

TAKE
TWO FILM
ACADEMY

THE THIRD DIMENSION OF LITERACY

HOW TO BRING FILMMAKING AND MEDIA LITERACY
INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

"For today's students, video is their language of choice. If you want to meet students where they are at, bringing this literacy into the classroom is a must." — SARAH KIEVAL, 7th Grade English Teacher

THE THIRD DIMENSION OF LITERACY

HOW TO BRING FILMMAKING AND MEDIA LITERACY INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

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“In an era of accelerating innovation...expanding our understanding of literacy isn't just important, it's essential to participating effectively and ethically in modern life. The Third Dimension of Literacy should be required for every educator in America and anyone else who cares about how we properly prepare the next generation to thrive in a world they're embracing faster than our teaching has up to now.”

—Michael Slaby, Chief Strategist, Harmony Labs
(a non-profit focused on decoding the effects of media on society)

“The Third Dimension of Literacy” has taken the medium of filmmaking and turned it into a literacy. This book is a must have for teachers who are looking for a safe way to experiment with film and digital citizenship!”

—Ross Cooper, Author of *Hacking Project Based Learning*

“I had no idea how profoundly engaging film would be for my students. My ability to teach and theirs to grasp the content has expanded exponentially.”

—Elyn Lankford, 6th Grade Social Studies Teacher

“The benefit of this work is that it seamlessly integrates and supports the curriculum rather than adding an extra burden for teachers. For example, our second graders created outstanding bird documentaries as the culmination of our bird study.”

—Pat Carney, Principal of PS 340

“This work was the perfect addition to our school. The impact and video work engaged our students and was invaluable in helping to solidify our students' learning. This work has now become embedded in the fabric of our culture.”

—Jessica Jenkins, Founding Principal of the West End Secondary School



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FOREWORD

I am an auditory and kinesthetic learner, which means that I struggled to learn to read and write. In the past, kids with challenges like mine were thrown into the classroom “pool” with ankle weights and had to outwork everyone else just to keep our heads above water. What I wouldn’t have given for alternative ways of learning, such as YouTube tutorials or the ability to articulate my arguments in a documentary film rather than in an essay.

I founded Take Two Film Academy in 2009 as a film school for children, teens, and young adults mostly because I liked making films and working with young people but also because I wanted things to be different and better for students like me—the students who use their ears and hands to learn and understand the world.

Today, Take Two works within schools offering residency programs and after school programs, as well as running stand-alone workshops. Take Two student films are regularly screened at local festivals and have been a part of the Tribeca Film Festival since 2013. Our program has served hundreds of classrooms and thousands of students and now I am excited to bring it to you.

What is this book about?

I wrote this book as a way to codify and share our work with teachers and educators who might be inexperienced or insecure about working or teaching in this medium. Filmmaking and media comprehension is the literacy of

the future and needs to be taught in schools as a way to meet young people where they are at and give them a framework for how to consume and create media ethically and responsibly. My hope for this book is that it encourages more teachers to adopt the third dimension of literacy and utilize it in all areas of study.

The book is meant to act as an introduction to the pedagogy of the third dimension of literacy and provide some basic “how-tos” on implementing it in your classroom. For additional resources we have created a Learning Management Site (LMS) to accompany this book. It provides coaching, rubrics, and more in-depth instruction on how to teach this material. I urge you to make use of the LMS just as fully as the text in this book. Some techniques are best explained by a short video rather than by an extensive description. Sometimes video is simply better, which, of course, is the whole point.

—MEGAN KIEFER, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF TAKE TWO FILM ACADEMY



DIGITAL FEATURES

Throughout the book, we have used QR codes to link to videos created by Take Two as well as resources that we have found to be particularly helpful in our teaching.

To access the resources, scan the QR code on the page using any QR-code scanning app. This will take you to the linked resource including the videos created by Take Two. On Vimeo, simply enter the password *taketwo*, press play, and watch. To access a full list of videos and resources, scan the QR code below.



Take Two resources.

PART 1

FUNDAMENTALS



CHAPTER 1

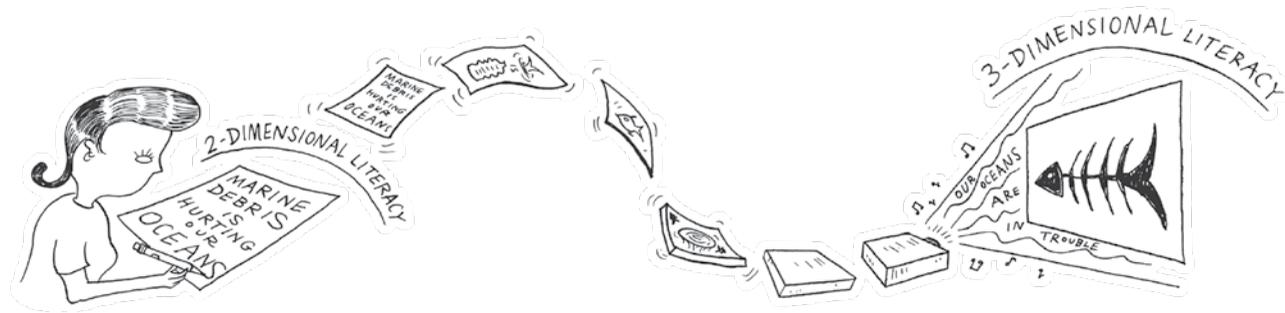
WHAT IS THE THIRD DIMENSION OF LITERACY?

“Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen, and use numeracy and technology, at a level that enables people to express and understand ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, to achieve their goals, and to participate fully in their community and in wider society. Achieving literacy is a lifelong learning process.”

—LITERACY ADVANCE OF HOUSTON¹

Literacy is, and always will be, one of the prime responsibilities for educators. Typically we think about literacy as the ability to not only absorb the ideas of others (reading) but to communicate our own thoughts and ideas (writing). Now imagine that you were taught how to read but not how to analyze and deconstruct what you read. And more—that you were never taught how to write. You could absorb the ideas of others to some extent, but you could never really share your own. For as long as audio-visual media—including sound, video, and film—have been used in the classroom, this is what we’ve been asking our students to do. We expect our students to consume media passively without much analysis or deconstruction, and when we teach them how to make their own films we often do so without giving them any ethical guidelines for production. In today’s media-driven landscape it is now more important than ever that we expand yesterday’s definition of literacy to include the analysis and

¹ www.literacyadvance.org/About_Us/Defining_Literacy



responsible creation of audio-visual media. We are calling this new literacy the third dimension: it now must include not only reading and writing text, but also understanding and creating audio-visual media.

**LITERACY IS, AND ALWAYS
WILL BE, ONE OF THE
PRIME RESPONSIBILITIES
FOR EDUCATORS.**

THE THIRD DIMENSION OF LITERACY

Consider the first dimension of literacy a *word*, and the second dimension of literacy a *stringing together of words* to form a complete thought. The third dimension of literacy is a *visualization of a complete thought*: it takes those strung-together words and adds a sensory component using audio and video elements. **So viewing films and video becomes the third dimension of reading and making films and video becomes the third dimension of writing.** The classic essay transforms into a documentary film and the short story or creative writing project becomes a narrative/silent/experimental film.

This dimension is how our students are communicating today. They are doing it at home, but not in the classroom. This lack of interactivity is a huge missed opportunity and we must not only bring this third dimension into the classroom, but cultivate it to create a more literate population.

The next billion users of smartphones may not be traditionally literate, but you can bet that they will be third-dimensionally literate, communicating via video and audio much more frequently than we could ever imagine. Fluency in these mediums is no longer a “nice to have” skill for the future but a “must have.” Businesses are looking for employees who are not only tech and computer savvy, but also for those who can communicate with customers in this

multimedia world. Studies have shown² that when given the option between a written article or a video on the same subject, people will gravitate towards the video—another reason to become more literate in this space.



Medium Shot
(Sam looks up article online)



Close Up Shot
(Website offers written article and video)



Close Up Shot (Sam clicks on the video)



Close Up Shot (Sam is happy)



Medium Shot (Sam tells Jesse about what they just learned)

As educators, parents, and interested parties, it is now time for us to take on this new dimension of literacy and implement it effectively and responsibly in the classroom. Not only do we need to become skilled at teaching it, but teaching with it. This book will show you how to do it!

² For example, see Liraz Margalit's article "Did Video Kill Text Content Marketing?", *Entrepreneur*, April 2016. www.entrepreneur.com/article/245003

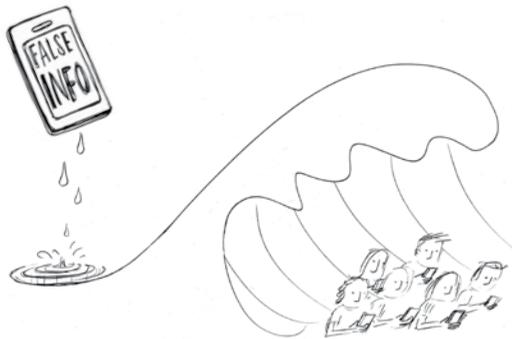
THE STAKES ARE GETTING HIGHER

Across the country, more and more schools are starting to implement video into the classroom as a tool for learning, especially in schools that are implementing the flipped classroom, blended learning, and other experiential learning environments. Yet even in these classrooms, where students are interacting in three dimensions, they are still largely being taught literacy in two dimensions.

Think about the audience *reach* of an essay or creative writing assignment that a student completes. Typically, only the student's teacher and family would ever see it. Now, think of the potential audience *reach* for a video or piece of media that same student creates. That audience includes not just the student's class, but the whole school community—even the world (if the video goes viral). This medium can have enormous positive impact, and also has the potential to do a lot of harm. Treating this medium as a new level of literacy and creating a framework around how to interact with it at a young age is now essential. For example, we ask students to cite their work when they write a paper; we should be training them to do so when they make audio and video content.

When a student has made a mistake in an essay or there is misinformation in a writing assignment, the consequences are local. The teacher may simply put a red mark on the document and maybe deduct a few points. However, misinformation or inaccuracies in a documentary, Public Service Announcement (PSA), or narrative film that a student creates can ripple throughout the class, community, or whoever watches the film and trusts the creator to provide truthful content.

When video and media are integrated only as receptive tools and without giving students the chance to produce their own videos,



this deprives the students of the ability to communicate effectively, powerfully, and ethically in this new world. Video production tools are no longer just for aspiring directors and producers. These are skills necessary in virtually every industry, across every sector of our economy.

While film and TV have been in the classroom for decades, the use has been one-way—as demonstrations or as substitutes for lectures. It is now possible and timely to use audio/video media not just as a means for creative artistic expression in art class, but also as a way of having students form and communicate their ideas in any subject in a way that goes beyond what is possible with reading, writing, or passively watching. On top of that, it offers a new instructional method for the teacher.

The Gallup Student Poll in 2015³ surveyed students in grades 5-12 and found that 50 percent of students were either not engaged or actively disengaged in school. Meanwhile, most children get their first smartphone around age 10, and around one-third of U.S. students use tablets or other devices provided by their schools. We all know how engaged they are with those devices. While young people are using their smartphones or tablets for entertainment purposes they are not using them as educational tools. **As students learn how to create quality audio-visual media, they consume media more maturely and they hone the creative and analytical parts of their brain. This type of project-based learning helps with critical thinking as well as supporting personalized, tailored curricula for individual students.**

The technology for bringing video production into the classroom is more affordable and accessible than ever and we need to take the time and energy to integrate it.

3 www.gallupstudentpoll.com/188036/2015-gallup-student-poll-overall-report.aspx



“Traditionally, producing, writing, and creating media has been viewed as elective education rather than a part of the core curriculum. Take Two Film Academy’s approach is instead based on the assertion that: Creating video should be implemented into the traditional common core within all subjects.”

THE TAKE TWO METHOD: PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Traditionally, producing, writing, and creating media has been viewed as elective education rather than a part of the core curriculum. Take Two Film Academy’s approach is instead based on the assertion that: Creating video should be implemented into the traditional common core within all subjects. The process we’ve developed to do so is a straightforward method that any dedicated teacher can use no matter what their level of experience or comfort with the technology.

Since our founding in 2009, Take Two has given more than 5,000 students a hands-on learning experience in a way that speaks to them and their interests, while introducing project-based learning and team-building at a very early age.

Here’s what we’ve found in working with these students:

- Students feel engaged and excited when they work with video. Their enthusiasm increases, and their minds are more open to accepting and retaining new information. Assignments become fun.
- Students’ desire to tell compelling stories and share information rises.
- Engaged students retain more of what they learn and retention levels increase after a student has produced a film or video.
- Editing, filming, and hands-on experiences give kinesthetic learners the chance to gain knowledge by seeing and interacting with a topic.
- Working with video gives auditory learners a chance to hear the content enough times that they can become experts in the unit they are studying.

- Watching and rewatching a film or project gives visual learners a chance to see what they are learning multiple times so they retain more information.
- Producing a video reinforces students' respect for one another and their work, the school equipment they are excited about using, and the intellectual property of others.
- Students learn to distinguish between credible and non-credible sources.
- Students increase their ability to think analytically.

Imagine a video-focused classroom where students are shown an interview from an “expert” who claims there’s no proof that human activity is leading to more species of animals becoming extinct. Students analyze this expert’s main points, and conduct research to discover alternative points of view. Perhaps they even conduct some primary interviews themselves! They film their rebuttal, using their filmmaking skills to convey a thoughtful, well-reasoned argument in a persuasive and appealing style, with visuals and archival footage that



bolster their argument. In the 20th century such an activity would have taken the form of a five-paragraph essay. In the 21st century, it can be accomplished with immersive filmmaking. With this video, education doesn’t have to stop when the project is complete. There are multiple platforms where students can share their learning and continue their engagement.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS BOOK

The techniques in this book can sound formidable, but when implemented, you’ll find them to be straightforward and fun, not only for your students but for you as well. This book will provide you with a toolkit to implement the Take Two Method in your classroom. You will learn:

- How to choose which unit of study will be appropriate for the kind of project you want to conduct and how to decide between making a documentary or narrative style film with your students.
- How to have conversations and analyze existing media within that subject, then prepare students to create their own films.
- How to have students implement their own findings into a video version of the traditional five-paragraph essay or creative writing assignment by teaching pre-production, production, and post-production for both narrative and documentary film.
- How to safeguard against unreliable research and cyber-bullying.
- How to source royalty-free music and other intellectual property without infringement.
- And lastly, how students can continue their educational journey by sharing their video to create an impact with a call to action.

SPEAKING OF CALL TO ACTION

As a society we need to start to look for more opportunities to integrate film and video into the core curriculum of schools. Why? Because media literacy has become essential to modern life.

Students love the power of images and love seeing themselves on film (for the most part). This is *their* literacy. They want to share their ideas with the world. When we teach media literacy, we're giving them the power to shape their own futures while promoting engaged learning. You only need to look to the growing popularity of YouTube tutorials and video lectures to see just how effective video can be as a learning tool. As more and more schools adopt flipped classrooms, blended learning, or other project-based learning experiences for their students, there will be many more opportunities to integrate media literacy into curricula.





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This book is for educators, film lovers, and anyone who sees how important media literacy is in our current culture. Our goal is to help teachers integrate the Third Dimension of Literacy into their existing curricula so that students are better able to analyze what they watch, and to responsibly create audio-visual media.

What is the Third Dimension of Literacy? Consider the first dimension of literacy a *word*, and the second dimension of literacy the *stringing together of words* to form a complete thought. The third dimension of literacy is the *visualization of that complete thought by adding audio and video*. **So viewing audio-visual media becomes the third dimension of reading and making audio-visual media becomes the third dimension of writing.** From an educational standpoint the classic essay transforms into a documentary film and the short story or creative writing project becomes a narrative, silent or experimental film.

Take Two Film Academy has taught thousands of students how to responsibly create and consume audio-visual media. Drawing on years of teaching experience, this book is a practical how-to guide for educators interested in bringing the Third Dimension of Literacy into the modern classroom.

“Megan Kiefer has written a book that challenges our conventional notion of literacy itself, pushing film and media literacy beyond the supplemental edges of its current classroom status to the forefront of teaching and learning. This is a PBL must read for educators committed to shifting mindset around media from consumption to creativity, purpose, and activism.”

– TIFFANY WYCOFF, Author of *Blended Learning in Action*

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