

# ***The Point***

## **Media Studies User Guide**

**PRODUCED BY SILO CORPORATION IN CO-PRODUCTION  
WITH THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA**



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### **Introduction**

Welcome to ***The Point***. Hang on for a wild ride!

***The Point*** is quite different from just about any film you have probably shown in the classroom – and knowing *how* it came to be made opens up important avenues to enrich the experience of using it with students.

Unlike other teen films, the young actors are not professionals, and they played an important part in creating their characters and the stories they would live through on screen. In effect, ***The Point*** is the result of a collaborative filmmaking exercise that brings together film pros with at-risk teens who use their own experience as the foundation for their writing and acting.

***The Point*** is a fast-paced film that chronicles one weekend in the lives of the characters created by these teens. It captivates the audience with its authenticity and invites viewers to experience the perspectives of these teenagers who – like most of us – are trying to make their way in an increasingly complex, depersonalized and uncertain landscape.

***The Point*** provides a glimpse into a multiracial, poor, inner-city neighbourhood. The story gains credibility because it is crafted from the real-life experiences of the teens. It is told for them, by them, in their voices, in their language.

Finally, although it is set in a particular time and place, the themes of peer pressure, bullying, trouble with parents and authority figures will always be timely.

## **Objectives of the Guide**

The goal of this guide is to provide teachers and students with an accessible and holistic approach to viewing and experiencing ***The Point***.

This guide offers a glossary of terms, pre- and- post-viewing objectives and flexible activities that can be adapted to your situation and needs.

The activities in this guide should be viewed as a menu. There is no need to order everything; choose what works for you. Nor should this guide be regarded as prescriptive. It should, however, be seen as a tool to enhance enjoyment of the film. It could be used as a complete study unit, or parts of it can be adopted to meet a specific teaching/learning objective or strategy. It may also be a point of departure for the writing/storyboarding/scripting and filming processes.

In closing, I would like to stress a final point that cannot be made too strongly. We should all take notice of the film's accomplishment, that it was written and acted by a group of inner-city youths. Educators should empower students. Take the ideas and concepts found in the guide, share them liberally with your students, and make the activities a springboard for their abilities. I can only imagine what treasures will come out of this process.

## **Target Subject Areas**

This film study resource guide can be used to target many subject areas in curricula across Canada. The following are some suggestions:

- Social Science and Humanities
- World Religions and Society
- Drama
- Media Literature
- Media Arts
- English
- Communication Technology

## **The Process of Making the Film**

*The Point* features the best characteristics of reality-based drama — improvisation and use of non-actors. It is not just a film. Rather, it is a grand example of taking young people, getting them involved in telling a story, and crafting it from their perspective.

In order to find participants, writer and director Joshua Dorsey and Silo Films producer Melissa Malkin sent out an invitation to community centres, schools and organizations that deal with at-risk youth. They were looking for kids who were interested in taking part in a series of workshops that would culminate in the creation of the film. Dorsey and Malkin promised that everyone who stuck with the workshops would be in the film. No auditioning for parts and hoping to make the cut.

Initially, 45 kids showed up. Two months later, an astounding 40 remained. All are featured in ***The Point***.

The workshops produced a wealth of narrative material. Four writers (including Dorsey) worked together to transform that material into a film that combines the naturalism of a documentary with the dramatic narrative of a supernatural thriller.

## **Pre-viewing Activities: Film terms**

Provide background information and set the stage for viewing the film. Here are some suggestions.

(A) Introduce a glossary (see the appendix).

(B) Ask students to pay particular attention to certain tasks that will help with understanding the film and its organization. The tasks you decide to use will depend on your focus of study and your reasons for screening the film.

Concepts that can be introduced or reviewed might include:

- Back story
- Ensemble cast
- Vignettes
- Point of view (POV)
- Title
- Narrative structure
- Camera work, including establishing shot, pan, hand-held, long/medium/close-up/extreme close-up
- Soundtrack
- Character development
- Timeline
- Editing, including insert/jump cuts/soundtrack

## **Pre-viewing Activities: Points of Interest and Discussion**

1. Title: In what way does the title of this film inform the audience about what they are about to experience?

2. Narrative Structure: The story relayed in ***The Point*** is told in an unconventional way. Can you identify the method and explain why this story had to be told in this manner?

3. Camera Work: Using at least three separate scenes, determine to what extent the camera helps to convey the narrative. (POV)

4. Back story: Because of the fast-paced nature of ***The Point***, it is essential that you follow the back story (Kyra's story and the story of the murdered inmate) from the outset.

5. Timeline: Create a timeline for the film that chronicles each group's story and the many subplots. Make sure that you record points of conflict/crisis and where

the plots intersect. Moreover, make sure to demonstrate how all the plots are resolved.

## **Post-Viewing: Points of Interest and Discussion**

1. **Narrative Structure:** *The Point* shows rather than tells its story. As an audience, we view the intimate moments of the characters as they relate to one another. As a result, we are not just passive viewers. Instead, we become an integral part of the story, as we collect information from each vignette and help to order them.

- Comment on how effective the storytelling style is in *The Point*.
- Could this story be told in another narrative style? What would the impact be on the storyline? (Use direct examples from the film to illustrate your response.)

2. **Camera and Point of View:** As with all film, it is through the camera's lens that the director conveys the writer's story. In *The Point*, the camera takes on a critical role. It is not only the link between the action on screen and the audience, it is also the conduit through which the audience becomes a silent cast member. Because the camera is present at all times, the audience, in effect, becomes the omniscient narrator. It is empowered with information and detail that the film's characters lack. In this way, it is possible for the audience to make sense of the seemingly random events that occur.

- Using five examples, describe in detail how the director uses the camera to make the audience a silent observer.
- Considering the complexity of the narrative, the film's multiple writers and the use of an ensemble cast, how does the camera influence and enrich the viewing experience?

3. **Timeline:**

- From your timeline, identify and summarize the main plot.
- Identify the subplots that run parallel to it.
- Explain how each subplot is resolved.
- Select one subplot and, using your timeline, storyboard it. (18 frames)  
Then retell this subplot from another character's point of view. (18 frames)  
Be sure to explain how the latter subplot would change the outcome of the subplot and main storyline.

4. **Point St. Charles as a character:** As the title suggests, the film takes place in a defined location, which becomes the anchor for all the plots and subplots. In effect, the setting becomes a de facto character that allows the various plots to be plausible.



- Could another location be easily substituted? What would be the impact on the plausibility of the storyline? (Hint: Think of the plotlines of three movies, and consider how changing the setting of each would affect the plausibility of the storylines. How many of these films include the setting as a silent, yet integral, member of the cast?)
- Use your storyboards to change the setting of your favourite film. Account for, and comment on, the changes you made to make the story plausible.

5. Motif: The film progresses at a speedy pace, with groups of teens and their stories spliced together.

- How does the film maintain its overall continuity?
- Three recurring motifs are central to binding the characters, making their situation believable, and bringing the film to a satisfying conclusion.
  - (i) The ever-present backdrop of Point St. Charles. (This setting allows the characters to occupy their own space, as well as giving them ample opportunity to overlap.)
  - (ii) The ever-present graffiti-laden building that is due for imminent demolition. It provides the central hub for the main plot — the question of what happened to Kyra — and, throughout the 48 hours in which the film takes place, it provides the backdrop for the central figures as they navigate their stories. The building stands as a monument that has more secrets than it is willing to share. It is not until that last few moments that the audience/narrator discover how much it truly is “Kyra’s building.”
  - (iii) Finally, we are left with Kyra, who is reminiscent of Hamlet’s ghost. Kyra’s demise is constantly speculated upon and discussed. Her relationship with Jaa, Oath, Ashley, Sabrina and Danny is sometimes subtle and sometimes overpowering. Her spectre is omnipresent; she walks the streets, appears in diners and is always there to help these individuals in their hour of need. At the conclusion of the film the audience is finally rewarded with her Mona Lisa smile. It seems to relate her place and somehow the knowledge that all will be all right in Point St. Charles.

6. Soundtrack: The soundtrack is comprised of dialogue, ambient sound and music. Music plays a central role in many of the scenes.

- Comment on the effectiveness of the soundtrack in the following scenes:
  - i) Julian getting ripped-off and the gangsters coming to collect.
  - ii) Harold and the gangsters arriving at the pet shop, driving away, and crashing their car.

7. Character: Characters are revealed by what they say, what they do and what others say about them. But after all is said and done, the audience is responsible for determining the credibility of the characters.

- Examine the character of Oath as he moves through the film, paying particular attention to his motivations and what influences his change.

8. Conclusion: Any film ending may be open or closed, satisfying or disturbing. ***The Point*** offers both closure and hope. The Kyra mystery is solved and we have a clever montage of many of the central characters coming together to confront their futures.

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## A GLOSSARY OF FILM TERMS

**Analog:** A film or sound recording process in which the electromagnetic output varies as a continuous function of the input, creating degradation as the signal is reproduced. In other words, each time you copy something analog, its quality goes down.

**Aperture:** The opening in the camera lens that determines how much light will pass through.

**Art director:** The person responsible for the design and overall physical appearance of the world in which the actors appear. For larger, more ambitious productions, this figure is now frequently called the **production designer**.

**Axis of action:** An imaginary line that extends the path in which a character or object is moving. If one camera is on one side of the line and another is on the other side, cutting from one camera to another will make the person or object appear to change direction.

**Bird's eye view:** A high angle shot from a camera located directly overhead at a distance – sometimes taken from a crane or helicopter. A shot from this angle allows the audience a wider view, providing more information than the characters involved in the scene possess.

**Bridging shot:** (1) A shot that connects two scenes in a film separated by time or place; (2) A shot from a different angle or distance that connects two similar shots in the same scene.

**Cinéma vérité:** Documentary shooting method in which the camera rules. The term applies to a genre of documentary films that strive for immediacy, spontaneity, and authenticity through the use of portable and unobtrusive equipment and the avoidance of any preconceived narrative line or concepts concerning the material. See **direct cinema**.

**Close-up:** A shot in which the camera seems to be very close to the subject. The head of a person, a small object, or part of an object fills the screen. The close-up is effective for conveying to the audience a character's emotions, reactions, and state of mind.

**Continuity:** Maintaining a consistent and unobtrusive progression from shot to shot in terms of screen direction, lighting, props, and other production details. For example, you want to make sure you don't have a pot next to the sink in one shot, gone in the next one, and then back again in a third.

**Continuity person:** See **script supervisor**.

**Cue:** To prepare an audio or video source for a precise start at some predetermined point.

**Cue sheet:** A log with the soundtracks in columns that indicate to the sound engineer, during dubbing, where certain sounds come in and how they are to be treated when he or she is combining them into a single track.

**Cut:** An instant change from one video source to another.

**Cutaway:** Shot that momentarily takes the viewer away from the main action.

**Didactic:** Intended to teach – in particular having moral instruction as an ulterior motive. It's generally not a compliment to call a film didactic.

**Digital:** A film or sound recording process that uses discrete on and off steps so that individual elements of picture or sound can be controlled and material can be reproduced without degrading the signal.

**Digitization:** Capturing a section of video or audio material into the editing system, where it becomes a computer file and is written to the system's hard drives.

**Direct cinema:** A low-profile documentary style of shooting that disallows any directorial intrusion to shape or instigate incidents. Developed in the 1960s and named by director Albert Maysles to suggest its direct, immediate and authentic approach to the subject matter. See **cinéma vérité**.

**Director:** The person in charge of everything that takes place in the studio or on location and during the editing process.

**Documentary:** A film that deals directly with fact and not fiction and that tries to convey reality as it is, instead of a fictional version of reality. These films are concerned with actual people, places, events or activities.

**Dolly:** A mobile platform on wheels that supports the camera and camera operator and allows the camera to make noiseless, moving shots in a relatively small area.

**Dolly shot:** A shot that involves moving towards or away from the subject by means of a wheeled support – generally a dolly.

**DV cam:** A digital video camera.

**Dynamic mic:** A rugged microphone whose transducer consists of a diaphragm connected to a movable coil.

**Editing:** The entire process of putting a film together into its final form: includes the selection and shaping of shots; the arrangement of shots, scenes, and sequences; the mixing of all soundtracks; and the integration of the final sound track with the images. The term editing includes picture editing and sound editing.

**Editor:** The person who assembles raw footage into a final program.

**Establishing shot:** The opening shot of a sequence, which establishes location. These shots can also establish mood or give the viewer information concerning the time and general situation. Establishing shots are generally long shots or extreme long shots.

**Extreme close-up:** A shot from very close to the subject, showing only a small portion (unless a very small object is being shot). An extreme close-up of a performer would only show part of the face, such as the eyes or mouth.

**Follow shot:** A shot in which the camera seems to pursue the subject as it moves. The recording of this movement may be achieved through a tracking shot (in which the camera physically follows the character) or through a zoom lens (when the camera does not move).

**Frame:** The borders of the image on the screen that enclose the picture, like a frame on a painting. The centre of the frame is normally the place for important action, while the rest of the frame must be arranged to not draw attention unless to comment on the major action. Characters on top of the frame seem to have power over those at the bottom. On the other hand, the bottom is the place of stability and more readily receives our attention. We tend to read a frame from left to right so that the action on the right area will naturally draw our eyes, allowing the left area to be a place for sudden surprises.

**FX:** Sound-effects track; sounds created in the studio.

**Generation:** The stage of video duplication. With analog tape, the original is the first generation. Each subsequent video copy is another generation and suffers a loss in quality. There is no generational loss with digital technology.

**Grip:** Location technician expert at handling lighting and set construction equipment.

**High-key lighting:** Lighting that is generally bright and even, with a low key-to-fill ratio.

**iMOVIE:** Video editing software for Apple computers.

**In-camera editing:** Editing that is largely performed through the camera, instead of with editing software. The sequence of shots and scenes remains much the same as during shooting.

**Insert or Cut-in:** Close-up detail inserted in a longer shot.

**Key light:** The primary source of illumination falling upon a subject. It is highly directional and produces a definite modelling or shaping effect with well-defined shadows.

**Lighting:** The illumination of performers, action and setting in the making of a motion picture.

**Light meter:** A photoelectric device that measures the amount of light falling on a specific area.

**Linear editing:** A type of editing in which the material is put together from beginning to end. If changes are needed, everything after the change must be re-edited. With the rise of non-linear digital editing, linear editing has become rare.

**Long shot:** A shot that shows the subject at a distance. Characters are seen in their entirety with some area above and below them visible. The shot includes some of the surrounding environment as well.

**LunchBox Sync:** A plug-and-play animation tool used for animation testing and motion studies by animation professionals, studios, teachers, students and schools. It provides the ability to shoot and replay animation instantly.

**Master shot:** Wide shot used to show a complete version of the action.

**Medium shot:** An intermediate shot between the long shot and close-up. It generally shows a character from the knees or waist up or the full figure of a seated character. Medium shots can include several characters in the frame. They are effective for 1) showing the relationship of two or more characters, while giving enough detail to maintain audience involvement; 2) focusing on a character in a particular setting, without showing a large amount of the environment; and 3) as transitional shots bridging long shots and close-ups.

**Mini DV:** Miniature digital video, usually referring to a portable digital camera or the tape stock used with this video format.

**Mise-en-scène:** The totality of lighting, blocking, camera use and composition that produces the dramatic image on film.

**Monodirectional mic:** A microphone that picks up sound from one direction.

**Montage:** Originally this term referred to editing in general, but now refers to the kind of sequence that shows a process or the passage of time.

**Narration:** An explanatory voice superimposed over the action.

**Narrative film:** Any film that tells a story. Also called a fiction film, a dramatic film, a theatrical film or a feature film.

**Non-linear editing:** A type of editing in which the program does not need to be edited from beginning to end. Material can be laid down in any order and can be added to, changed, or deleted without having to edit all over again from the point of the change. Non-linear editing can be done with software such as iMovie.

**Omnidirectional mic:** A microphone that picks up sound from all directions.

**One shot:** A shot of a single person in the frame. A medium one-shot would show a single person from the knees or waist up, or the full figure of a sitting person.

**Outline:** A general listing of what will be included within a film, usually in bullet or paragraph form.

**Over the shoulder shot:** A shot that is taken over the shoulder of a character, with the back of the head, the neck and the shoulder generally seen at the side of the frame. The camera focuses past the character on some object or person that he or she is seeing. The shot is frequently used in conversations between two people, either showing a close-up of the speaking character from over the shoulder of the person who is listening, or a close-up of the reactions of the person who is listening from over the shoulder of the person who is talking.

**Pan:** A shot in which the camera moves horizontally along a fixed axis, to survey an area.

**Persistence of vision:** A human phenomenon whereby the brain retains images for a short period of time, so that still images that are projected very quickly look like moving images.

**Pitch:** A meeting during which people with a program idea try to convince other people to buy their idea (for development).

**Post-production:** The part of the production process that follows after the film has been shot. Editing is the first stage of post-production.

**Pre-production:** The preparation and planning period that comes before shooting.

**Producer:** The producer is usually in charge of elements such as writing, music clearance, financial considerations and hiring the director. The producer is also in charge of all the financial and administrative aspects of film production, from the inception of the film project and its initial planning through all stages of production, distribution and advertising.

**Production:** The stage during which all the shooting for a film occurs.

**Production assistant:** An individual who generally works under the director, performing a variety of tasks, including distribution and posting of printed materials, preparation for rehearsals and shooting and running errands.

**Production designer:** The person in charge of the overall look of a film. See **art director**.

**Real time:** Being able to do something, such as show moving video, in the same amount of time as it actually happens. Usually used in conjunction with how fast a computer system can show video.

**Rushes:** Unedited footage.

**Screenwriter:** The individual responsible, in total or in part, for writing the various stages of a film script. Sometimes one person may write all the stages, but often several people have a part in developing the script.

**Script:** The written text from which the film is produced.

**Script supervisor:** The person who keeps notes during production so that continuity is maintained and the material can be edited properly.

**Self-reflexive:** A work of art that is concerned with its own status as art. In the case of film, any motion picture that explores and exploits its own medium or that investigates its relation to reality can be considered self-reflexive.

**Shooting:** The entire process of putting the action on film or video, using a camera.

**Shooting schedule:** A sheet that lists what is to be accomplished each day of production and the major elements needed in order to accomplish it.

**Short lens:** A lens with a short focal length and a wide viewing angle. A short lens includes quite a bit in the picture and tends to exaggerate distance.



**Shotgun mic:** A highly directional microphone used for picking up sounds from a distance.

**Shot list:** List the director makes so that the camera operators know what they will be shooting.

**Slate:** An identification procedure whereby date, scene, segment and other information necessary to tape and film editing are recorded at the beginning of a designated camera sequence.

**Sound Dissolve** (also called a Segue): Blending one audio track into another.

Also described with

- **“Mix to...”** (as in “bird song mixes to rain”).
- **Fade down:** Lower overall level of sound.
- **Fade up:** Raise sound level.
- **F/O:** Fade out to silence.
- **F/I:** Fade in from silence.

**Stock footage** Scenes of various types that can be purchased and inserted into a production.

**Stop-motion animation:** The process of photographing drawings, puppets, silhouettes or inanimate objects frame by frame through stop-motion photography. Each frame records a small progressive change in the subject or image. When the frames are projected onto the screen, one after the other, at the standard speed of 24 frames per second, the subject seems to move or be animated.

**Storyboard:** A series of simple drawings or computer-generated frames that visually lay out the content of a film.

**Superimposition:** Places one thing over another. Usually reserved for titles.

**Telephoto lens:** A lens with a very long focal length, used for close-ups of objects from a great distance.

**Test reel:** Footage shot to see if equipment, shooting conditions or camera angles are adequate.

**Tilt:** A movement of the camera that goes up or down along a vertical axis from a fixed position.

**Time code:** An electronic synchronizing system, standardized by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, employed for editing video images and sound.

**Transitions:** Techniques, such as dissolves and wipes, used for getting from one shot to another. Here is a list of transitions, with brief definitions.

- **Cut:** Switching to another screen image, possibly in another scene.
- **Match cut:** Joining two different-sized shots of the same scene (like a medium shot and a close-up) to create the illusion of continuity.
- **Action match cut:** Type of match cut made on a movement. The movement “flows” across the cut, maintaining direction and speed.
- **Jump cut:** Usually signals that time has elapsed or something has been omitted from scene.
- **Fade-out:** Fades out the image to black.
- **Fade-in:** Fades the image in from black.
- **Fade to white:** Fades out to white screen.
- **Fade from white:** Fades in from white screen.
- **Dissolve or Lap dissolve:** Two shots that merge by overlapping one with the other.
- **Wipe:** One image replaces another as a line travelling across the scene.
- **Iris Wipe:** An image at a point in the centre of the screen that expands to fill the previous shot.

**Treatment:** A written account of the film’s story with all the characters, actions and scenes, but usually without dialogue or lists of individual shots.

**Two shot:** A medium or close shot in which two people fill the frame. This is the basic shot for most scenes of conversation in a film, showing the characters talking and responding to one another in profile, or in a variety of stances and from a variety of angles.

**Video capture:** Hardware and software that allows a personal computer to convert video into digital form.

**Voice-over:** Used to present dialogue that could not actually be heard, as when we hear a character’s voice while he or she is reading a letter silently on screen.

**White balance:** An adjustment process through which light reflected from a white card in a given lighting situation is used as a reference point. In this setup mode, the camera automatically balances the red and blue intensities with the available light.

**Wide shot:** The type of shot that shows the most space.

**Wild dialogue:** Dialogue that does not come from a visible speaker in the shot.

**Worm’s eye view/low-angle shot:** A shot from beneath eye level, with the camera looking up at the subject. Such shots make the subject appear large, dominant – even threatening.

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