



HOW TO:

CREATE FILMS WITH CHILDREN AGED 7-14 Mission Possible Part 2: Next Steps

In this guide we share Missions 4-6 of our 'Mission Possibles', a set of filmmaking activities for children. Each activity consists of a task and a set of clear creative rules, and is designed to develop on the previous one, so that children can continually practice and build on their knowledge and skills as they work their way through the set. If you haven't done so yet, we recommend you complete Missions 1-3 in Part 1: 'Getting Started' before embarking on these activities.

Each Mission includes a YouTube link where you can see some of the videos made by the children who helped us develop these activities. To find out more about us, how and why this project came about, have a look at the 'Developing the Mission Possibles' Case Study at the end of this guide.

MISSION 4:

FIVE SHOT FILMS

EQUIPMENT

- Storyboards
- 4 DV cameras (Larger groups can work in pairs)
- DV Tapes
- Macbooks
- Tripods
- Sample storyboard

AIM

To further develop the group's camera and sequencing skills.

URL

<https://youtu.be/AQnHZRXPes>

ACTIVITIES

1. Exercises and games to get the children comfortable with using cameras.

Game a: The group sits in a circle. Each child takes a turn holding the camera and zooming-in on another's face. They then pass the camera to that person, who zooms out and zooms in on another until the whole group has been filmed.

Game b: The Group sits in a circle and asks each other open ended questions using phrases such as "Can you describe?...?", "Tell me about...?", "How do you feel about...?" and maybe using 'Contrast and compare questions', for example: "Can you describe the school playground when you were in year younger?" or, "What do you like about School dinners?"

2. Five shot stories.

The group is shown an example storyboard sequence with a beginning, middle and end. They then have to think of a simple task or sequence of events that can be filmed in 5 or 6 separate shots, such as filling up a water bottle or putting shoes on. Thinking about motivation and context, they work in pairs to shoot the sequence so that it tells the story from beginning to end.

OUTCOMES

- This structured series of exercises builds individual confidence with using video cameras and develops sequencing and planning skills amongst the group.
- Some children have the confidence to film their sequences entirely by themselves, sharing skills and ideas, whereas others may need help.
- The children develop the confidence to express their ideas through planning, demonstrating that storyboards can be stick figure scribbles so long as they show the framing and the action. They don't need to 'be able to draw' to do this task well.
- The children can become over-ambitious, trying to tell stories of robberies and supernatural portals. Keeping to the 5 or 6 shot rule keeps the films achievable and makes them plan carefully.

FURTHER ACTIVITIES:

Digitise the footage for editing in subsequent weeks
Add titles, credits or other fun special effects

Discussions around all the things they have learned so far:

- What's the best way to capture the action?
- How do the shots (framing, angles) or editing (timing) add to suspense, atmosphere or emotion?

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MISSION 5:

SCRAP STORE DOCUMENTARY

EQUIPMENT

- 6 x DV Cameras
- 6 x Stills cameras
- 6 x USB microphones
- 2 x iPods or iPads with cameras
- Handycam handle
- Wide-angle lens
- Carrier bags for makeshift steadycams
- 1 x DV camera with wide angle
- 6 x Tripods
- 1 x Slate
- Back-up hard drive
- 7 x DV tapes
- Collection of recycled objects to use as props (see film link above for examples)

AIM

Explore how to document an activity in school using a mixture of observational filmmaking, interviews and action sequences to capture the imagination and excitement of lunchtime play.

LINK

<https://youtu.be/mFmzf0ZNDcw>

ACTIVITY

The children plan and film a short documentary about the creative processes involved in their lunchtime play activities using recycled objects.

Approach the activity in four stages:

1. Watch a selection of skateboarding and action sports films so that the children gain an understanding of what documentary is and different approaches to filming.
2. Carry out an introductory camera workshop so that children can experiment with using different cameras such as iPods/iPads, DV and stills cameras with video capacity, and using tripods.
3. Start the group discussing and planning the film, thinking about what types of things they want to include and how they might approach filming it.
4. Filming the activity.

OUTCOMES

Because the activity and environment is familiar to the children they are in control and confident in taking creative approaches to working with handheld cameras.

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Re-watch the 'Down the Stairs' sequence from Mission 1 and think about how the action was filmed, what worked and what might be done to develop or improve it now that the group has new skills.
- Consider how other filmmakers have captured action and opinions.
- Discuss how the story of playtime could be told differently and what angles need to be covered?
- Think about how to conduct a successful interview such as avoiding yes and no answers, interruptions and filming 'cutaways'.
- Watch the rushes (raw footage) and discuss how shots might be contrasted to create rhythm and excitement while still telling the story.
- Discuss when to use or not use a tripod, which shots do and don't work and why.
- Watch documentaries on YouTube, a couple of good examples are Dogboarding and Skateistan.

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MISSION 6:

FREE RANGE EGG

EQUIPMENT

- Storyboards
- DV camera(s)
- DV Tapes
- Macbook(s).
- Tripod(s).
- Clapperboards

AIM

Developing the children's understanding of visual sequencing and storytelling.

LINK

<https://youtu.be/c7p-WUpl7SA>

ACTIVITY

The group work together to plan a film made up of sequences with agreed joining points. They then form sub groups, each of which storyboards and films one of the agreed sequences. The sequences are then joined to make a single film.

We called this mission Free Range Egg because our research school keeps their own hens. We suggested the theme of 'eggs' to the group and provided a box of six eggs, including one made of rubber. From this point it was left to the children to discuss and develop the idea. They decided to follow the journey of an egg from chicken coop to plate, with various exciting adventures on the way. You could use this theme or choose a different one that relates to your group, but do ensure that the theme is based on an object, rather than a person.

OUTCOMES

Following the journey of an object instead of a person enables different groups of children to storyboard, plan and film small, manageable sections of the story. Their knowledge of the school and timetable means that they can incorporate action such as sports matches and really start to understand the process of production planning;

- arranging locations
- asking for permissions
- dividing responsibilities
- directing action
- cinematography

This mission brings together all the skills developed from Missions 1 to 5. Encourage the children to come up with imaginative and innovative ideas and then use their knowledge from those missions to work out how their ideas can be achieved.

Introduce:

- Shooting stories out of sequence and in parallel (e.g. the beginning and end of the story both being filmed by one group).
- Shot logging by using a clapperboard.
- Directing actors.
- Shooting multiple takes to be sure they have what they need before moving on.
- Making, adjusting and adapting their plans and ideas due to changing circumstances and unforeseen events.

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Consider sequencing and how the film will edit together.
- Think about continuity, pacing, cutaways and camera angles and how best to use these to engage the viewer.
- Revisit previous projects and talk about how the group can learn from them when making this film. E.g. trick shots, filming action, whether to use a tripod or not, framing and camera angles.
- In future sessions children can be asked to edit their small own sections.



CASE STUDY:

Developing the Mission Possibles

WHY USE THE 'MISSION POSSIBLES' FORMAT?

There are many children's filmmaking activity resources which are influenced by an industry model, e.g. write a script, storyboard, shoot the film and edit. While it might seem logical, there are some common pitfalls with this approach:

- If you're working with a large group it's difficult make films which include everyone's ideas.
- If the group is inexperienced the learning curve can be too steep.
- If a professional filmmaker is involved there can be too much focus on the product, rather than process, because the children understandably want the final product to be well received.
- An apprenticeship style approach can be highly valuable, but children may not be fully immersed in the act of filmmaking or making meaningful decisions in the process.

The 'Mission Possibles' set out to avoid these pitfalls, teaching filmmaking skills by providing children with a practical task and a set of clear creative rules.

WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO

To find out what filmmaking activities children already did at home.

At first, children indicated that they take quite a lot of footage on mobile devices, but nothing beyond that. As we worked through the project it emerged that they actually did have some knowledge of film editing software, particularly special effects apps.

To find out what aspects of film production children were curious about.

We found that they were keen to understand what we came to think of as the magical elements of film, e.g. how to make people vanish?

To design a set of activities that would teach children filmmaking through a rich and enjoyable learning process

Using the data we collected we designed the activities so that they would involve learning and practicing filmmaking skills through an artistic and creative process. This means the children:

- Learn through first-hand discovery and exploration, unpicking filmmaking techniques and developing their own ideas for narrative structures and sequences.
- Can work without fear of 'getting it wrong' or becoming fixated on the finished product.
- Benefit from hands-on experience, making original and sometimes chaotic films that capture the creative energy of the process.
- Develop a strong sense of ownership, personal achievement and the confidence take risks and experiment as they progress.

HOW WE WORKED

We worked with six groups of eight children for three half-day workshops each. During this time we introduced them to filmmaking techniques that would allow them to experiment with different approaches to visual story telling.

The children worked individually and in groups exploring:

- Animation
- Pixilation
- Live action drama
- Documentary
- Still photography and computer programming (to learn about camera angles, sequencing and editing)

The workshops were developed and adapted in response to the children's interests; building on their skills, knowledge and aspirations and challenging them to try different approaches. We made sure that there were some rules and constraints on each task to guide and focus the process. For example, in one workshop we presented the children with an innocuous looking cardboard packaging box as inspiration. Each group approached it in a different way; the box was destroyed and re-animated using visual trickery by one group, and in another it 'crash landed' into a classroom and became a portal for an alien invasion.

The children were encouraged to discuss and share their ideas freely with the group throughout. They viewed and appraised each other's work, discussing how their films could be developed or improved at every stage of the project.

WHO?

The 'Mission Possibles' were developed in Sheffield by Dr Becky Parry, Janet Jennings and Jon Harrison as part of a research project funded by First Light (now Into Film).

Dr Becky Parry is a research fellow at the University of Nottingham, and author of 'Children, Film and Literacy' published by Palgrave Macmillan. Becky was the inaugural director of Showcomotion, a children's film festival in Sheffield, England, and has worked on numerous creative projects with young people.

Jon Harrison is a creative producer, filmmaker and educational consultant, working primarily with universities and arts organisations. **Janet Jennings** is an arts project manager and fundraiser with experience of producing arts and media events. Jon and Janet are also Co-Directors of Lovebytes, an innovative and groundbreaking organisation that promotes digital creativity as a means to connect and cross-fertilise educational subject areas and learning environments. Over the last 20 years they have been running digital arts projects, including large-scale public events, festivals, exhibitions, film programmes and educational activities for adults, children and young people.