very well. The songs bring it too much into a specific time frame".¹⁵
- Do you agree that using current popular songs in a film sets the time period too narrowly? Explain.
- Sound design consists of four inter-relating components: atmosphere, sound effects, music and dialogue.
- When viewing a selected Burton film, listen carefully and think about how these four inter-relating components in the narrative come together to create the whole of the sound design. Looking at selected sequences explore how the sound design evokes emotions and engages our senses aurally in conjunction with the visual design.

Task: Sound design

- For discussing the importance of sound design try the volume on and off during selected sequences. Discuss the effects of the sound on and off and what the differences create.
- Choose a sequence from a Burton film and sit with your backs to the on screen action, turn the volume on and imagine what you **see** via what you **hear**. Concentrate on the mood/atmosphere, the effect of the sounds heard and how the sound plays out a series of actions and narrative even though imagery is not seen. Now, try the same thing with the picture – that is, watch the screen but turn off the sound. The storyline becomes much more difficult to follow.
- Discuss how the sound design creates meaning for an audience, its relationship to the narrative structure in terms of character motivation, character identification, narrative action/events and the thematic considerations of the narrative.

Task: Close analysis activity

Pee Wee Herman's Big Adventure

The opening sequence to *Pee Wee Herman's Big Adventure*, cleverly illustrates Burton's idea that the music in this film became another character. (This sequence begins with the titles and ends when Pee Wee Herman locks the door to his house which is seen in wide shot.)

- Watch the title and opening sequence and consider whether the sound or the imagery of the titles is privileged. Explain why you think this is and how it is achieved.
- In the opening sequence of the dreamscape, what mood does the music establish and how does it work with the on-screen action and the accompanying sound effects. Explain.
- Once we see Pee Wee wake up and begin his daily routine, how does the inter-relationship between sound effects, dialogue and mood establish the character of Pee Wee?
- Listen to the actual sounds and identify which sounds you hear. Listen for the rhythm and pace of these sounds, the music and sound effects. Listen for the low and highs, the soft and loud, the beats and crescendos. What happens at these various points and how does it establish not only the character of Pee Wee but the introduction to the story?

Task: Close analysis activity – *Corpse Bride*

Explore the DVD extras on *Corpse Bride* and view the feature on Danny Elfman discussing the musical score for the film. In this interview, Elfman discusses Victor's piano piece and how this piece of music became the signature musical number to identify with Victor and lent the emotional resonance for not only Victor but also the love triangle between Victor, Victoria and the Corpse Bride.

- Listen to the musical score of Victor's piano playing. What does this music suggest about Victor?
- How would you describe the emotion of this musical score?
- View the sequence in which Victor and his family arrive at Victoria's house to begin the arranged marriage preparations. The sequence begins with Victor and his parents arriving at the house of Victoria and ends with a fade to black and the on-screen title – 'three hours later'.
- When viewing this sequence identify how the camera frames Victor, as he plays piano. Look at the mise-en-scene of this scene and explain how the emotionality of the sequence is established and explored via the acting of Victor and Victoria and the placement of their characters within the frame.
- Identify the camera angles and camera movements in this sequence and explain how the characters' personalities and the romance between them is conveyed and suggested by the angles and movements of the camera.
- Do the music and the camera come together in synchronicity at any point? Explain.

The director and the production designers:

Colleen Atwood costume designer & Bo Welch production designer.

Atwood and Welch have collaborated with Burton on many of his films. They have contributed signature costume and production designs, which have supported and conveyed the artistic vision of Burton. The worlds and the characters imagined by Burton and interpreted by these talented designers have lent the visual palette and emotional resonance of films such as *Edward Scissorhands* and *Big Fish*.

Costumes and production lend themselves to a study of symbolism and metaphor. Emotional range and unspoken understandings are conveyed through the colour palette and tonal range of on-screen worlds as well as through costumes.

Symbolism and metaphor

Symbolism: when something concrete stands for a larger and more abstract idea (i.e. a dead flower may symbolise mortality) or the attribution of symbolic meaning or character to something.

Metaphor: a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action which it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance (eg the 'ship of the desert' referring to a camel).

In film, symbolism and metaphor are represented throughout the overall story of the narratives and through production design; we come to interpret and understand through the signs of the images and sounds. We use the tools of semiotics and the codes and conventions of the moving image to deconstruct meanings created for us. In our culture it is assumed (and here we are now aligning our own culture in part, with that of the USA, insofar as both cultures are representative of Western culture) that we share cultural signs and may make meaning from those signs and what they signify.

Put simply, think of a recent advertisement (print or electronic) which you've seen or heard and try to remember how you came to understand its meaning. What visual or aural signs did you read? What did these signify? Think of the ad in terms of denotation and connotation. Denotation is what the sign depicts and connotation is what we bring to the sign, how we interpret it.

When we look at Tim Burton's films, we see that the colour and tonal range of the production design are important in conveying a sense of emotionality as well as thematically allowing the narrative and characters to progress.

Lighting, colour and shapes symbolically work to metaphorically convey the themes and ideas of the film via the production design. Film is a visual medium and Burton and his team clearly and imaginatively utilise the broad spectrum of the medium to progress the story via the design of the film.

Here are some good examples of this process:

- *Big Fish* – uses monochrome and colour in the flashbacks of Bloom's past to the present. Look at how the past and present are separated by the use of monochrome and colour. Consider what this conveys.
- *Corpse Bride* – the land of the living and the land of the dead are contrasted by the use of vibrant colours and muted tones. Look at how the two worlds are contrasted and consider what this conveys.
- *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* – similar to *Corpse Bride*, as we see the use of hues, muted tones and vibrant colours contrasted in the world of Charlie and the world of the factory. Look at how the two worlds are contrasted and consider what this conveys.

- *Edward Scissorhands* – uses pastel colours in suburbia whilst Edward's castle is a mixture of dark and earthy tones, yet this juxtaposition creates an important element in shaping the themes of the film. Look at how the two worlds are contrasted and consider what this conveys.

Discussion points

I remember growing up and feeling that there is not a lot of room for acceptance. You are taught at a very early age to conform to certain things. – Tim Burton¹⁶

- What does conformity mean? Discuss an example.
- Are there consequences for not conforming in society? Explain.
- Can non-conformity be positive? Discuss.
- Think of who may be considered a non-conformist from a historical perspective and discuss how this might have contributed to either positive or negative social change.
- In our society who are considered the outsiders? Why? Discuss.
- Have you ever felt the outsider? Explain.
- Discuss what words are associated with feelings of being the outsider?
- What colours may be associated with feelings of being the outsider? Explain.

Task: Close analysis of production design

Big Fish, Edward Scissorhands, Corpse Bride, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

As with most of Burton's visual work, his films also symbolically use colour and tonal range to convey themes and explore character.

Task: Designing a 'Burtonesque' world and characters.

Every time I do anything I start with the character. – Tim Burton¹⁷

Either via sketches, a series of photographic stills, a mixed media collage, puppets or modelling clay, design and create an 'outsider' character and the world s/he inhabits.

Think about the following:

- The look and feel of the character: their clothing, gestures, accessories, personality, actions, characteristics, gender, age.
- The world: objects, the landscape, interior or exterior worlds, natural or synthetic.
- The colour palette and tonal range of the world and the character.
- What does this convey about your character and their world?
- A time period: historical, contemporary, futuristic.
- Lighting: is it natural, artificial, bright or dim? Why are you lighting this world in this way?

Further research

- Research symbolism in art and the cinema; identify works of art and films that clearly convey this concept.
- Find out more about Mackinnon & Saunders, designers & builders of animation puppets.

Task: Create a stop motion character and set

There's an energy with stop-motion that you can't even describe. It is to do with giving things life. - Tim Burton¹⁸

Create a short 30-60 second stop motion animation. Develop a short story based on the characters and world you designed in the earlier task and turn those ideas into a stop motion animation

- How will you make your animation? What equipment will you need?
- What frame rates will you use to create fluidity and movement, in a way that is believable to your audience? (There are many sites on line which can assist you with this, in the section on further investigations there are some references)
- What would it look like?
- What materials will you use?
- How will you light it?

Consider the following:

- Colour palette and tonal range of your set
- Shadows created by lighting
- Shapes and lines in your sets and mise-en-scene
- Patterns and repetition in your design

Further investigations

- View the DVD extras on *Corpse Bride* and watch Mackinnon & Saunders discuss their working collaboration with Burton and the process of working on *Corpse Bride*.
- An excellent resource for exploring how to create stop motion animations:
<http://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Stop-Motion-Animation>
- Explore Mackinnon & Saunders website – <http://www.mackinnonandsaunders.com>

EXPLORING TIM BURTON'S ARTISTIC PRACTICE

I occupied my time going to see monster movies, watching television, drawing and playing in the local cemetery. --- Tim Burton¹⁹

How we respond and engage with art is subjective and individual. Artworks inspire, challenge, and stimulate our senses and our feelings. We observe the content of the artwork before us, but it is the sensation of experiencing the artwork that triggers ideas, thoughts and emotions in us, which ultimately draws us in and leaves a lasting impression.

As we explore the diversity of Tim Burton's films and his visual art works, consider not only the content of the works but their look and feel. Consider most importantly, how they make you feel, what they allow you to see/hear and how that engagement allows for a sensory experience.

Burton is an incessant sketcher, doodler and drawer who has not only achieved a long and illustrious film career but has produced a body of drawings, paintings and photography. In this section we analyse and respond to his many visual art works.

Artistic explorations: analysis of Burton's visual art works

In this section we explore and engage with the visual art created by Tim Burton. There are diverse visual examples and tasks, which look at the ways that Burton generates his ideas, how his ideas are realised and how viewers respond to his ideas and art.

Discussion points

When looking at the art works consider and explore the following points below.

Consider the following:

- Subject matter
- What is happening? Where? To whom? When?
- Technique
- What materials are used? How? Why?
- Form and design elements
- Line, colour, tone or shading, shape, texture, mass, volume, space
 - Form and principles of design:
- Unity, balance, harmony, contrast, repetition, scale, focal point, lighting, organisation of composition
- Composition and design elements:
- Line and shape, straight lines, curved lines, colour, rule of thirds, space
- Expression
- In other words, the expressiveness of the subject matter.
 - Think about what the purpose may be: to inform, to challenge, to educate, to shock, to suggest.
 - How does the work address the viewer: directly, indirectly, via an emotional representation such as anger, happiness, torment, etc.?
 - How is this expressed: is the work whimsical, assertive, timid, reflective, daring, humorous, and confusing?

- Style can be interpreted in various contexts:
 - A *personal style*, which may be the mark of the artist with recurring motifs, ideas, shapes, colours, subject matter, technique.
 - A *historical style*, which represents a style of working identifiable with a certain time, fashion, beliefs, and interests of a particular community.
 - A *cultural or sub-cultural* style such as belonging to or representing particular cultural and sub-cultural identities, customs, mores, of a class, race, gender, social group.

He is attached to the playful aesthetics of drawing and animation, and to tools associated with childhood, such as crayons and coloured pencils, because they connect him with pleasures of the imagination that he learned to value in adolescence and continue to inform his work as an adult. --- Ron Magliozzi²⁰

Task: Visual analysis

Each of the following artworks adopts a differing materiality and technique yet each represents a uniquely Burton style. When you look at each piece consider not only the subject matter but also the materials used and the techniques adopted.

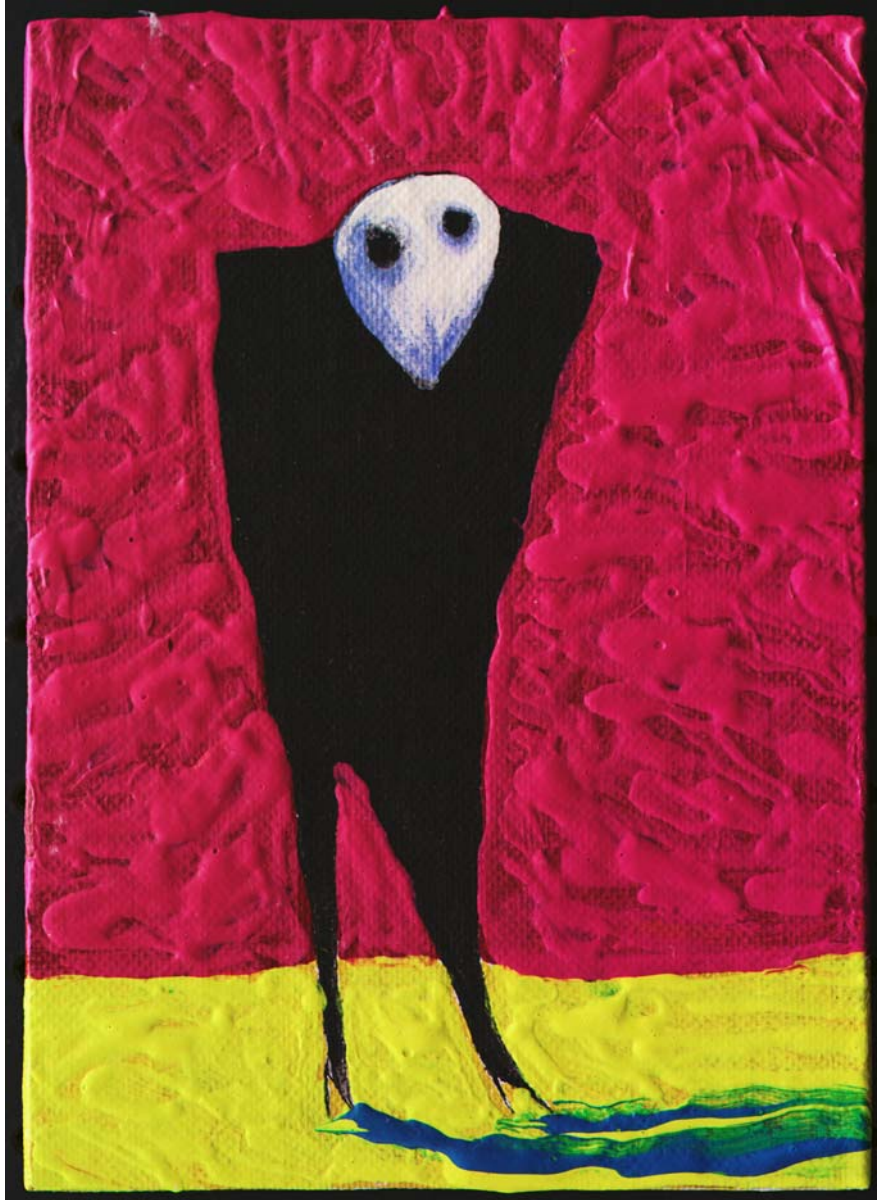
Make notes when looking at the pieces following the initial discussion points above. Firstly take a look at the image and jot down some points of your initial response. Don't think about it too long, just respond. Then look at the focus points and make notes. Consider how the formal analysis and your initial gut response may differ or be similar. How does a formal analysis inform a response? Does it alter the initial response or add to the engagement of that initial response? Explain.

Paintings



TIM BURTON (American, born 1958)
Blue Girl with Wine, c. 1997
Oil on canvas
71.1 x 55.9 cm
Private Collection
© 2010 Tim Burton

- What is striking about this painting? Explain.
- Looking at the composition of this painting consider how line and shape and space work together to create balance and harmony.



TIM BURTON (American, born 1958)
Untitled (Creature Series Drawing), 1992
Acrylic on canvas
17.8 x 12.7 cm
Private Collection
© 2010 Tim Burton

- This painting is lit in a room black light in order to bring out the fluorescent colours applied to the acrylics on the canvas.
- How does this lighting affect the colours, shapes and line of this painting? Explain.



Installation shot of *Tim Burton the Exhibition* at ACMI, showing the lighting and installation of the black light effect, in the black light room.



TIM BURTON (American, born 1958)
The Green Man, 1996-1998
Oil and acrylic on canvas
25.4 x 20.3 cm
Private Collection
© 2010 Tim Burton

- Consider the combination of oils and acrylics on canvas, what effect does this create?
- Again Burton's work is characterised by his use of shapes and lines; how do these work to create a balanced composition? Explain.

Drawings



TIM BURTON (American, born 1958)
Untitled (Romeo and Juliet), 1981-1984
Pen and ink on paper
30.5 x 40.6 cm
Private Collection
© 2010 Tim Burton

- How would you describe the expressiveness of this drawing? Explain.
- How do line, colour, tone and shading, contribute to the expressiveness of this work?



TIM BURTON (American, born 1958)
Untitled (Creature Series), 1997-1998
Pastel on paper
35.6 x 27.9 cm
Private Collection
© 2010 Tim Burton

- How is movement conveyed in this painting?
- How does the choice of materials affect the emotive quality of this work?

Photography



TIM BURTON (American, born 1958)
Untitled (Seahorses on Pink Tree), 1992-1999
Polaroid
83.8 x 55.9 cm
Private Collection
© 2010 Tim Burton

Burton works with a large format Polaroid camera to create his images.

- What is happening in this piece do you think? Explain.
- Consider the composition and design elements of:
- line and shape
 - straight lines
 - curved lines
 - colour
 - rule of thirds
 - space
- How do these design elements contribute to the overall composition?



TIM BURTON (American, born 1958)
Untitled (Blue Girl with Skull), 1992-1999
Polaroid
83.8 x 55.9 cm
Private Collection
© 2010 Tim Burton

- How is the expressiveness of the subject matter conveyed? Explain.
- What *cultural and sub-cultural* styles such as belonging to or representing particular cultural and sub-cultural identities, customs, mores, of a class, race, gender, social group, might this image represent? Explain.

Further investigations

Quotes:

Discuss the following quotes with reference to Burton's art works.

Examining his visual shorthand of pointed and rounded faces and bodies, it becomes clear that Burton's triangles and circles stand for trouble and loss. --- Ron Magliozzi²¹

For Tim Burton drawing is exercise for a restless imagination. --- Ron Magliozzi²²

Choose a Tim Burton film from the following list and use the techniques of visual analysis to consider the look and feel of his production design.

- *Beetlejuice* (M)
- *Pee Wee Herman's Big Adventure* (PG)
- *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (PG)
- *Edward Scissorhands* (PG)
- *Big Fish* (PG)
- *Batman* (PG)
- *Alice in Wonderland* (PG)
- *Sleepy Hollow* (MA 15+)

Look at the opening and closing sequences of the film and make notes with direct examples on the following:

- Style
- Expression
- Form and design elements:
 - Line, colour, tone or shading, shape, texture, mass, volume, space
- Form and principals of design:
 - Unity, balance, harmony, contrast, repetition, scale, focal point, lighting, organisation of composition.
- Composition and design elements:
 - Line and shape, straight lines, curved lines, colour, rule of thirds, space.

Further research

Research the production process of a film and make notes with visual accompaniments of how the production design of a film contributes to the overall visual look and feel of a film production:

- What is production design?
- What roles and stages are involved in design?
- How does the production designer work with the director of the film to realise the vision?
- What process is undertaken during the course of the production process?
- Look at a sequence from the film under research and its production design. Compare and contrast the final look and feel of the films in terms of their production design.

CLOSE ANALYSIS

Choose a Tim Burton film (maybe one of his shorts or features)

- Write either a short answer response (300–500 words) or an extended response (500–750 words).
- Adopt a close analysis approach. This is when you re-watch the selected sequences several times and focus on specifics in detail. Choose 2–3 sequences to analyse, and re-watch these several times.
- Use direct examples to illustrate your analysis (you may draw, use flow charts, concept maps etc).
- Be coherent and direct.
- Concentrate on the following story and production elements and attempt to draw connections between the elements:

How to write a close analysis piece

Fill in the table below with direct examples from chosen sequences of a Burton film.

Production Elements

ELEMENT	SCENE/SEQUENCE	DESCRIPTION OF ELEMENT	EXAMPLE
Sound Design			
Editing (pace & rhythm)			
Mise-en-scene			
Camera Placement (shots, angles, movement)			
Special Effects			
Lighting			

Story elements

ELEMENT	SCENE/SEQUENCE	DESCRIPTION OF ELEMENT	EXAMPLE
Character/s			
Themes/Issues			
Setting			
Structure of time			
Cause and effect			
Point of view			



KEEPING A LOGBOOK

Narrative focus questions**STORY ELEMENTS****Character**

- How and why are characters established and developed in the way they are?
- How is character believability achieved?
- How is character empathy and identification achieved?
- Look at the way characters are introduced in the credit sequences.
- Look at what they say, what they do, what others say about them.
- Focus on:
 - placement within the frame (how the camera shoots them, angles etc),
 - visual presentation,
 - make-up and dress (i.e. costuming, physical body, tattoos etc),
 - tone of voice, specific dialogue, use of slang or street language etc.
- Look also at the relationships between characters, the role or function of characters in the narrative, type and range of characters, and similarities and differences between characters.

Setting

- How does the setting relate to the narrative? In other words, why has a background, location or set for a particular scene/sequence been chosen?
- Are any of the props significant?
- How do the mood and ambience of the setting create meanings for an audience?
- Discuss the function of the regular and familiar setting/locations for the series. What meanings do these create? What emotional or intellectual effect do they have on audiences?

Structuring of time

Look at the way narrative manipulates time. How are events ordered?

- For instance, are events chronological or is there use of flashback or flash forward?
- Look at duration of events, for example the expansion or contraction of time.
- How frequently are events or scenes shown in comparison with their presumed occurrence and existence?

Point of view (POV) from which the narrative is presented

- From whose POV is the narrative presented?
- Do we see it through one character's eyes or more than one? Why? What are the effects of this?
- Is the POV other than that of the characters? To what effect?
- What story information is given or withheld at different points in the narrative?
- What effect does this have? How is POV technically communicated to an audience?

Themes and issues

- What themes and issues are introduced and how are they developed and explored?
- Are certain themes and issues exclusively related to particular characters? How do the themes and issues work in with the storyline?

Cause and effect

- What motivates the characters?
- What events are motivated by character?
- If there are natural or supernatural causes, what are their consequences?

Opening and closure

- Look at the extent to which the conflicts, motivations and issues are resolved or unresolved by the end of the film.
- What expectations are established in the beginning and resolved or remain unresolved at the end?
- How are character developments, themes/issues and resolutions dealt with in the closing sequences?

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

Camera work

- Angle (high, low, eye level, aerial) and movement of shots (shot reverse shot, panning, tracking, tilting).
- Distance of shots (i.e. close-up, mid shots, long shots and extremes of this), shot size and camera movement.
- Duration of shot on screen: what impact/effect does the concentration of the length of a shot have on the audience?
- What meaning is created for an audience by using different shot sizes, movement and camera angles?
- How does the camerawork inform the audience about a character's motivation, create an identification with characters and communicate their relationship to the story?
- How is an audience's engagement with the narrative created by the choice of camerawork?

Lighting

- Is the lighting natural/artificial, realistic or expressive. How does it set a mood or create an atmosphere?
- Why and how effective is this?
- Are any lighting effects used, for example, to emphasise an object, a character or an action? Explain.

Mise-en-scene

- The way each shot is composed within the frame has an effect on the way we respond to the narrative. Composition relates to the production elements and story elements.
- Look at how the following aspects of composition are arranged in particular scenes or in a sequence:
 - Setting and set design
 - Costumes and objects
 - Colours
 - Arrangement and movement within the frame
 - Spatial relations between objects and characters (spacing)
 - Framing: how is the shot framed, that is how is it positioned within the square of the frame?

Editing

- How do the placement, timing, and rhythm of the editing affect the mood of a sequence and of the overall film?
- How do the shots relate to each other visually and aurally – image to image, sound to sound, image to sound?

Sound

- Look at the music, sound effects (including atmospheric sound) and the way the dialogue is recorded.
- How does the soundtrack relate to the storylines, themes and issues of the narrative, characters and plot? Focus on both diegetic and non-diegetic sound.
- How do the layers (atmosphere, dialogue, sound effects and music) work together to create the sound design?
- Are there any special or unconventional applications and explorations of sound design? Explain.

Acting/Performance

- How does the actor's performance contribute to the characterisation?
- Does the actor bring associations from outside the narrative to the character?
- What effect does this create in terms of character believability/acceptance?
- Does an audience have empathy for the characters? How is this achieved?
- Are there characters who repel the audience? Why?

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- 2 West, Nancy, *Introduction to Film, Lecture Four: German Expressionism*, University of Missouri –Columbia, 13 September, 2005, <http://web.missouri.edu/~westn/courses/film1/handouts/09.13-lecture.html>
- 3 David Bordwell and Kristin Thomson, *Film Art*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2008, p. 330.
- 4 West.
- 5 Bordwell and Thompson, p. 330
- 6 West.
- 7 West.
- ⁸ West
- 9 Bordwell and Thompson, p. 448.
- 10 Bordwell and Thomson, p. 113.
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- 14 He, p. 21.
- 15 In Salisbury (ed.), 2006, p. 81.
- 16 In Salisbury (ed.), 2006, p. 87.
- 17 In Salisbury (ed.), 2006, p. 76.
- 18 In Salisbury (ed.), 2006, p. 45.
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- 21 Magliozzi, Ron, p. 14.
- 22 Magliozzi, Ron, p. 9.