

# Metaphor & Juxtaposition in Film

Presentation by  
M. Schoenhals

Based on excerpts from Developing Digital Short Films by Sherri Sheridan

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# Using Metaphors & Symbols to Tell Stories

Symbolic images help us to understand abstract concepts that cannot always be translated into words.

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# Definitions

- 1. Metaphor = Action/Sound**  
Visual or auditory representation of a separate action, experience, or idea. A character blows out (action) a candle in a bedroom to show death of a loved one.
- 2. Symbol = Object/Sound**  
Visual or auditory representation of another object. The candle (object) is in the shape of a ballerina to show grace and beauty.
- 3. Motifs = Collections**  
Collections of related metaphors or symbols used to represent a related concept. Lights or flames going on and off to show life or death states throughout a film.
- 4. Leit Motifs = Repetition**  
The repetition of identical metaphors or symbols to represent a greater concept. The color of the candle is gold (valuable color), along with other gold symbolic objects and activities in each scene to show the overall concept of what is valuable in a character's life.

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## Where to Place Metaphors and Symbols in your Story

Metaphors and symbols can be used to develop plot, theme, and character in deeper ways visually. As a filmmaker, you need to create a unique metaphorical language in your story.

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## Ideas for placing Metaphor and Symbols in your films:

### 1. Objects/props

Household items, flags, T-shirts, games, art in room, statues, furniture style, shape of windows, magazines, pictures, weapons, wall hangings, books, instruments, pets, cars, people, houses.

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### 2. Music/Sounds

Background sounds, songs, atmospheric music bed, music in scenes, street noises, weather sounds, sirens, people crying/laughing/screaming in the next room, weird unexplainable sounds, heaters, equipment, natural sounds, animals, event sounds.

### 3. Color

The color of everything in the frame may mean something. Carefully choose colors for everything in each scene, including for costumes, sets, lights, cars, hair color, makeup, props, sky, fur and weather.

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#### 4. Words

Heard in dialogue or appearing on sets or otherwise onscreen (pop-up bubbles to indicate thought, subtitles, and so on). Posters in the background, titles, onscreen text with background info, poems, fables, stories inside stories, signs, subtitles for slang, graffiti, product names on packages, license plates, bumper stickers, billboards, song lyrics, street names, character names, location, event lingo, speeches, vocabulary, dialect.

#### 5. Sets

Location as character. What does the setting say about the mood of each scene? A conversation in a junkyard has a different context than one at the top of the Eiffel Tower.

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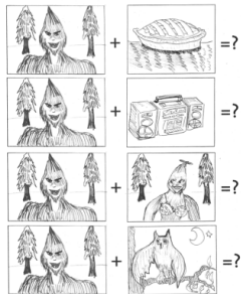
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### Juxtaposition

By strategically placing two visual ideas next to each other, you can create a separate third idea in the viewer's mind.



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### Juxtaposition New-Thought Math

1 idea + 1 idea = 3<sup>rd</sup> separate idea generated inside the mind of the viewer, an idea that connects the previous two ideas.

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## Juxtaposition Between Symbolic Shots

Example at right:  
First bone tool created (birth & civilization) + futuristic spaceship floating in space in the same shape as bone (future civilization) = History of civilization.



2001: A Space Odyssey

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## Juxtaposition Between Two Scenes

Scenes are a series of shots put together to describe an event. Two events placed next to each other produce a third idea. Audiences try to connect the dots between the two scenes to make the events somehow fit together in their heads, while trying to figure out what will happen next in the story.



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## Juxtaposition Between Two Stories To Show Theme

Some films jump around through time and tell two different stories simultaneously. These parallel stories usually show the same theme.



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## Juxtaposition Between Voice & Image

Dialogue & narration juxtaposed with different images can convey large amounts of information, in a way that gives the audience space to decide for themselves what is going on in your film.



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## Juxtaposing Between Music & Image

Music that contrasts with what the characters are experiencing can create a powerful juxtaposition.



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## Other Ways to Juxtapose:

- Juxtaposition between Two Shots
- Disjointed Editing Styles
- Eliminating Exposition in Favour of Juxtaposition
- Editing Action Sequences
- Juxtaposing to Create Humor

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## Assignment

Using your top 10 movie list, find 3 different examples of Juxtaposition in them. Outline in a paragraph how the filmmaker's successfully created a third meaning by taking two unlike elements and combining them. Sum up the paragraph with a Juxtaposition formula (eg: Grinning Guy + Bikini Woman = Lust).

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