
Sing Street

Film Study
2nd Year English

Film Studies Checklist

- ✓ Characters
- ~~✓ Setting~~
- ~~✓ Plot~~
- ~~✓ Key Moments~~
- ✓ Theme
- ✓ Cinematography
- ✓ Personal response




Setting

The film is set in Dublin in the 1980s. Socially, it is a difficult time with lots of unemployment due to a harsh recession. This goes hand in hand with a lot of new pop music being released in the charts. The plot of the film switches between the difficult reality of the recession in Dublin and the happy escape that music provides.

(Plot) Opening

- The opening of the film introduces us to the main character of Conor Lawlor.
- He is a fifteen year old boy who lives with his brother and parents.
- Very quickly audiences realise that Conor's home is not a happy place to be.
- Because of the recession, Conor's dad has been fired from his job while his mother has had her job reduced. Conor's older brother has also dropped out of college.

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- To go along with this, Conor's parents are also unhappy in their marriage.
 - The family have very little money and Conor is forced to go to a new school, Synge Street CBS in the inner city of Dublin.
 - This school is very different from what Conor has been used to and immediately he feels like an outsider, with all of the other boys in the school looking at Conor.

Key Moment 1 - Conor has to move school

Key Moment 1 - Conor Has To Move Schools

1. Watch key moment 1 (00:00 - 11:50)
2. Fill out your worksheet on key moment 1



Key Moment 1

- 1980's Ireland - harsh recession
- Conor's parents struggling financially
- Family meeting: Conor has to leave his fee paying private school and move to an inner-city Dublin public school, run by the strict Brother Baxter of the CBS

Key Moment 1

- Conor is harshly treated by Brother Baxter who has no flexibility as far as the school rules are concerned - 'brown shoes'
- Conor is immediately picked upon by bully Barry
- Conor meets Darren, a kindred spirit in the world of being a victim to bullying

Part 1 - Cinematic Effect (01:00 - 04:58)

Black screen, guitar strumming. First shot is **close up** of **protagonist**, Conor, with his guitar. **Camera zooms out**, we see that he is sitting on his bed in his room. We see a poster on the wall behind him, exam papers lying beside him on the bed. We hear muffled voices of adults having an argument. The protagonist slams his bedroom door shut. The camera zooms in on the protagonist as he begins to use the insults he hears as lyrics for an imaginary song.

Cut to black screen with the words 'Dublin 1984' written on it and a **voiceover** of a news anchor explaining the emigration of young Irish people for a better life in London. Ireland is in the midst of a deep recession. Camera zooms out to reveal a television screen and a half empty glass of wine on top of the TV set. **Panning** then and our protagonist is sitting at the kitchen table. We see empty dinner plates, a bottle of wine, a bottle of spirits, and everyone is wearing extra clothes.

Part 1 - Cinematic Effect (01:00 - 04:58)

Conor's older brother, Brendan, arrives and is the first to speak; 'This meeting has been called to order'. Conor's father is sitting at the head of the table, smoking. Close up of Dad as he explains Conor's new school arrangements - the family are in extreme financial distress and can no longer afford to send Conor to a private school. He will start in the Christian Brothers, a local public school, founded on the motto, Act Manly. Everyone leaves, Conor is alone at the table, looking miserable.

Part 1 - Cinematic Effect (01:00 - 04:58)

Cut to school crest on the side of a building; 'Singe Street'; it's Conor's first day at his new school, **dolly shot** follows Conor as he makes his way in. There's rock and roll music, and the camera captures the busyness of the environment from Conor's point of view. There's a lot of unruly activity including school yard fighting and **the fast paced music adds to the chaotic atmosphere** with the lyrics 'stay clean'. It's hectic and crowded. There is a **low angle shot** of Brother Baxter overseeing all that is going on.

Part 1 - Cinematic Effect (01:00 - 04:58)

Cut to a classroom, Conor is sitting at the top of the class, he obviously stands out as the only student not misbehaving. We see everything from Conor's point of view - nobody is paying attention to the teacher who has his back to the class - students are smoking etc. Brother Baxter enters the classroom and instantly there is order as the students stand to greet him.

Cut to **film title** on screen: 'Sing Street' in white letters on a black background. All of this gives us vivid impressions of our protagonist in the opening scene of the film.

What does the opening shot tell us?



What does the first shot of the school convey?



What is communicated here?



Editors
Andrew Marcus
Julian Ulrichs

Key Moment 2 - Conor meets Raphina

Key Moment 2 - Conor meets Raphina

1. Watch key moment 1 (11:50 - 20:07)
2. Fill out your worksheet on key moment 1



Key Moment 2

- Conor spots a pretty girl across the street introduces himself.
- Conor lies to Raphina about being in a band to impress her.
- Raphina asks Conor to sing a song so he sings "Take On Me" by a-Ha.
- Raphina then agrees to feature in the video.

Key Moment 2

- Darren introduces Conor to Eamon whose father is in a rehabilitation centre. Eamon has every musical instrument a band needs as his father is in a covers band. Eamon can also play most of them. The dream of starting a band is becoming a reality.
- Darren also brings Conor to Ngig's house to ask him to join their band. Darren's racist comment shocks Conor, and it functions to show the poor education of many of the boys who attend Synge Street CBS.
- Two other boys, Larry and Gary, see a flyer in school that advertises vacancies in the band and the band is complete. The boys decide on "Sing Street" as a pun on the name of their school.

- Conor quickly comes to the attention of headmaster Br. Baxter, with his incorrect school uniform (brown shoes instead of black). He then encounters the school bully, Barry, during a disturbing homophobic and violent scene where Conor stands up for himself.
- At home we see the positive relationship Conor has with older brother Brendan through their shared love of music. We learn more about life at home for Conor as his parents openly drink alcohol and there isn't enough money to put the heating on.
- Tension grows in school over Conor's shoes and we see close up shots of him wearing just his socks as he has been forced to leave his shoes with the headmaster while he is in school, song 'I Fought the Law' by punk rock group The Clash plays in the background. There is another disturbing encounter with Barry then Conor meets Darren and then, Raphina.
- To get Raphina's phone number Conor pretends he's in a band. This scene is shot using low angles of her (powerful) and high angles of Conor (vulnerable). The Dolly Shot of Conor returning to Darren captures his excitement before he states, 'we need to form a band'.
- Darren and Conor call to Eamonn's house and recruit him with Conor exclaiming, 'I'm a futurist...no nostalgia, no looking backwards, just forward.'. Eamonn is clearly very talented and we see his difficult home life situation – his father is a violent alcoholic who is in rehab.

- The next member to be recruited is Nigig and we see elements of racism here as Darren states 'he'll be able to play something, he's black!'. Ariel shots of the boys going to Nigig's house show the setting as a run down block of flats in inner city Dublin.
- The remaining members, bassist Larry and drummer Garry, are recruited when they respond to a poster in school seeking musicians for a 'Futurist band'. They all meet in Eamonn's backyard shed and the band 'Sing Street' is formed. Slow motion camera shot used to show each member exiting the shed suggests power and the start of good things for these boys.
- At their first practice session they play a cover song. However, advice from Brendan inspires Conor to start writing his own songs. The band compose their first song that will be used for a music video featuring Raphina, 'Riddle of the Model'. They set up to shoot the video in a back alley covered with graffiti. We see that the boys

have developed a relationship and are coming together as a team. Raphina arrives to shoot the video.



What does this pair of shots tell us? (Raphina)



Reverse shot of Conor



Key Moment 3 - 'Drive It Like You Stole It' Rehearsal Scene

Key Moment 3 - 'Drive It Like You Stole It' Rehearsal Scene

- ❖ The band is practising for their performance for the school dance.
- ❖ Conor is waiting for Raphina to show but she doesn't show in the end.
- ❖ As Conor is performing in the gym he has a dream of performing in the gym and everyone shows up including Raphina, Brendan, Brother Baxter and Robert and Penny.
- ❖ The key moment ends with Conor's sad realisation that it was all a dream and he looks once more at the door that Raphina didn't walk through.

Key Moment 3 - 'Drive It Like You Stole It' Rehearsal Scene

- ❖ Conor goes to the house where Raphina lives.
- ❖ He is told Raphina has gone to London and Conor is crestfallen (disappointed).
- ❖ Raphina, as it turns out, hasn't left. Her boyfriend lied to her and they had an argument and she has a bruise on her face.
- ❖ Raphina makes a comment about hanging out with a fifteen year old boy which offends Conor and he leaves

This is the band's most popular song. Conor has imagined the music video in his head and it's inspired by the film "Back to the Future." He organises background dancers and is going to shoot the video in the school hall. One of his teachers is there to supervise. He invited Raphina to be in the video but she doesn't turn up. This worries him and he's bitterly disappointed that she doesn't come to shoot the video. He tries to teach the other young people how to do "fifties dancing" but begins to realise that they are not co-ordinated and wonders if this will look as good as he wants.



We then cut to a dream-like sequence where Conor tries to imagine what this video would ideally look like. This tells us a lot about Conor's character and what he really wants. The hall is decorated with bright colours and everyone is wearing old-fashioned, 1950s style clothing. The band is wearing smart suits and they are performing with the audience cheering and dancing along. It feels very Americanised and joyful. Raphina enters the dance, looking glamorous. It is clear from the way that she looks at Conor that she is impressed.

Brother Baxter also enters the dance by completely backflips. He is jovial and ready to socialise. It is completely different from the Brother Baxter that we have met earlier on in the film. As the song continues, Raphina's boyfriend begins to hassle her. We see Brendan arrive on motorbike to the dance, looking like James Dean in "Rebel Without a Cause." He looks healthy, happy and has cut his hair. He sticks up for Raphina and himself and Raphina's boyfriend engage in a knife battle, similar to something out of "West Side Story." The fight gets resolved peacefully without any bloodshed.

Conor's parents walk into the dance, hand in hand. They are smiling and happy, clearly in love with each other. This is in sharp contrast to their previous fighting and arguing throughout the film.

Everyone in the hall gets together for a choreographed dance sequence and it's clear that Sing Street are playing to an audience that loves them.

Conor then begins to snap out of his daydream and we realise that all that has happened on screen for the past few moments has been simply just a fantasy. It tells us that Conor wants Raphina to love him, for Brother Baxter to stop giving him a hard time, for Brendan to succeed and do well and for his parents to reconcile.

Key Moment 4 - The School Dance

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- ❖ Despite a few jeers at the start, the crowd warms quickly to “Sing Street”
- ❖ Conor risks their growing popularity by singing a slow song which empties the floor but he needs to do this for himself, and Eamon understands - Find You
- ❖ Conor gets revenge on Brother Baxter - Brown Shoes
- ❖ Raphina shows up, reminiscent of Conor’s dream earlier on and we begin to feel a fairy-tale ending on the horizon
- ❖ Conor and Raphina leave the school hall happily, running with smiles on their faces.

During the dance, the band has played well. They've gotten the crowd on their side and despite being mocked initially, the audience has reacted well. They decide to play a slow song, a ballad, in the middle of their set which causes a lot of the audience to clear out, however they return for the final song.

Conor informs other members of the band to give out masks with Brother Baxter's face on it. They sing the song "Brown Shoes" despite Brother Baxter's warnings that they will be expelled if they say anything negative. While playing, everyone wears these masks and eventually Brother Baxter leaves in a furious rage. Conor knows that he will probably be expelled from school for doing this, but he doesn't care.

Raphina watches this final dance happen and she looks up at Conor admiringly. Herself and Conor run out of the school hall, hand in hand when the final song is played.



Key Moment 5 - Conor and Raphina Leave for London

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- ❖ Brendan agrees to drive his brother and Raphina to the boat in Dalkey.
- ❖ In a touching scene, Conor quietly steals into his parents' bedroom and whispers to his mother who is fast asleep that he loves her.

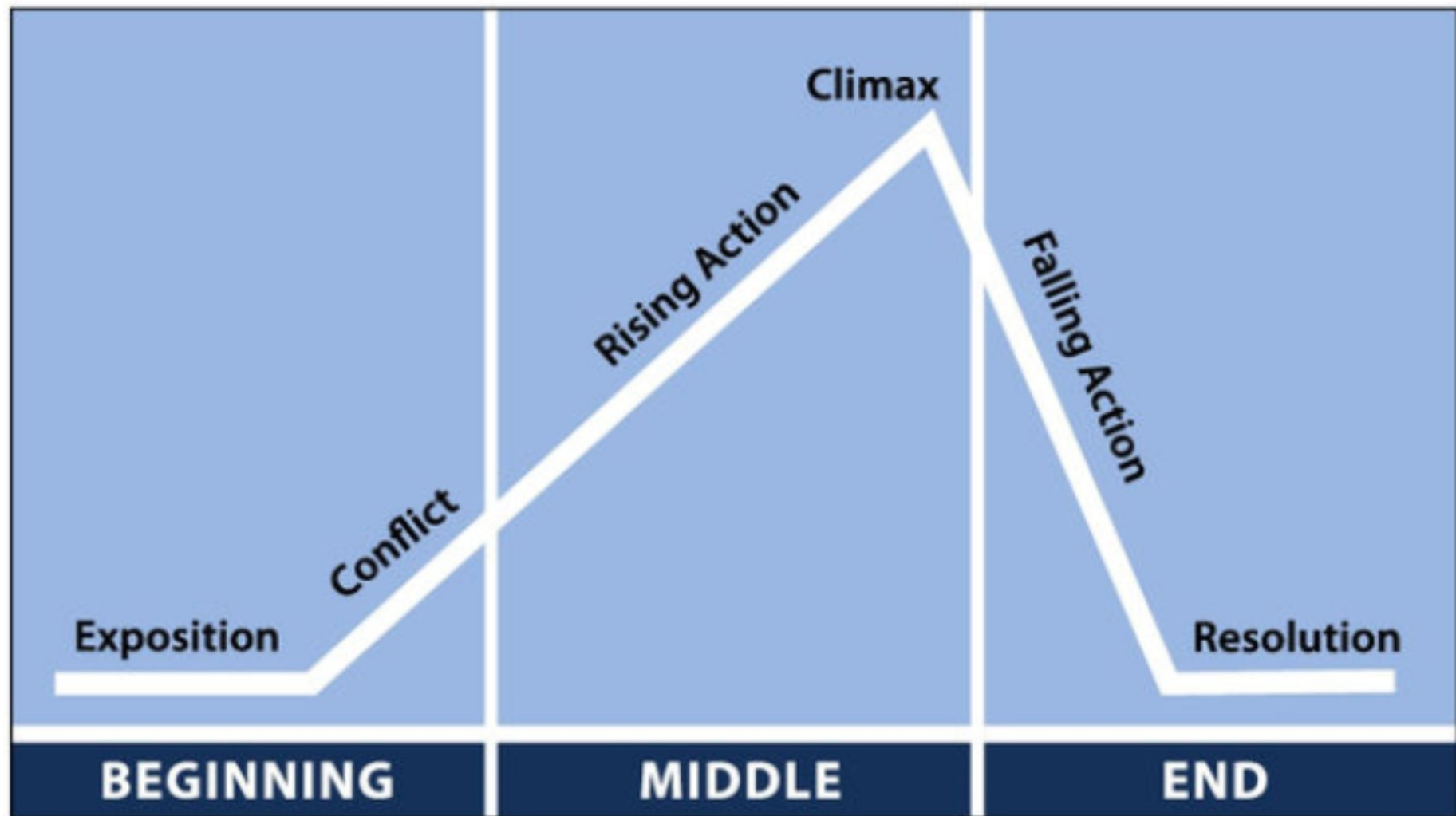
Key Moment 5 - Conor and Raphina Leave for London

Conor and Raphina decide to go to England to try and make it as a musician and a model respectively.

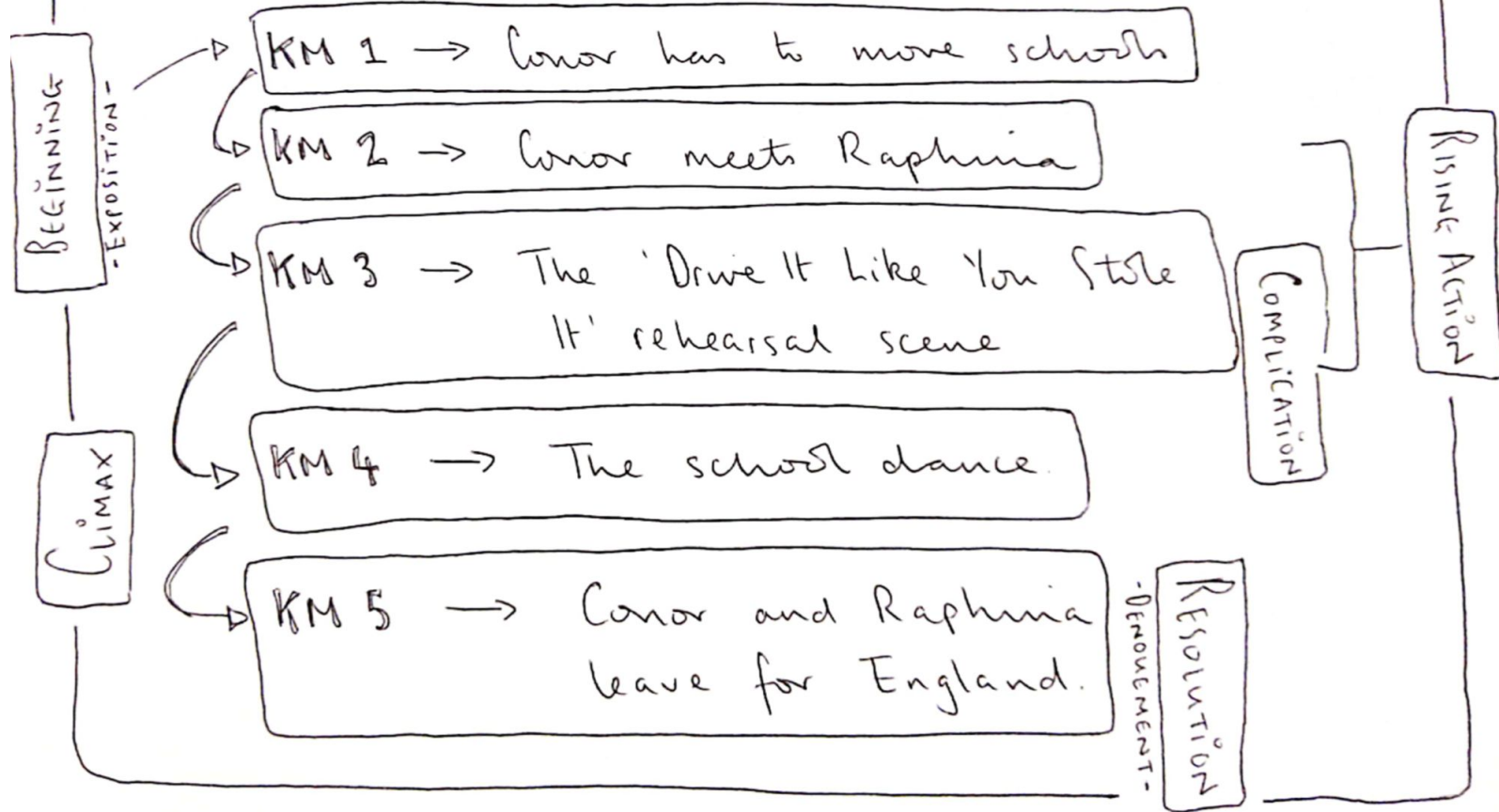
- Brendan supports them and brings them to the harbour
- Brendan gives Conor some lyrics he wrote and asks him to maybe put them in a song
- Despite jealous that his little brother is pursuing a dream Brendan once had, he is fully supportive of Conor, seen particularly after Conor leaves and Brendan jumps and whoops for joy
- Although they nearly crash into a ferry, Conor uses this to his advantage by following the ferry to Wales.
- Despite the cold and wet, the pair look happy.

The ending presents audiences once again with the main themes of the film; young love and escapism. Conor has performed at the end of year disco with his band and is celebrating its success. This is happening at the same time that his life at home continues to be difficult for him. The concert and his music continues to offer him an escape from his sad reality. Raphena comes to his concert and it is clear to audiences that she has fallen in love with Conor.

The young couple decide that there is nothing left for them in Ireland. They are going to run away together to London and try and forge a career as a model and a musician. This idea presents audiences with a very romantic, almost fairy-tale version of young love. The music used in the soundtrack at this point in the film is upbeat and exciting to match the action of the characters on screen. Conor returns home to collect his stuff and say one final goodbye to his mum, as he gets set to leave his old life behind. Conor's older brother, Brendan gives them a lift to the harbour. This part of the film is emotional, as Conor must say goodbye to his brother, whom he loves dearly. The closing scene of the movie is symbolic of Brendan's comment of being a 'jet stream' – Conor and Raphena have decided to follow their dream, they are unsure what their future holds, but are happy to be together, against all odds.



Key Events in "Sing Street" by John Carney.



Characters

- Conor - called 'Cosmo' by Raphina; protagonist
- Raphina - love interest
- Conor's mum and dad - Penny and Robert
- Conor's brother and sister - Brendan and Ann
- Eamon - guitarist
- Brother Baxter - school principal and antagonist

Characters

- Darren - manager/cameraman
- Ngig - keyboard
- Larry - drummer
- Garry - bassist
- Barry - bully turned roadie

Key Moment 1 - Camera Angles

Part 1 - Cinematic Effect (01:00 - 04:58)

Black screen, guitar strumming. First shot is **close up of protagonist, Conor, with his guitar. Camera zooms out**, we see that he is sitting on his bed in his room. We see a poster on the wall behind him, exam papers lying beside him on the bed. We hear muffled voices of adults having an argument. The protagonist slams his bedroom door shut. **The camera zooms in on the protagonist as he begins to use the insults he hears as lyrics for an imaginary song.**

Cut to black screen with the words 'Dublin 1984' written on it and a **voiceover** of a news anchor explaining the emigration of young Irish people for a better life in London. Ireland is in the midst of a deep recession. **Camera zooms out to reveal a television screen and a half empty glass of wine on top of the TV set. Panning then** and our protagonist is sitting at the kitchen table. We see empty dinner plates, a bottle of wine, a bottle of spirits, and everyone is wearing extra clothes.

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Cut to school crest on the side of a building; 'Singe Street'; it's Conor's first day at his new school, **dolly shot** follows Conor as he makes his way into the school. The moving shot shows the crowd of students around him, showing the viewer that he is outnumbered. There's rock and roll music, and the camera captures the business of the environment from Conors point of view. There's a lot of unruly activity including school yard fighting and **the fast paced music adds to the chaotic atmosphere** with the lyrics 'stay clean'. It's hectic and crowded. **There is a low angle shot** of Brother Baxter overseeing all that is going on. It shows the viewer that he is in a position of power and authority.

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Cut to a classroom, Conor is sitting at the top of the class, he obviously stands out as the only student not misbehaving. We see everything from Conor's point of view in the classroom - nobody is paying attention to the teacher who has his back to the class - students are smoking etc. Brother Baxter enters the classroom and instantly there is order as the students stand to greet him.

Cut to **film title** on screen: 'Sing Street' in white letters on a black background. All of this gives us vivid impressions of our protagonist in the opening scene of the film.

1. Close Up Shot - Conor in his room



A close up shot of Conor in his room shows him playing his guitar while sitting on his bed. The use of a close up shot introduces the audience to the protagonist. We see that he is dressed in a scarf and hat, telling us the house is cold. We later learn that Conor's family are struggling with money and don't put the heating on. This is reflective of the world of the text as there is a recession during the time the film is set.



For camera shots and angles on the next 3 slides, write 3-4 sentences for each explaining what the camera shot or angles tells us, the viewer.

It might tell us about setting, character, relationships etc.

See the previous slide for a sample

Sentence starters for your homework:

This image shows us

This is a _____ camera shot. The effect of this kind of shot is to

Task

2. Low Angle Shot - School Crest



3. Dolly Shot - Conor entering his new school



4. Low Angle Shot - Brother Baxter



Key Moment 2 - Camera Angles

Camera Angles

It is clear from the scene where Raphina is standing on the steps across from Conor's school that he likes her. The camera angle at this time pans up to Raphina, giving audiences the impression that she is important as a character and to Conor.

Over The Shoulder Shot - Conor sees Raphina



Low Angle Shot - Raphina Looks Down at Conor



High Angle Shot - Conor looks up at Raphina



Key Moment 3 - Camera Angles

Close Up of the Hall Door for 'Drive It...' Rehearsal



Key Moment 4 - Camera Angles

Wide Angle Shot and Close Up Shot of Conor at the Dance



Key Moment 5 - Camera Angles

Wide Angle Shot and Close Up Shot

