Memory

A thematic unit proposed by **Réseau Canopé**

A unit by Jean-Louis Jouanneaud

Teaching with cinema

4 short films with a total running time of 14 minutes.

Lost property

Asa Lucander, United Kingdom, 2014

L’eau life

Jeff Scher, United States, 2007

Memory sprint

Seth Boyden, United States, 2015

Waves

Lorenzo Fresta, United States, 2014

Memory *by Jean-Louis Jouanneaud*

Are we nothing more than our memory?
Remembering, yes — but remembering what?
Can we decide which memories we want to keep?
Memory, the direct witness of our past, prepares our future, for it is essential to the development of our personality.

L'eau Life © Jeff Scher

Context

Place in the school curriculum

The primary-school curriculum frequently refers to the indispensable role of memorisation.

« Memorise and recall the spelling of common words… », « Extend lexical knowledge, memorise and reuse newly learned words… », and so on.

To have at their disposal the knowledge needed for full success at school, children must be aware of the reality of their own memory.

What is it? How does it work?
How can it be improved? What « tools » does it rely on?

These are all questions to which watching the four films presented below can help provide answers.

Overview

Aim of the unit

Memory is a key element in a child's success at school: when it performs well because it is used well, it helps build knowledge that will be enriched step by step, year after year.

Yet a significant number of pupils do not know how — or are unable — to mobilise their memory. They then run into serious difficulties.

This is therefore an opportunity to make them aware of what memory is, and to reflect on some of its aspects and on how it works.

That is the main objective of this unit.

A thematic unit proposed by Réseau Canopé. Author of the unit: Jean-Louis Jouanneaud

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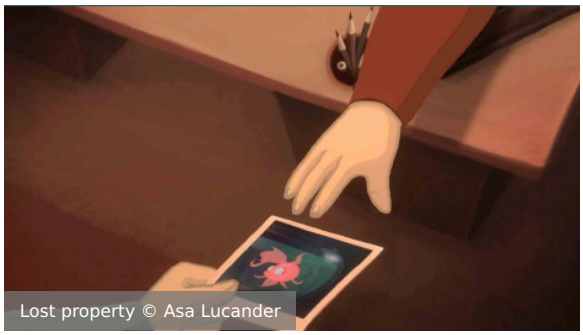
Presentation of the short films

4 short films with a total running time of 14 minutes.


Lost property © Asa Lucander

« Lost property » deals with memory loss and its possible resurgence. It allows children to consider the need to train the memory.
It raises questions about the importance of memory:
we are what we have lived through and what we remember of it.

Direction: Asa Lucander
Production: 12foot6, United Kingdom, 2014 · 2D animation, 6 min 13 s

« L'eau life » deals with the pleasures of water under the summer sun: sliding, diving, floating, swimming... The film's dynamic lets the viewer leap from one action to another, like so many rapid, successive memories.
A lively soundtrack floods the animation with a cascade of sound.
The film is interesting both for its visual approach and for the rhythm it sets.
The intensity of the pleasure felt in contact with water is palpable.

2D animation, 2 min 30 s · Production: Jeff Scher, United States, 2007 · Direction: Jeff Scher

L'eau Life © Jeff Scher

Memory Sprint © Seth Boyden

« Memory sprint » evokes the deliberate search for a memory.
An old lady makes the effort to climb up to the attic — the playground of her own childhood — in order to revive her memories. She must rewind her life to become a child again and, for a moment, be reunited with her brother and sister.
Once satisfied, she returns to her present, in which she no longer needs her walking stick.

Direction: Seth Boyden
Production: CalArts, United States, 2015 · 2D animation, 1 min 22 s

« Waves » deals with memories triggered by an outside event: a young man braves a storm that brings back a moment from his childhood. The film illustrates long-term memory, the permanence of the past in the present, and the bond of memory woven between generations. It invites us to reflect on what causes the sudden, involuntary recollection of distant events, but also to grasp certain key moments of our existence.

2D animation, 3 min 36 s · Production: CalArts, United States, 2014 · Direction: Lorenzo Fresta

Waves © Lorenzo Fresta

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Thematic and cinematographic analysis

These four films deal with memory with very different aesthetics, but they share at least two deliberate choices:
They are silent, which allows work on searching for meaning. Who are the protagonists? What are they doing? Why?
The music takes the place of words. Slow when memory struggles (Lost property), it becomes frenetic when memories speed up (L'eau life)…

For each film, the teacher will aim to have pupils grasp the essence of the content through a sufficient number of viewings, followed by appropriate questioning. Learning activities can be drawn from the following (for more detail, see teaching sequences 1 to 6 for the film **« Lost property »** and the presentation of the other three short films).

In class, pupils will have become aware of the importance of their own memory. The teacher's task will then be to make them want to cultivate their memory through physical activity, sleep and regular training — the winning triangle!

The teacher will have pupils work on the three levels of memorisation (immediate, medium-term, long-term). He or she will give meaning to the need to learn in order to remember better, will value the tools developed in class and encourage pupils to use them (displays, summaries, various written records…).

To memorise the word *rouge-gorge* (robin), for example, pupils will benefit from associating it with a picture, from reading the word in a particular shape or colour and, finally, from writing it out themselves. They can also verbalise it (number of syllables, song…). Reasonable use of a mind map can be considered by age 9.

Pedagogical implementation

French
. Establish a dialogue to identify the key moments of the film. (**sequence 1**)
. Present the characters and describe them. (**sequence 1**)
. Imagine what they might say to each other, and write it down. (**sequence 2**)
. Write a caption for a photo or a drawing. (**sequence 3**)
. Explain one of the film's scenes orally and in writing. (**sequence 3**)

Questioning the world (ideas directly linked to the theme of memory)
. Reconstruct the chronology of a story. (**sequence 3**)
. Train the memory through games: Memory, Kim's game… (**sequence 4**)
. Collect records of family memory in films, photo albums, letters… (new idea)
. Collect elders' childhood memories and compare them with the children's present. (new idea)
. Create one's own family tree. (new idea)

Physical education and sport
. Complete a course with « extended instructions » that have been memorised. (**sequence 4**)
. Take part in a memory relay in which each « relay pupil » receives new instructions. (**sequence 4**)

Music education / poetry writing
. Create cumulative rhymes (like « Mon âne, mon âne a bien mal à la tête… ») to memorise better. (**sequence 5**)
. Create poems that activate memories (« I remember… »). (**sequence 5**)

Visual arts
. Draw a film's characters in order to present it. (**sequence 6**)
. Use drawing to link the representation of an object with its past. (**sequence 6**)

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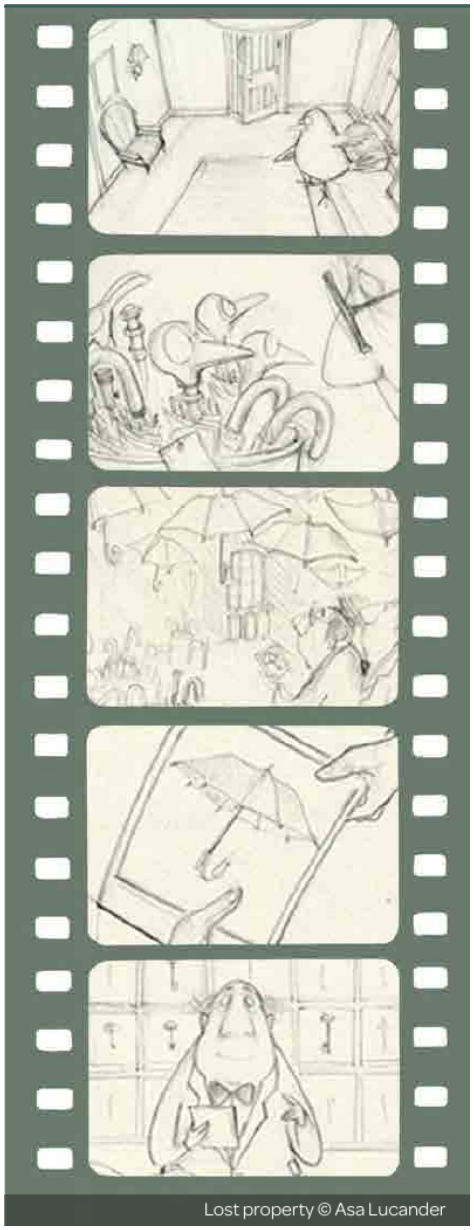
Sequence 1: Lost Property (French)

Main learning objectives

. Understand and express oneself orally.
. Write.
. Experiment, produce and create in the visual arts.
. Cooperate and act responsibly towards others.
. Learn to observe in order to understand, then produce reflective discourse.
. Give pupils a first opportunity to reflect on the theme of memory.



Lost property © Asa Lucander

Suggested outline for the sequence

1.

Show the film a first time, then invite the children to comment freely. Pick up on the uncertainties raised by some of their statements and suggest a second viewing.

2.

Ask questions so as to pin down the essence of the content. From there, list elements that evoke the loss, then the recovery, of memory.

3.

Ask the children to define the word « memory » in writing (in short: storing and retrieving information). Explore why memory is indispensable to us (without memories, whether short-term or long-term, human beings would have only powers of perception: acquired knowledge would vanish as soon as it appeared).

4.

Learning at school requires memory training: how can we make our memory perform well?

5.

Ask the children in what contexts, and for what purposes, they need to use it.

6.

Suggest that each child create their own graphic representation of memory, through a drawing or a diagram.

7.

Conclude by watching the film one last time. Take a few moments for final remarks.

Sequence 2: Lost Property (French)

Main learning objectives

. Understand and express oneself orally.
. Speak, read, write.
. Experiment, produce and create in the visual arts.
. Move from a visual and musical message (a silent cartoon) to a situation of spoken exchange.
. Use vocabulary suited to the characteristics of memory loss.

Lost property © Asa Lucander

Suggested outline for the sequence

1.

Having checked that everyone has properly understood the video (see teaching sequence 1) and established that the characters in the film do not speak, ask the children — in small groups or as a whole class — to imagine what their exchanges might be. Their first task will be to find the few key moments, indicated below by time markers.

0:51: Hello, Sir, I've lost this umbrella...
1:37, 1:55, 2:22, 3:25, 4:03, 4:28, 4:39.
The resulting dialogues can be dictated to the adult, or become a writing exercise.

2.

First, have the children speak their dialogues in sync with a viewing of the video (value their imaginative work, provided it respects the theme). Then broaden the scope of interpretation by staging real short scenes.

3.

To conclude, the children write a short illustrated text presenting each of the two characters, in the first or third person. Give meaning to the objects the lady is looking for by creating a story in which they appear.

Sequence 3: Lost Property (French)

Main learning objectives

. Understand and express oneself orally.
. Read, write.
. Cooperate and act responsibly towards others.
. Find one's way through the chronology of a story.

Lost property © Asa Lucander

Suggested outline for the sequence

1.

Watching the video is an opportunity to exercise the children's memory.
Ask them, individually or in small groups, to put the pictures back in the order in which they appear in the film (see page 7).

2.

Once the ordering is done, ask the children to write a caption for each object or situation.

3.

A story could be invented and written down by the adult.

Older pupils (ages 7-8), in small groups, would write an explanatory text to go with each of the pictures in context.

This text would explain why the object was lost or forgotten: for example, the key belonged to the gate that had to be replaced because it was too old. That is why it was forgotten…

4.

The texts would then be shuffled, prompting a fresh search for the story's chronology based on the written word alone.
Using time connectives appropriately can be one of the objectives when reassembling these texts.

5.

Finish with a wall display made up of the enlarged photos and a text to go with each one.

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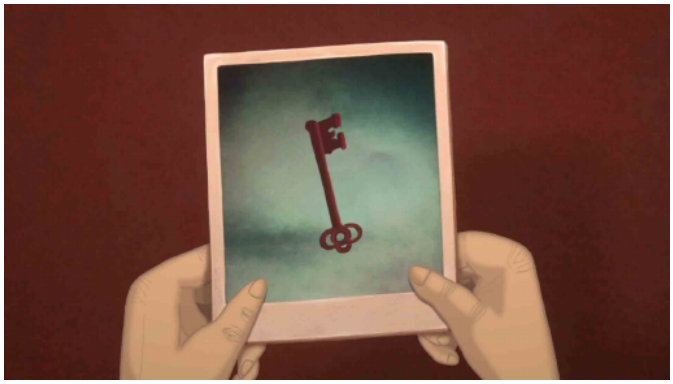
The film stills for activities 3 and 4 of « Lost property »

1

2



3

4

5

6

7

8

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Sequence 4: Lost Property (Physical education and sport)

Main learning objectives

. Motor skills and body language.
. Cooperate and act responsibly towards others.
. Train the memory while becoming aware of how it works.

Child, PxHere

Suggested outline for the sequence

The photos of the objects have been placed below in the order in which they appear. Suggest that the children cut them out so as to use them for memory games.

Option 1.

Have the photos laid out in their original order. Ask the children to study them carefully so as to memorise the position of each one. Turn one of them over.
Ask which one it is.
Proceed in the same way, removing two cards, then three, and so on.

Option 2.

Follow option 1, but this time swap the positions of two, then three cards. Ask the children to find them.

Option 3.

In PE, offer courses with « extended instructions »: each stage involves several instructions (« Go around the first hoop, then pass through the middle of the second », etc.). Add a new one after each success.

These courses can lead to « memory rallies » in which each relay pupil receives new instructions from a partner. Value each child by adding a point for every instruction followed.

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Sequence 5: Lost Property (Music education / poetry writing)

Main learning objectives

. Understand and express oneself orally.
. Sing and perform.
. Explore, imagine and create.
. Write.
. Become aware of how one's own memory works.
. Memorise a sequence of information.

Lost property © Asa Lucander

Suggested outline for the sequence

1.

The list of objects will be the basis for creating rhymes designed to aid memorisation. Following the model of cumulative children's songs (for example: « Mon âne, mon âne a bien mal à la tête »), ask the children to create the « rhyme of the film », to be spoken or sung.

It might go like this:
« The lady wants to find her umbrella.
The lady wants to find her umbrella and her key.
The lady wants to find her umbrella, her key and her goldfish… »
The class will memorise the text.

2.

As a follow-up, have the children work in small groups to create a new rhyme, this time with objects of their own choosing, selected within a theme decided beforehand: the sea, the mountains, space, school, a haunted castle…

These rhymes will be recited, exchanged and, in turn, learned.
Each will begin, if possible, in a different way:
« At the seaside, I like… »;
« In the mountains, I saw… »;
« I dream of meeting… in space »;
« In my haunted castle, I'm afraid of… », etc.

The rhymes will be written out in full or in part before being illustrated.

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Sequence 6: Lost Property (Visual arts)

Main learning objectives

. Experiment, produce, create.
. Link the representation of an object with its use in the past.
. Represent the use of memory in a personal way.

Lost property © Asa Lucander

Suggested outline for the sequence

The film combines, within a single image, the representation of one of the sought-after objects and the use made of it in the past. For example, the umbrella.

2.

Once the ordering is done, ask the children to write a caption for each object or situation.

3.

A story could be invented and written down by the adult.

Older pupils (ages 7-8), in small groups, would write an explanatory text to go with each of the pictures in context. This text would explain why the object was lost or forgotten: for example, the key belonged to the gate that had to be replaced because it was too old. That is why it was forgotten...

4.

The texts would then be shuffled, prompting a fresh search for the story's chronology based on the written word alone.
Using time connectives appropriately can be one of the objectives when reassembling these texts.

5.

Finish with a wall display made up of the enlarged photos and a text to go with each one.

Presentation of the film « L'eau Life »

Water and summer mingled in a joyful, hypnotic cavalcade.

« L'eau Life » deals with the pleasures of water under the summer sun: sliding, diving, floating, swimming…
The film's dynamic lets the viewer leap from one action to another, like so many rapid, successive memories.
A lively soundtrack floods the animation with a cascade of sound.

The film is interesting both for its visual approach and for the rhythm it sets.
The intensity of the pleasure felt in contact with water is palpable.

L'eau Life © Jeff Scher

Thematic and cinematographic analysis

The director uses watercolour to better render the effect of water, omnipresent in the film. The lightness of this medium serves the film's purpose: conveying the sensation of the liquid element and the emotion of being immersed in it.

The initial movement of the sea carries over into the joyful races that lead the bathers to it, their laughter, and the pursuit of pleasure that dominates.

Mixed into these scenes of aquatic happiness, in fleeting superimposition, are fruit-juice bottle labels, fragments of postcards, rolls of photographic film… (all objects that evoke the summer-holiday season).

The blurred lines of the drawing and the trembling animation recall the films of days gone by. They hint at a relationship with the past — and perhaps with childhood. The music, though joyful and lively, has a mechanical structure that evokes the passage of time.

Going further…

It would be worth building on the film's aesthetic to ask the children to go looking for « Super 8 » films within their families.

A classroom screening would make it possible to evoke both family memory and the advance of technology.
Pathé-Baby camera, Super 8 camera, camcorder, digital camera…

Presentation of the film « Memory Sprint »

Letting one's memory travel through time to find one's childhood again.

An old woman climbs up to her attic to find a game curiously named **« Memory Sprint »**.
It sends her back to her sister and brother, in her earliest childhood.

The film evokes the deliberate search for a memory.
The old lady makes the effort to climb up to the attic — the playground of her own childhood — in order to revive her memories.
She must rewind her life to become a child again and, for a moment, be reunited with her brother and sister.
Once satisfied, she returns to her present, in which she no longer needs her walking stick.
This film can be set alongside another short film, **« Waves »**, which deals with memories triggered by an outside event.

Memory Sprint © Seth Boyden

Thematic and cinematographic analysis

The constant trembling of the image evokes the uncertain, fleeting nature of memory. The film's aesthetic rests on the complementarity between the main character — the only one in colour — and the sketched settings.

The whole brings a lightness well suited to memory's swift journey back in time. Before finding the brother and sister she is looking for, the lady's memory has to dodge the obstacles created by the accumulation of memories piled up over an already long life.

The soundtrack slips an « electric jazzy » score (which grows in intensity as the object of the search draws nearer) between the two appearances of the hesitant « tap-tap » of the old lady's stick on the attic floor.

The central character's slight chuckle, together with a smile, at the end of the film proves that the deliberate use of memory can turn out to be a pleasure.

Going further...

Watching the film can be an opportunity to ask the children to collect childhood memories from their grandparents on the subject of their free time: what was it like? How did they spend it? What would they like to have back?

Presentation of the film « Waves »

How memory helps us stand up to life's storms.

« **Waves** » deals with memories triggered by an outside event: a young man alone in a tent braves a storm.
It brings back to his mind a moment from his childhood: when he was sailing at sea with his grandfather in similar weather conditions.

The film illustrates long-term memory, the permanence of the past in the present, and the bond of memory woven between generations. It invites us to reflect on what causes the sudden, involuntary recollection of distant events, but also to grasp certain key moments of our existence: the child, now an adult, braves the elements as his grandfather did — a grandfather from whom he inherited a taste for solitary adventure… and a heavy yellow pea coat. It can be compared with another short film, Memory Sprint, which deals with the deliberate use of memory.

Waves © Lorenzo Fresta

Thematic and cinematographic analysis

The palette of sound and image devoted to the natural elements is very rich: the whistling of the wind that lifts the waves and slips into the tent, the din of the rain and the raging sea, the rumble of thunder and the glow of lightning are omnipresent. It is they that carry the memory. The humans do not speak — the child, now grown, remembers only shouts and laughter shared with a grandfather at once frightening, protective and powerful.

The film can be used in class to explore what a founding moment is. For example, one's first arrival at school.
The boy's boat trip determines part of what he will become: his grandfather teaches him not to be afraid — to grow up.
Similar situations can be sought in books of tales: young Native Americans had to triumph over the bison, and the Maasai of Ethiopia over the lion.

An interesting piece of work on the theme of the initiatory tale:
www.cndp.fr/crdp-creteil/telemaque/comite/initiatique.htm

The generational difference between the two protagonists opens the way to discussing family ties. The children can draw up a brief family tree: from themselves back to their great-grandparents, for example.

Going further…

Georges Perec: « I remember dinners at the big table in the bakery. Milk soup in winter, wine soup in summer. » (Georges Perec, **Je me souviens**, Paris, Hachette, 1976.) Share a few extracts from Perec's book, then invite pupils to follow in his footsteps: first discussion, then a sentence created (or chosen), written down and illustrated. Producing calligrams can also be considered.

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Extensions and links with the Arts

Cross-curricular resources.

Lost property © Asa Lucander

The Persistence of Memory, Salvador Dalí, 1931.
© MoMA https://www.moma.org

La mémoire de la forêt de Chambord, T. Rousseau, 1839.
Metropolitan Museum of Art

1. Paintings depicting memory, to debate around:

« The Persistence of Memory », by Salvador Dalí, is an allegory of memory and time (the watches have stopped…). Children will respond to its astonishing aesthetic.
A short video for children has been devoted to this work.
https://education.francetv.fr/matiere/arts-visuels/ce1/video/persistance-de-la-memoire-de-dali
« Memory » (La Mémoire) by René Magritte. This painting may unsettle some pupils because of the bloodstain representing a painful event from the past. Yet the face depicted is perfectly peaceful…

2. A few songs:

« Qu'est-ce que j'oublie ? » by Anne Sylvestre. Far removed from her earlier songs, this one brims with tenderness, humour — and nostalgia too.
« La symphonie d'Alzheimer » by Barcella deals very tenderly with memory loss and the disease of the same name.

3. Books:

« Perds pas la tête, mamie » by Françoise Laurent. Éditions SEDRAP, 2008.
Joséphine, Antoine's grandmother, does strange things: this novel deals with Alzheimer's disease with subtlety and humour.
« Doux comme un souvenir » by Cathy Delanssay. Éditions Balivernes, 2009.
This soft, pastel picture book teaches children that they too carry within them memories that help them grow and build themselves.

4. Videos:

The series **« C'est pas sorcier »** has devoted several episodes to the theme of memory: « J'ai la mémoire qui flanche », « Comment améliorer sa mémoire ».

These programmes are a little demanding for pupils aged 9-11, but accessible extracts can be selected.
https://www.reseau-canope.fr/notice/la-maison-de-poussiere.html