Mid Stage 5 English student work sample – Grade A

An adaptation of a novel, Shrek involves the conventional fairy-tale story, with a few unusual twists. Shrek, surprisingly is an ogre, a very ugly and repulsive one at that and because of this simple fact, the composers were free to attack all the fairy-tale conventions of older times. Through the Establishment shot/scene; the music and sound effects, the special effects/lighting; the narrative line; characterisation and the camera angles/editing and pace, composers Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jensen have portrayed a fast-paced and unconventional comedy.

Starting with the opening of a book, Shrek seems to portray the normal ideas that one would associate with a fairy-tale, princess; dragon; evil king, with one key element missing – the hero. Reading of the book demonstrates this and shows that the Princess is yet to be saved, however, what happens next is unsuspected for all viewers. Shrek uses the pages of the book as toilet paper and denounces the ideas shown in the book.

A key element is music and is used to display all aspects shown in the movie. All Star is used in the opening scene in co-ordination with the image of Shrek, an obviously unlikely hero. Music such as the Russian death march, the melancholy music played during his dinner and the royalty music are used to give certain impressions such as the involuntary and unescapable manner in which the fairy tales are hoarded away, the lonely music is ideal to develop the connotation that Shrek, however ugly, is also human and does get lonely sometimes. Lord Farquaad, however small is still seen as a very powerful king and one that wields authority.

Through effects such as the spinning fire and the pixie dust, the composers have ensured that we understand their ideas involving fairy-tales and how they plan to denounce them. The spinning fire around the picture of Princess Fiona shows that she is the choice that would incur the most dangerous rescue, however in the spirit of “ripping off” all evil kings, Lord Farquaad chooses to have someone rescue her. This simply shows his stupidity and his arrogance especially when he does not listen to the magic mirror afterwards. The pixie dust is used as an appropriation in order to show the fairy-tale convention of magic. Lighting is used in Shrek’s house to give an impression of loneliness and his quest for privacy. The lights are dim and his singular shadow is over them all.

Commonly, when one refers to films in the fairy-tale genre, one thinks of magic, dragons, handsome heroes and beautiful princesses. However this is not your ordinary fairy in regards to three aspects in particular: the hero (appearance), his motivation and the normal conventions regarding his reward. Most heroes are believed to be handsome, however Shrek is an ugly ogre who only wants to be left alone. Heroes travel on a quest in order to get the girl and live happily ever after, Shrek, on the other hand, merely wants to reclaim his swamp from the fairy tale creatures that have invaded it due to the unnecessary cruelty of the miniature (in size) Lord Farquaad. In order to reclaim his swamp, Shrek must travel to Lord Farquaad’s castle and attempt to meet with him. Shrek receives an unlikely companion for the journey in the form of an overbearing annoying and intrusive talking donkey that is obsessed with the ugly, but apparently human Shrek. A reward for the quest is usually money however all Shrek wants is his swamp back and his privacy.
Characters play a role as they are the cornerstone of the movie and in this derogatory statement regarding fairytales, humour must be involved. Lines like “This is the part where you run away”, “that’s a nice bowlder” and “Do you think maybe he’s compensating for something?” ensure the viewers appreciate Shrek for his humanistic qualities not his exterior features.

Camera angles, and types of shots help the viewer to understand what is occurring. The extreme close-up on Shrek’s mouth while he is screaming shows that he is scary and feared, however the inclusion of the panoramic shot of his home in contrast to the vast beautiful wilderness helps to give rise to the idea that he does have a name and he likes his homely touches (humanistic). The movie skips along at a reasonable pace allowing the viewer time to understand the humour and grasp the ironies while still enjoying the simple story-line.

An overall enjoyable experience, helped in many ways by the actors who contribute the voices, Mike Myers (Shrek), John Lithgow (Lord Farquaad) and Eddie Murphy (Donkey) and to the brilliant composition. Recommended to young and old this is a modern-day-fairy-tale that destroys all conventions and is a humorous romp for all ages.

Grade Commentary

Eden has demonstrated extensive knowledge and understanding of film techniques in film analysis. The analysis is insightful and sophisticated. Some advanced techniques, such as parody and intertextuality, have been identified but without detailed explanation on how they create meaning. The review has been well-structured with judiciously selected information, and a clear personal style is apparent. Extensive vocabulary and fluent, clear and varied sentences have been used.

Eden’s response demonstrates characteristics of work typically produced by a student performing at a grade A standard midway through Stage 5.