

# DW Griffith and *Birth of a Nation*

**Part 1 - Intro to DW Griffith - Directions:** Watch the video (The History of Cutting) introduction to DW Griffith and answer the questions below. (1 pt each)

## **Primitive Editing:**

1. Although pioneering many film "special effects", George Melies limited his direction to the exclusive use of "Tableaus". What are "tableaus" and how might they limit a director's film-making abilities?

## **The Birth of the Edit:**

2. What did Edwin Porter do differently from the Lumiere Bros and Melies that allowed him to move away from Tableaus?

3. Porter helped create **film grammar**. What is **film grammar** and what is its main belief/rule?

## **DW Griffith & Editing:**

4. How did DW Griffith get his start in the film industry?

5. Griffith pioneered the use of and/or expanded various editing/directing techniques. Describe each below (.5pts ea):

- Cut - In
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Continuity Editing (Match Cuts)
  - 180 Degree Rule
  
  
  
  
  
- Intercutting/Cross-Cutting

6. Why is Griffith's most successful film, *Birth of A Nation*, both celebrated and admonished (hated) in film history?

**Part 2 - DW Griffith & Directing- Introduction** DW Griffith is a film pioneer in every sense. He developed the notion of what it means to be a film director - establishing what is known as mis-en-scene, or the idea that every shot you see in a film is carefully chosen and selected by the director for a purpose. He is responsible for pioneering many of the different shot types, and the combinations of them as well as, establishing the 180-degree rule, which are tools & rules by every director today. In addition, his ability to edit films seamlessly (continuity) using varied and original shot types were a dramatic improvement over previous film pioneers. Though the racial content of his films is to be abhorred and are out-right disgusting, his contributions to film grammar, editing, cinematography, and the role of a director are profound.

**Directions** - Read pages 3- 7 of Closely Watched Films & answer the questions below: (1 pt ea)

**Mis-En-Scene (To set the scene) [Page 3]**

A. What is Mis En Scene?

B. How did Griffith develop the concept of Mis-En-Scene beyond that of previous film makers, like Edwin Porter?

**The Enframed Image: [Pages 3-5]**

D. Briefly describe the purpose of each type of shot used by Griffith (i.e. how did he use the shot to get a certain emotion?

- Close Up
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Long Shot

E. What is the effect of match cutting - combining different shots of the same scene? (*Hint - Influence on Narrative*)

**The POV shot: [Page 6 Last paragraph to page 7 end of 1st paragraph]**

F. What is a "POV" shot?

G. What is a "reaction" shot?

H. (Match Cut) What is the effect created by combining a POV and reaction shot for the audience?

**Part 3 - Birth of a Nation:** Read along with the intro to BOAN on page 8 of Closely Watched Films, answer the intro question. Then, for each major scene record general observations and highlight use of either editing techniques you notice (Continuity, cross-cut, cut-in), or elements of direction you notice (Mis en scene, close up, medium shot, long shot, emotion evoked). (1 pt for observations, .5 for each box after, 6 pt total). Then complete the reflection on the next page (2pts)

Intro Reading: (1 pt each)	
1. What is the plot of <i>Birth of a Nation</i> ?	2. Written and directed by Griffith, how is the film plot/story a great example of mis en scene?

Scene	General Observations (1-2)	Directors Mis En Scene (Direction/Scene/Set)	Shot Type OR Editing Technique
Battle Scene	•	•	•
Reconstruction Scene	•	•	•
KKK Scene	•	•	•

**Reflection:** According to what you read and saw, why is DW Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, although incredibly racist, considered the most important film of all time?

**Part 4 - Extra Credit:** "Gus Chases Flora" From *Birth of a Nation*. Read pages 8-18 in Closely Watched Films to answer the questions below. Go to the class website and watch the Gus "Chases Flora" and take observation notes based on what you see. (15 Points total)

[illegible]

