



Étudier la notion de pouvoir dans Douze hommes en colère

Un film de Sydney Lumet, 1957

Type d'activité : Analyse d'extrait et questionnaire de visionnage

Durée : 2 h

Extrait étudié : Du début du film à 00:11:26

Premier film de son réalisateur, promis à une grande carrière par la suite, le *12 hommes en colère* de Sidney Lumet, sorti en 1957 résiste très bien à l'épreuve du temps. Si la pièce de Reginald Rose (qui a fait l'objet de nombreuses autres adaptations, théâtrales ou filmiques) y est pour beaucoup, il faut aussi souligner la qualité de l'interprétation (à commencer par celle d'Henry Fonda) et de la mise en scène de Lumet, qui parvient à rendre ce huis-clos haletant.

12 hommes en colère permettra de travailler avec les élèves sur les différents aspects de la notion de pouvoir, abordé sous l'angle original de l'institution judiciaire : pouvoir institutionnel, résistance à ce pouvoir, ainsi que leur représentation par les moyens du cinéma.

Dans les programmes

Niveau	Dans les programmes	Compétences
Cycle terminal	Lieux et formes de pouvoir	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Capacité à expliquer et commenter une scène▶ Capacité à argumenter▶ Capacité à interpréter et analyser à partir d'une technique filmique

Twelve Angry Men

A film by Sydney Lumet
Drama
1957

The plot

A jury holdout attempts to prevent a miscarriage of justice by forcing his colleagues to reconsider the evidence.



I - Watch the beginning of the film and answer the following questions.

- 1/ Where does the action take place?
- 2/ What crime was committed and by whom?
- 3/ What does the jurors' task consist in?
- 4/ Why do you think the judge looks so bored when reading?
- 5/ What is the sentence at stake?
- 6/ What happened as soon as all jurors are in the room?
- 7/ Why does one juror asks another to change places?
- 8/ Which question is recurrently asked by the men?
- 9/ What do they intend to do at first?
- 10/ Which different forms of power can you detect in this extract?



II - Read the summary of the film and find the equivalents of the following words in the text.

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1/ Un procès | 6/ Le ministère public |
| 2/ Poignarder | 7/ Un témoignage |
| 3/ Coupable | 8/ Un témoin |
| 4/ Exiger, réclamer | 9/ Un jury sans majorité |
| 5/ Critiquer | 10/ Un obstacle |

Twelve Angry Men is a film about twelve jurors who have to bring a verdict in a murder trial. A Puerto Rican youth is accused of stabbing his father to death with a knife. He faces the death penalty if found guilty and the jurors come to a unanimous decision. In a stiflingly hot jury room, the 12 men cast a preliminary vote: eleven guilty, one not guilty. Juror Eight voted not guilty and demands that they discuss the case before casting another vote. Juror Eight begins to find faults with the prosecution's case. He argues that the weapon used in the crime is a common knife and that anyone could have killed the father. He also points out that the testimony of the eye witnesses lacks credibility. Little by little, the jurors change their votes. For a while, it seems like they'll have a hung jury, but Juror Eight's arguments are successful. The last holdout, Juror Three, finally changes his vote to not guilty. The boy is acquitted.

III - Camera angles and shot sizes

1/ The **camera angle** shows where the camera is in relation to the person or object that the director wants us to focus on.

Read the following definitions and match the pictures with the corresponding camera angles.

- a/** Low angle shot : a photographic or cinematic shot that looks up at its subject.
- b/** High angle shot: a shot taken from a camera positioned above the action.
- c/** Medium shot: the subject here looks into the camera without moving his eyes up or down.



2/ What did the film director want us to pay attention to when he chose those camera angles? Why?

In picture A the camera focuses on _____

In picture B the angle chosen by the director conveys the idea _____

Picture C shows _____

3/ The **shot sizes** show us how far away the person or object is that the director wants us to focus on. Read the following definitions and match the pictures with the corresponding camera angle shots.

- a/** Wide shot: shows the subject from the top of their head to their feet with the background
- b/** Close-up: focuses on the actor's face while eliminating the environment
- c/** Medium (or mid) shot: shows the actor from the waist up with their surrounding environment



4/ The camera angles and shot sizes indicate the emotional state of each character as they slowly begin to question not only their opinions on the case, but themselves as impartial jurors.

It means that: at the beginning of the film, we'll find a majority of _____ shots to convey the idea of objectivity. But as tension mounts we can notice more and more _____.

5/ Take a stance on the words of Juror N°8 (the only one who voted "not guilty"):

We're talking about somebody's life here. We can't decide in five minutes. Supposing we are wrong?



Éléments de correction

- I -**
- 1/** New York /Court house/ court room/ stuffy locked jury room/closed room
 - 2/** A young Puerto Rican is accused of stabbing his father with a knife . The culprit will stay unknown.
 - 3/** Their task consists in deciding unanimously if the defendant is guilty or not.
 - 4/** He might have heard the lawyers' speeches or he might have seen so many cases like this one before that he is used to it and is only bored.
 - 5/** The death penalty / the electric chair
 - 6/** The room is locked / stifling air
 - 7/** Because it has been agreed upon that all jurors would sit in running order.
 - 8/** They ask each other what they think of the case.
 - 9/** They want to take a vote at the beginning, convinced that it is an open-and-shut case of murder.
 - 10/** Power of justice (court house, quotation, death penalty), democracy (jury, unanimity) power of language (evidence, reasonable doubt, conviction), power of images (shots and their meaning)

- II -**
- 1/** Un procès : a trial
 - 2/** Poignarder : to stab someone
 - 3/** Coupable : guilty of
 - 4/** Exiger, réclamer : to demand
 - 5/** Critiquer: to find faults with
 - 6/** Le ministère public : the prosecution
 - 7/** Un témoignage : a testimony
 - 8/** Un témoin : an eye-witness
 - 9/** Un jury sans majorité : a hung jury
 - 10/** Un obstacle : a holdout

III -1/ A3 B2 C1

2/ In picture A the camera focuses on the jurors' faces showing how concerned or not they feel. It is a form of characterisation.

In picture B the angle chosen by the director conveys the idea that justice and laws are more important than men and life for a society.

Picture C shows the power of justice in a democracy.

3/ A2 B1 C3

4/ ...we'll find a majority of wide and mid shots to introduce the context in which the story unfolds and express the notion of objectivity in the discussions. As tension mounts, especially at the end of the film, we can notice the recurrent presence of close-ups which focus our attention on the emotions of the characters.

Pour aller plus loin

► Films about the death penalty:

Dead Man Walking (La dernière marche), de Tim Robbins, 1995

The Green Mile (La Ligne verte), de Frank Darabont, 1999

► [What you need to go if you go to court](#) ESL Enshlish Lesson by James