



**F** for Field Trip  
The **ABC**'s of Filmmaking

BY EVA ZIEMSEN

**A** IS FOR *Animation*

**B** IS FOR *Bulletin Board*

**C** IS FOR *Community* \* **D** IS FOR *Direction*

**E** IS FOR *Experience* \* **F** IS FOR *Film*

**G** IS FOR *Guest Speaker* \* **H** IS FOR *Human Interaction*

**I** IS FOR *Inspiration* \* **J** IS FOR *Jokes*

**K** IS FOR *Knowledge* \* **L** IS FOR *Lift Out Loud*

**M** IS FOR *Mentoring* \* **N** IS FOR *Narrative*

**O** IS FOR *Out of the Box* \* **P** IS FOR *Passion*

**Q** IS FOR *Questions* \* **R** IS FOR *Real World*

**S** IS FOR *Special Events* \* **T** IS FOR *Trim Bin*

**U** IS FOR *Unity* \* **V** IS FOR *Volunteering*

**W** IS FOR *Workshops*

**X** IS FOR *eXhaustion* \* **Y** IS FOR *Yawns*

**Z** IS FOR *Zzzzzs*

The lesson of the day begins with directions: get off at King St. or St. Andrew Station, take the westbound streetcar to Atlantic Ave. and then cross south of King and walk towards Liberty, turn left and you will hit Hanna Ave. Wait there for your teacher so that we can all enter LIFT, the first stop of our field trip together.

Field trips are a tool in teaching that I have incorporated into my curriculum for several years now, after seeing the tremendous impact it has on my students. The very nature of a field trip is geared to experience and the real world, and therefore perfectly in line with my goal as an educator: to deliver practical and innovative education.

Field trips function on multiple levels: one, they provide students with an experience and applied study of the subject of film and the industry; two, they are an opportunity to bond with my students, and share with them, my own community; three, they train students to continue their education beyond their initial schooling. It is a practical example of the importance of actually getting out in the world, going somewhere to learn something new and to meet and network with other filmmakers.

The field trips I have organized included visits to LIFT, the Director's Guild of Canada (DGC), the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), the Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre (CFMDC), attending a panel discussion at the Worldwide Short Film Festival (WWSFF), The Film Reference Library, various production and distribution companies' offices, Deluxe for a live-looping session and watching matinee screenings of Canadian films at local movie theatres.

The most recent field trip I organized was with my current students from the Advanced Filmmaking Program at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. While some students will pursue careers in other parts of Canada or abroad, many will migrate to Toronto upon graduation and therefore this trip was geared

as an introduction to the independent film scene.

#### INT. CHARTER BUS MORNING

The bus ride provides the first chance for our group to bond in a different way than we would in the classroom. Since our trip occurs well into the semester the students were already friends from having worked together. I tell students to document the trip and thus a camera is rolling throughout. Despite their tired eyes at the 7:00 AM pick up time on the drizzly grey November morning, there's excitement in the air on our ride to Toronto.

#### INT. NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA WORKSHOP ROOM—DAY

Our first stop is the NFB, located at 150 John Street, where we participate in a claymation workshop entitled "Animate the Issues." The friendly and helpful NFB workshop contact is Merrill Matthews, who is also our instructor for the day.

"Animate the Issues" teaches students what a Public Service Announcement (PSA) is by providing video clip examples, facilitating a discussion on what constitutes an effective message, and through a practical exercises of creating five-second long claymation PSA videos. The NFB provides all supplies, including clay and their animation set up: a video camera and a "Lunch Box" (which enables frame by frame photography onto a hard drive).

In groups, my students develop ideas, draw a short storyboard, consult with Merrill before going ahead with their "model creation" and then, they begin to play with clay!

This exercise is by far one of the most effective learning experiences I have encountered in teaching film thus far. On past trips, I have received comments such as "I only want to animate from now on" or "This is the most fun I've had making a film ever." I attribute these

reactions to the fact that adult students like to be given the chance to play.

While the exercise is similar to many film projects, its childlike nature causes any anxieties of learning to disappear. It is amazing to witness how creativity starts to pour out of students when they are encouraged to literally play and experiment. Our semester entailed much production planning and development, as this is oft the lacking ingredient amongst student films. Therefore, the idea of making a film in less than two hours, from beginning to end, is a refreshing and complementary way of working. Additionally, we receive one output tape of our completed claymation PSA's to take home.

#### INT. NFB MEDIATEQUE—DAY

After the workshop we conveniently head downstairs at the NFB, to the Mediateque. Like a film oasis, the Mediateque consists of pod-like viewing stations, each of which connect to over 10,000 NFB production titles in all genres, including documentary, animation, narrative and experimental. It is all one could ask for. At a minimal cost of \$2, anyone can come into the Mediateque and watch Canadian films of high caliber. I encourage the students to freely watch what they desire, with the exception of two mandatory films: *Begone Dull Care* by Norman McLaren and *Ryan* by Chris Landreth. My intention is to ask questions relating to these films on the final exam.

#### EXT. STREET QUEEN AND JOHN—DAY

Our lunch hour in the heart of Queen and John provided another opportunity to bond with students on a more human level, out of the classroom.

#### INT. LIFT—DAY

Renata Mohamed, the membership coordinator, welcomes us at a large table with the latest issue of *FilmPrint* and

*"I've always wanted to make a claymation short  
and now I had a chance to do it.  
I really enjoy hands-on projects like this.  
I've always walked by the NFB  
and had no clue about what they do or offer.  
So it was wonderful to see first hand what they have.  
I think more instructors should incorporate field trips in their courses.  
It allows students the opportunity to see  
that there is a whole world of possibility available at their fingertips."*

— Kevin Clark, student and field tripper



Photos by Eva Zimeson

membership brochures. She speaks to us extensively about LIFT's services, resources, community and membership, followed by a tour of the facilities. Often when students first see the equipment, they have no idea what it is and it appears ancient to them. I try to stop them from perceiving LIFT as a museum, by giving examples of films that have recently been made with the gear. Part of the foreign experience is due to the fact that many film students do not shoot films on celluloid anymore. I point to a trim bin and ask, "Who knows what this is?" No one knows. I start to explain, and get blank stares in return. Then I say, "You know in Final Cut Pro, there are bins where you can organize your files..." Eyes light up. "Well that is where this term comes from." I explain, "Back in the day" people had to literally hang clips and pull them if they needed them. Some people continue to edit this way,

including some LIFT members. I remind them that the world has changed so much with recent technology and that we now don't think twice about trying out an edit, as we can just hit Apple-Z (undo), but before, it took a good few minutes to make the change. This is when I start to feel very old.

Roberto [Ariganello's, former executive director, who passed away last year] passion on these tours was so heartfelt, that I believe he could convert George Lucas to working exclusively on celluloid on the Oxberry camera. He used to say, "If you want your work to stand out, to really look different, you should shoot on film and use some of the techniques available at LIFT, as it cannot be done with video." I would always jump in and tie it in to my teaching mantra, "Form equals Content". I'd say that there might be a time when you make a film where working on actual celluloid will perfectly

serve your message and artistic goals, and that is when you will remember LIFT. You may also decide to begin experimenting with the medium and discover the right content for the form.

Roberto and I used to tag-team the tour. He knew every piece of equipment like it was one of his children. I will never be able to do this, but I try to inject what he "used to say" where possible.

By now you would think we were exhausted, but were not yet done for the day. With only one day in Toronto and a rented bus, I squeeze as much as possible into this opportunity.

INT.—CFMDC—DAY

Again, conveniently, we headed downstairs to the Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre (CFMDC), where Larissa Fan, the Educational Development and Outreach Coordinator, kindly pro-

*"We got to see various equipment, like cameras which were very old, but still give good results and different kinds of editing equipment. I liked LIFT because it is the best place to learn, get experience and meet people from the film industry. Also there are so many flyers on the notice board... We had the opportunity to see the sound room with all the sound recording equipment."*

— Anita Pillai, student and field tripper



grammed a screening of short films from the collection for us. Larissa informs the students of the CFMDC's role in the independent film community, locally and internationally, letting them know how they could possibly approach the CFMDC with completed works in the future.

By the end of the screening, I sense the low blood sugar amongst my students, but from the comments on the bus, I know they valued every last minute of the screening.

We board the bus and our driver is ready to take on rush hour traffic all the way back to London. As soon as we sit down, I hear a few, "Thank yous" along with exhausted smiles. That's my cue that the trip was a success. There's no better feeling as an educator than when students really value what you laid out for them. I know they will not forget this experience too soon, unlike for example,

PowerPoint lectures on budgeting and financing. Nothing sticks like a truly visceral, participatory, *real* field trip.

One of my students has prepared a huge container full of fruit, cheese, nuts, and other healthy items, which she passes around the bus. Some students sleep, some talk amongst themselves and to me.

EXT. PARKING LOT—NIGHT

We arrive back in London safely. Tired and fulfilled, everyone scatters into the night parking lot.

I believe field trips are an essential complementary ingredient of film education, as much as all other components of a rich and applied curriculum. Field trips are well worth the substantial extra time, effort and energy they require to plan and conduct.

As one student wrote on her exam, "I think going on field trips should be mandatory at least once for every course because some people grasp things through actually going out and doing it or actually seeing it, rather than just talking about it in a classroom." Another wrote, "Field trips allow the student the opportunity to see that there is a whole world of possibility available at their finger tips."

FADE OUT.