Movie trailers are art forms of their own—and yet it’s so easy to watch them flash by without fully understanding their rhythm and structure, or the media tools used to sell the movie before its theatrical release.

Have students identify the elements of a theatrical trailer

AHA! Movie trailers aren’t just slapped together. They’re totally planned out!

Grade Level: 6-9

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules

Materials: High speed internet access, LCD projector, screen

Activity: Play a trailer for your students, and ask them if they can identify what’s attracting them to it. For lack of better material, you might try this series of trailers profiled in an article in the New York Times:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/02/19/movies/awardsseason/oscar-trailers.html?_r=1
Here are some elements of trailers for students to consider, with credit to Stephen Garrett in *Film Maker Magazine* online, January 13th, 2012. Film trailers generally take their cuts from beginning to middle and end of the film. And they tend to function as small stories in three acts: introduction to characters and environment, obstacles and complications, and intensification of conflict. If they don’t tell those three-act stories, the editors may be more interested in establishing a tone or mood to match that of the film.

Sometimes the filmic elements themselves take center stage. Does the trailer rely most heavily on dialogue? Do they dwell on the lush cinematography or set design? What do the music cues tell you about the film? Does the trailer focus on actors’ performances? Or is it the genre that determines most of the creative choices of the editors? A trailer for a *Harry Potter* film will be much different from a trailer for an offbeat comedy about two characters on a road trip.

Once your students have had a chance to tease apart the elements of the trailer, ask them to rate it. Did it grab your attention and entice you to see the movie, or did it seem like a hodgepodge of outtakes that were less than exciting?

Extension: For a subsequent class, ask students to think of movie trailers they thought weren’t all that great. What do they think the editors should have done instead?

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