

Original Writing Activity

A Level English Language

Task: Read and annotate this film review from the Sunday Times, identifying the key language features of this genre. Comment on:

- The voice and how it's created
- The syntax (sentence length and type)
- Any non-standard grammatical features
- How it's structured and how the plot summary is embedded
- The lexical choices and the levels of formality
- The purpose (Inform, Persuade, Entertain etc.) and how this is achieved.

Once you've done this analysis, write a film review for a film you've seen recently, replicating these genre features, then do a short commentary (500 words) explaining why you've made the language choices you have.

You can email your finished work to t.exley-moore@s6f.org.uk

Good Luck!

From [The Sunday Times](#)

December 20, 2009

Avatar

Cosmo Landesman



The good news is that James Cameron's *Avatar*, his first big film since *Titanic*, 12 years ago, is a good film. The bad news — at least for Cameron — is that his film is not the masterpiece he set out to make. Nobody spends so much money (more than £214m, according to one estimate) or spends so much time (the project was first conceived in 1995) to make just a good film. No, Cameron has set out to make nothing less than a classic sci-fi epic that will take its place alongside *Star Wars*, *The Matrix* or his own *Terminator* films. But let's give him his due. *Avatar*, which he also wrote, is bold and beautiful. It's almost too rich to take in and appreciate on one viewing. And although it's a crowd-pleasing Hollywood film driven by special effects, it's not afraid of social and political commentary. Cameron is a populist patrician, educating us in the evils of capitalism while entertaining us with the evils of capitalism. He offers bread, circuses and sermons for the masses.

Never mind the quantity (yes, it could have done with a trim): consider Cameron's meticulous attention to detail. The unreal world of fantasy has never been portrayed with such realism. And the final battle sequence is a masterful, adrenaline-boosting finale.

Set in the future, *Avatar*'s action takes place on a faraway jungle-like planet called Pandora, where the Na'vi, a tribe of 10ft blue people with tails, live in close harmony with nature. Their world is threatened by a greedy American corporation prepared to use military force in pursuit of the valuable minerals found there. Attached to the corporation is a group of scientists led by Dr Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver), who want to find a peaceful solution. From the safety of their ship, they interact with the Na'vi via artificial bodies known as avatars. When one of Grace's team dies, his brother Jake

Sully (Sam Worthington), a paraplegic soldier, takes his place. Although meant to be helping to find a diplomatic solution, Sully agrees to work secretly for the hawkish Colonel Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang), collecting information on the Na'vi for a forthcoming attack.

Through his avatar body, Sully can walk again and charges off to Pandora. There he falls in love with Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), the warrior daughter of the head of the tribe. Things come to a head when the corporation decides talking time is over and moves in for the kill, and those valuable minerals. You can guess who leads the resistance.

The curious thing about Avatar is that, for all of its state-of-the-art technological wizardry, there is something rather dated about it. If the more excitable reports on Cameron's use of 3-D and special effects are to be believed, then I can say I have seen the future of the cinema — and it looks like the past.

Take the whole idea of avatars. The prospect of humans inhabiting surrogate bodies to travel in other worlds or cyberspace was an exciting concept for novelists and film-makers back in the 1990s. One of them was Cameron himself, who began writing this in 1995. Since then we've seen numerous avatar-driven films and, with games like *Second Life*, they've become familiar. To be fair, Cameron's avatars have a degree of human realism and dramatic expressiveness that has been lacking in films so far. But they still have a rubbery quality that undermines the naturalism. Cameron has said that, ideally, the audience would not be able to tell the difference between actors and avatars; well, he's not there yet.

Avatar's political thrust also seems dated. Even though "shock and awe" turns up in the script, it's not about anything so contemporary. Cameron's view of rapacious corporations destroying habitats and native people in the name of profit might have had a nightmare feasibility to it in the days when Sting was campaigning to save the rainforests. Now we're all primitive people, and it's the entire planet supposedly facing extinction.

Still, the great challenge for Cameron was to create a whole new world of visual wonders — and he does it with a mix of strange animals, plants, predators and flying creatures. And his Floating Mountains are as beautiful and surreal a sight as you'll ever see. Cameron is a keen deep-sea diver, and you can see the influence of that passion on his portrayal of Pandora, for his jungles resemble the bottom of the ocean; they glow like coral reefs.

This wonderful shell of beauty can't disguise Avatar's lack of, dare I say it, heart. In the past, Cameron could always mix big spectacle with big emotions. What's missing here is the lump-in-the-throat moment. The love story between Jake and Neytiri doesn't take off the way Jack and Rose's did in *Titanic*. I have nothing against 10ft blue women with yellow eyes and flat noses — honest — but Neytiri is this really dull, earnest, eco-chick warrior, for ever banging on about the wonderful ways of her people.

Still, when all the hype and hullabaloo about Avatar calms down, we will be left with a film that's no masterpiece, but still well worth seeing.

Avatar, 12A, 162 mins

