Appearances

A thematic unit proposed by **Réseau Canopé**

A unit by Patrice Rocas

Teaching with cinema

4 short films with a total running time of 18 minutes.

One More Beer

Pedro Conti, Brazil, 2011

French Roast

Fabrice O. Joubert, France, 2008

You Look Scary

Xiya Lan, United States, 2016

Appearance and Reality

E. Rogova & Z. Pavlenho, United States, 2014

Appearances by Patrice Rocas

Appearances are sometimes deceptive. What if we were wrong about other people most of the time? Can't the coarse brute have a tender heart? Can't the poor man show more generosity than the one who has never known need? Appearances often guide our behaviour, prompting distrust or attraction; they are often far removed from reality, and they mislead our judgement.

— For pity's sake, Sir, please let me laugh.
Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, Molière, 1670.
Engraving by Jean-Michel Moreau, 1913

Context

Place in the school curriculum

"All the arts contribute to developing sensitivity, through artistic practice, through exposure to works of art, and through the expression of one's emotions and tastes. The history of the arts [...] helps forge a particular link between the sensory and the rational dimensions. In French, the aim is to enable a sensitive reception of literary works by developing pupils' expression and the formulation of their opinions."
Special Official Bulletin No. 11 (26/11/2015), domain 3 of the common core: the formation of the person and the citizen.

All subjects contribute to the formation of judgement, to the development of self-confidence and to respect for others.
They help awaken a sensitivity that makes it possible to see beyond appearances.

Appearance matters in many respects, but it is very often distorted by our judgement, our emotions or our personal history.

The study of these four films can thus be linked to four learning domains covered in the proposed sequences.
Each time, the aim is to place pupils in a situation of active reflection when faced with difference — with appearances that are sometimes deceptive.

Overview

Aim of the unit

Is appearance really important? The aim of this unit is to prompt reflection on the way we look at others. Our society attaches great importance to image. The idea we form of another person begins with their appearance. Breaking out of this straitjacket — which sometimes erases our feelings and our sensitivity — in order to better understand and accept others lies at the heart of the idea of "living well together": tolerance, respect...

Teaching helps each pupil accept others in all the complexity of their feelings and actions, through the image they project, and helps them grow into reasoned, enlightened, respectful and caring citizens.
Identifying certain cultural and artistic preconceptions and stereotypes in order to move beyond them serves the same idea: **Looking beyond appearances.**

A thematic unit proposed by Réseau Canopé. Author of the unit: Patrice Rocas

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Presentation of the short films

4 short films with a total running time of 18 minutes.

One More Beer © Pedro Conti

« One More Beer » could be the slogan of a drink for "tough guys" — the cruellest of Vikings. Here, a warrior with a flaming beard, wearing a horned helmet and skull-shaped brooches, arrives at the table of a rustic tavern. He orders his brew, and is brought what looks like a martini glass filled with a pink liquid and a delicate straw, to which a small decorative umbrella is added. The daintiness of the refined drink contrasts with the character's apparent roughness.

Production: Pedro Conti, Brazil, 2011 · Direction: Pedro Conti · 3D animation, 58 s

« French Roast » On the terrace of a Parisian café, a cigar-smoking man refuses to give alms to a beggar. But when the bill arrives, panic sets in: his wallet is gone. What to do?... until an old lady gives the beggar a banknote pulled from a wad she puts back in her bag. The temptation to help himself from the lady's bag is strong. Are the poorest the thieves? What if things were quite different? The old lady turns out to be a bank robber, and the old beggar the most honest and generous of them all.

3D animation, 8 min 17 s · Production: Pumpkin Factory, France, 2008 · Direction: Fabrice O. Joubert

French Roast © Fabrice O. Joubert

You Look Scary © Xiya Lan

« You Look Scary » At the dentist's, fears multiply. A crocodile has a toothache and must be treated by a rabbit dentist. The former is afraid of the treatment, which he imagines to be cruel, and the latter is well aware that his patient is, to him, a predator. The appearance or reputation of one misleads the other about his feelings. The bloodthirsty animal is just as afraid as the dentist, who is "preceded" by his profession's bad reputation. Each misjudges and fears the other, without realising the terror he himself inspires.

Production: CalArts, United States, 2016 · Direction: Xiya Lan · 2D animation, 4 min

« Appearance and Reality » or two films in one. Characters cross paths in the street. Two screens, one above, one below: what the characters are in their attitudes, and what they really are deep down. Is what we show what we are? Emotions and feelings are harder to see in others. Through three characters — a middle-aged man, a child and a teenager — we understand that nothing is less simple than appearances at such different ages. An example of the complexity of human relationships?

2D animation, 4 min 37 s · Production: Amix Film Studio, United States, 2014 · Direction: Elena Rogova & Zhenia Pavlenho

Appearance and Reality © Amix Film

Thematic and cinematographic analysis

These films show us the full complexity of feelings, of human relationships, of the image we have of others, and of the impression we make on them.

The gap between outward appearance and the reality of the characters' inner lives is the common thread running through these films, whose aesthetics differ widely. It creates a comic effect and inexorably leads the viewer to conclude that "the cowl does not make the monk" — you can't judge a book by its cover.

These films invite us to imagine, reflect and question. Through its distinctive characters, each one shows ways of perceiving others, with all the preconceptions and errors of judgement that this implies.
They illustrate the complexity of our perception of the people around us.

Pedagogical implementation

Watching the films should make it possible to work on different learning domains, in an approach that values interdisciplinarity and cross-curricular links — the connection between the spoken and the written word.

Comprehension and meaning-building strategies are at the heart of the approach. The aim is to start from what is seen in order to develop interpretation skills and the ability to express oneself and debate, moving towards more specific knowledge depending on the domain.

The pedagogical implementation should make it possible to explore certain essential aspects of the films in depth, working in sequences that bring several films together according to their common features and to targeted objectives.

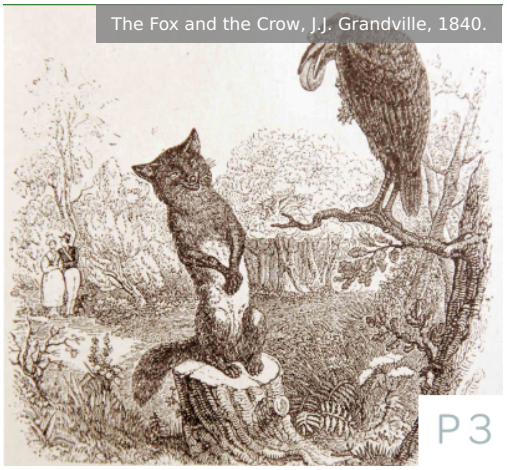
4 Sequences

Sequence 1: French
Becoming a character in the story

Sequence 2: Moral and civic education
Debates on appearance

Sequence 3: History of the arts
Interpreting human cultural productions

Sequence 4: Visual arts
Faces and emotions


The Fox and the Crow, J.J. Grandville, 1840.

P 3

Sequence 1: Becoming a character in the story (French)

« French Roast » is the short film that references a classic genre: the detective story, or "polar". Appearances are, of course, at the heart of the plot. The suspect is never the designated culprit. And the perception of the characters changes over the course of the story, generating intrigue and suspense. A well-constructed script and characters who turn out to be more complex than they seem are the keys to success in this type of film.

The sequence proposed in French is above all a writing project, preceded by a detailed study of the characters' complexity — of what they show and what they really are. These personalities must emerge gradually over the course of the narrative, for a more compelling plot.

French Roast © Fabrice O. Joubert

The sequence draws on the evolution of the viewer's perception of the characters. It has two main objectives: understanding the structure of the narrative, and producing a descriptive text.

1.

Watch the short film **« French Roast »**. Oral discussion and questioning phase around the film: summarise the story, reconstruct the scenario and identify the key events that serve as true turning points in the plot. Reconstruct the skeleton of the film, the outline of the script, the chronology.

2.

Identify the different characters. In groups, produce descriptive fact sheets for them, presenting their physical and moral characteristics. Organise a whole-class discussion.

3.

Orally, put yourself in the characters' shoes and imagine how they experience their situation in this context.

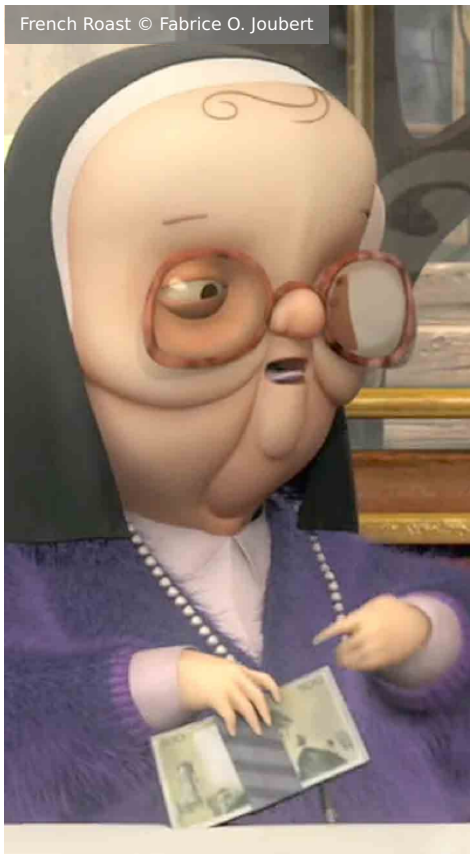
4.

Writing project: choose a character and write what they feel and what they see. Putting oneself in a character's place allows interpretations of the story to emerge, which may spark an interesting debate.

Sequence 2: Debates on appearance (moral and civic education)

The objective of this type of debate is for pupils to become capable of questioning and challenging their initial judgements. This reflective debate can take place orally, as a philosophically-oriented discussion, both in its approach and in the learning it brings into play. "Moral and civic education primarily ensures an understanding of rules and law" (Official Bulletin, Nov. 2015). This ties in with the idea of respecting others — for what they are or for what they show. The four films thus lend themselves to debates on the question: are we what we think we show?

« One More Beer » clearly evokes the possible opposition between a rustic appearance and delicate tastes. In **« You Look Scary »**, the characters' reputations mislead us about their true nature. **« Appearance and Reality »** highlights the difference between what we do and what we would like to do. As for **« French Roast »**, it is the expression "the cowl does not make the monk" put into images.
Four stories — and several ways of approaching the notion of appearance as deceptive?


French Roast © Fabrice O. Joubert

How to approach the subject:

1.

Watch the films and hold an initial discussion on the notion of appearance and its importance. Does appearance reveal what we really are? Set up a system: one film / one group that reports what it has understood, followed by a validation viewing by the class.

2.

Topic of the first debate: is appearance important for expressing what we are, or should it be erased to reveal our true personality? Pupils can bring out the debate topic themselves. Using photographs of children their age, they can also be asked what they think of the clothing they observe. The reflection can take place in groups and lead to a real questioning of how each person dresses, of what brands mean to pupils, and ultimately of the importance of appearance.
The procedure for a structured (or reasoned) debate is available on Eduscol:
http://cache.media.eduscol.education.fr/file/EMC/01/1/ress_emc_debat_464011.pdf

3.

Possible second debate: does the reputation of a person, or of their profession, harm their true personality? Give groups of pupils photographs of people practising a specific profession but in different activities (a butcher cutting up bloody meat, and another at his stall; a police officer protecting and one issuing a fine; a doctor reassuring a patient and one giving an injection...). Then compare the representations and bring out the idea that appearances sometimes betray our judgement.

Sequence 3: Interpreting human cultural productions (history of the arts)

Among the general objectives of this subject for pupils' education, some are methodological in nature. They concern the understanding of a work of art. A pupil who analyses a work can make links with their existing knowledge and reflect both historically and aesthetically, developing "a sensitive, informed and thoughtful eye". This sequence proposes going beyond the image — seeking to understand a work and to go further than what it represents.

It is built on the principle that pupils must give a reasoned opinion on their interpretation of a work of art. It is important to show that going beyond appearances, by seeking information other than what is perceived at first glance, is a lever for understanding.

It is also an opportunity to link the short films viewed with works of art from humanity's cultural heritage. Pupils can thus confront representations of the Viking or the Gaul at different periods, from caricature to a more scientific and realistic vision. They can study famous paintings, or paintings of undeniable historical value. One example is **The Surrender of Vercingetorix by Lionel Royer**.

One More Beer © Pedro Conti

Attila and his Hordes, Eugène Delacroix (GNU licence)

The different phases can be:

1.

In groups, pupils can work on the representation of the Viking and, more generally, of the "barbarian" in art, where his image is often shaped and transformed for specific purposes. They will be shown a range of images, from Lionel Royer's proud and courageous Gaul to the bloodthirsty barbarian of Eugène Delacroix's paintings (Attila...).

2.

Commentary on a work: based on these selected works of art, each pupil can produce a piece of writing on the character and his representation on the one hand, and on the historical reality on the other. The written work can be presented alongside the artwork and become the subject of discussions and exhibitions.

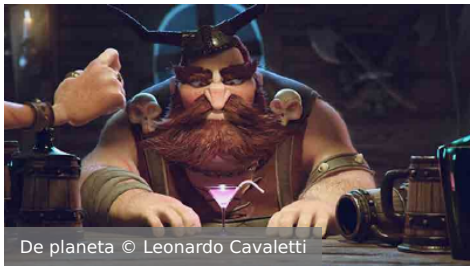
3.

Watch **« One More Beer »** and round off the idea that representation counts for a great deal in the idea we form of a character. Behind the Viking's apparent roughness lie refinement and a certain delicacy. Here again, it is a blatant caricature. See on Eduscol:
eduscol.education.fr/cid99018/ressources-d-accompagnement-du-programme-d-histoire-des-arts-au-cycle-3.html

Sequence 4: Faces and emotions (visual arts)

Emotions through expressions. Is that not what betrays us? Our faces are so expressive that they often reveal our deepest feelings. **« One More Beer »**, **« You Look Scary »** and **« Appearance and Reality »** present characters with such different expressions that they are so many examples of the contradictory appearances we present or provoke.
Representing the surrounding world, or giving shape to one's imagination by exploring various domains (drawing, collage, modelling, sculpture, photography, video...), is one of the skills worked on in cycle 3.

Giving a reasoned opinion on what a work of art represents or expresses means making a judgement. For that judgement to be an informed one, the work studied must first be fully understood.
The three short films mentioned above are starting points for a personal expression of human feelings.
The sequence is based on the idea that everyone's face carries expressions and emotions.


De planeta © Leonardo Cavaletti

You Look Scary © Xiya Lan

Appearance and Reality © Amix Film Studio

The different phases can be:

1.

Watch the three short films.

2.

Prepare images of the facial expressions of the various characters in these films using screenshots. Ask pupils to identify the feelings expressed, then list the main human feelings.

3.

Reflect on what best characterises each feeling. Imagine which facial expression best matches the feeling expressed. Orally, describe or mime it. Then, using various artistic representations, identify the feeling evoked (examples of portraits that can be studied: Picasso's **Weeping Woman**; Munch's **The Scream**; Dalí's photo-portraits exhibited at the Figueres museum; the facial expressions of comic-strip characters...).

4.

Choose one of the feelings listed at the start of the sequence and create an artwork based on it. Show pupils different facial expressions of manga or comic-strip characters they know (Naruto, Mortelle Adèle, Astérix...). Then ask them to draw on these to express the chosen feeling on a face they will draw.

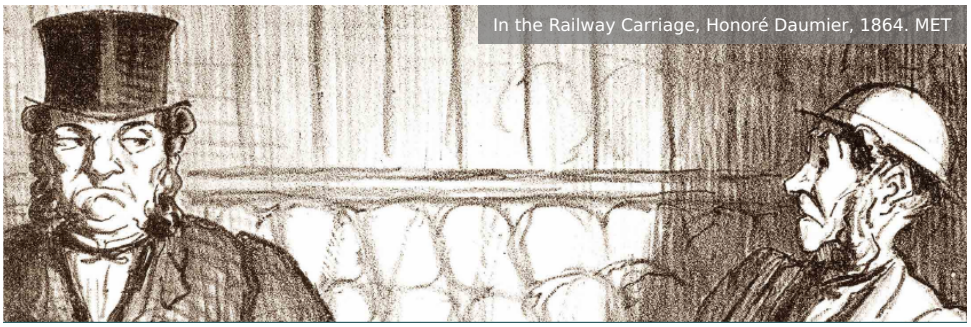
5.

Another possible sequence: based on the study of Dalí's photographed portraits, ask pupils to photograph themselves (with parental consent and in compliance with French circular No. 2003-091 of 5 June 2003) expressing, as best they can, a chosen list of feelings.

Extensions and links with the Arts

Cross-curricular resources.

"This gentleman's face doesn't sit well with me."
"This traveller's face inspires no confidence in me."
In the Railway Carriage, Honoré Daumier, 1864.


In the Railway Carriage, Honoré Daumier, 1864. MET

"Woman is well within her rights, and indeed performs a kind of duty, in striving to appear magical and supernatural; she must astonish and charm; an idol, she must gild herself to be adored. She must therefore borrow from all the arts the means to rise above nature, the better to subjugate hearts and strike minds."
In Praise of Cosmetics, C. Baudelaire, 1885.

A Parisian Woman Seen from Behind, C. Guys, 1850. MET

The appearances at the heart of these four films very often prove deceptive — or are the expression of each person's truth. We see only through our feelings, our experience, our impressions... And what we feel very often betrays the truth. Possible extensions abound in various domains:

1.

« French Roast » can easily be set alongside many detective films for the construction of its scenario. It can be the starting point for a more in-depth study of the detective genre. It can help pupils understand the need to write a well-constructed story. Examples are numerous and varied: for cinema, Cocteau's film **Beauty and the Beast**, or Condon's; or, for the theatre, Rostand's play **Cyrano de Bergerac** or its adaptation **Cyrano sentait bon la lessive** by the Hecho en casa company.

2.

The expression of inner life is very present in the Surrealist movement. The writings of André Breton, Dalí's paintings, certain films in the lineage of Buñuel's or, outside Surrealism, the musical compositions of Steve Reich, Philip Glass... offer many ways into the study of feelings and impressions — of the appearances we present, so often at odds with the truth of our feelings and our inner selves.