



MEN IN BLACK

Scheme of Work using the Film in Education promotional material.

Resources required:

- **MIB video**
- **MIB novel**
- **Film in Education support materials**
- **Craig Raine's *A Martian Sends a Postcard home***
- **H.G. Wells *War Of The Worlds* (or extract from 1999 SATs)**

1. Introduce the idea of UFOs. Ask the class to write down 5 things that expect to find in Science Fiction stories and movies. Brainstorm on the board.
Introduce the idea of genre.

Alien (L. Alienus = 'belonging to another'.) Ask the class to describe a typical alien. Brainstorm on the board to draw up a picture of (usually) a insect-like creature. Ask why we have these preconceptions leading to a general discussion of their findings. How many eyes? Shape of face? Body size, Colour? Texture? Slimy etc. In groups draw and label on sugar paper- report back to plenary then display. (The 'cylinder opens' extract from War of the Worlds is particularly good here.)

Read chapter one of MIB, then using 'storyboard sheets' introduce the idea of camera angles etc. Get the class to reduce chapter one to 8 camera shots and 8 accompanying quotes. Watch the first 20 minutes of the movie, how do their storyboards compare? Does the alien live up to their expectations? In the novel Mikey is described as being 'short inhuman looking' - with a snout, rows of scaly snail-like tentacles - turning into a 'sizzling geyser of blue goo'. His native language consists of 'grunts / squeaks and saliva'.

2. In pairs. 'You have seen a UFO. Complete the MOD question sheet'. One of the, pair can act as interviewer / interviewee. Report back to the class. This is an exercise in formal report writing. The MOD form also includes some challenging vocabulary.

3. Homework. 'You have, to assemble the contents of a time capsule. Say what (and why) you would include to honestly reflect the interests of the early 21st century.' E.G. trainers - 'reveal our pre-occupations with fashion and fitness, being thin, wearing the right labels etc'.

4. Read Craig Raine's *A Martian sends a postcard home*. Class can then create their own stanza - 'it is a small bulimic creature that is force-fed with dirty food and then spews it all out again later' (washing machine). A short stick that bleeds onto 'pale leaves'. (A pen). Write three stanzas for homework.

5. Watch the MIB video until just before the 'candidate assessment' (page 32 novel). Discuss the character of Kay. He has great authority; is sarcastic, and has some great one-liners'. I'm just a figment of your imagination'. (The Neuralyzer) is 'a gift from some friends out of town'. His dress and badge also suggest authority. J is younger but has a similar attitude towards authority. We can tell that K has done this job for a long time by the way Tommy Lee Jones delivers his lines - dead-pan and world-weary - as if he knows it all off by heart. He also longs for 'the girl he left behind'. 'Better to have loved than lost' says J. 'Just try it' the sardonic K replies.

6. Use the '**Army witness saw alien at Roswell**' sheet. Read around the class, discuss difficult vocabulary and clarify that they know what is meant by the metonym 'Pentagon'. Put the class in mixed gender pairs (weaker boy with stronger girl.) Get them to work on the 5 questions in the right hand column. Tell the students that they will be reporting back to the group in 15 minutes and that you are not only interested in their answers but also about the ways in which their 'pair' co-operated. The light-hearted tasks at the bottom right of the sheet lead to some humorous creative writing. These can be completed for homework with the students again attending to 'demarcation'. These tasks can be performed as TV interviews, radio reports or newspaper stories.

7. Brainstorm the various subtextual themes in the movie. The youthful character J having to 'prove himself alongside the older, more experienced, character of K. ultimately of course he takes his place as the keeper of the neuralyzer. He is the hero who has to be 'tried out'. He experiences Life, (the birth of an alien). Death (suicide, murder) and eventually has to fight the creature alone (Beowulf?). Being a politically correct movie the woman ultimately saves the day. J also brings an element of sensitivity into the situation - he *wants* people to be given pleasant memories.

The hint of racial tension between K and J. 'I make this look good' 'Mr. White' 'Mr.Black' 'So basically you have a racial problem with all insect-based life - forms?' The whole concept of 'illegal aliens' and 'political refugees.' Use Sting's *An Englishman In New York* : 'Whoa I'm an alien, I'm a legal alien...'

The idea of an apocalypse, Armageddon and other eschatological concerns: 1999! 1666! 2000!

The paranoia and conspiracy theories that create movies like the X Files and MIB suggesting, as they do, that we can't trust national governments.

Talk about Gene Rodenberry - Star Trek was often a thinly veiled morality play adopting, say, an anti-war stance (Vietnam). Captain Kirk would often learn the lesson that just because some terrifying creature had evolved in a way dissimilar to our own evolution it could still love and protect its children - and have a much greater IQ than humans.

8. Read chapter 5 The Recruit.

J has to go through his initiation (Grail legend?) The other MIB still refer to him as 'junior' 'kid' etc. Ceremonially, he is dressed in the black suit and dark shades of the MIB. - Although he is only given a very small gun!

He is told the secret history of the MIB and has his identity removed. He discovers that the earth is relatively insignificant. That 'human language and thought are seen as infectious diseases' by aliens. The idea of an 'apolitical refuge for space refugees' is introduced and can lead onto the Red Cross adverts (SATs) or discussion about war in Kosova. We also reach the philosophical core of the film:

'A person is smart son.... people are dumb. Everything they've ever known has been proven wrong. A thousand years ago everybody knew as a fact that the earth was the centre of the universe. Five hundred years ago they knew it was flat. Fifteen minutes ago, you knew we humans were alone on it. Imagine what you'll know tomorrow.'