

Programme Guide

Welcome to the **Get the Picture** programme of informal study based on Mark Cousins' 15-chapter film series *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*.

Programme Overview

This is a programme of self-organized film study in which small groups of people

- organize themselves as a study group with a designated enabler
- download study notes for use as a common basis for individual research and group discussion
- watch chapters of *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*
- engage in mutually supportive discussion on specified topics related to *The Story of Film* Chapter contents to enhance and extend each group member's knowledge and understanding of film.
- In parallel with these discussions, individual group members may follow their own investigations into the subject matter of each chapter through suggested individual study activities, mostly web-based.

The Contents of this Guide

This guide describes how the programme works. In it you will find

- the aims of the programme
- details of the programme
- guidelines for setting up and running a study group
- information about how to get started or involved
- supportive suggestions about how your study group could work.

What are the aims of the programme?

- To encourage and support learning processes about film which group members already have in place
- To introduce new group and individual learning processes about film which further the individual learning objectives of informal film students
- To recruit new learners about film and provide a learning environment in which they can develop
- To develop participants' ability to watch film critically, and think and talk about film
- To extend and expand the ways in which participants think and talk about film.

How does the programme work?

In this film study programme, participants develop their knowledge and understanding of film by watching one hour chapters of a 15-chapter film sequence on the history of film by Mark Cousins entitled *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, and then discussing what they've seen in a small group. This seems a bit like a book group, but it's more structured than a book group, because there are specially-prepared study notes for each of the discussion sessions.

These study notes suggest what should be discussed in the group, and also propose investigations and activities that individuals can do outside of the group context, between meetings.

Because a 15-session programme might be more than some participants want to commit to initially, we've broken it up into 3 five-session segments: all groups should start with Segment 1.

More about *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*

Mark Cousins' film series has been much-discussed in the film press since its showing on UK TV in Autumn 2011 and its exhibition at a number of prestigious film festivals before and since. In *Sight & Sound* May 2012 Mark Cousins discussed how it has been adopted as an educational tool around the world, and proposed a number of reasons for this, including its range of coverage and its questioning of widely-held assumptions.

We should point out that while Mark Cousins has entitled his series *The Story of Film*, it's a very individual account of how film developed, and as the notes in each box set point out, what found its way through the edit for each chapter was dependent on a wide range of factors. There are many stories of film, and this is a highly stimulating and authoritative contribution to the canon.

How big will your commitment be?

Each chapter of *The Story of Film* is full of information and insight about a particular phase in the development of film. Participants will probably find they will watch a chapter at least twice: once to get the overall picture, and then again to prepare for the group meetings. The great advantage to basing a programme on *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* is that it is easily rich enough and interesting enough to stand such repeated viewings.

Participants need to commit to a discussion meeting for each chapter, with discussions guided by questions posed in the study notes. They should also expect to take on some individual research activities connected with the material in each chapter, which might include reading web pages, watching Youtube clips, and (for those who have the time) additional reading. Your group will need to agree the amount of time to allow between meetings, and this will let you negotiate enough time for your own study.

Built into the programme is a requirement to watch key films - films cited by Mark Cousins in the Chapter under consideration. It helps the discussion sessions if everyone has seen a couple of these films recently enough to talk about them easily, and some of the discussion topics specifically focus on one of the key films for the chapter under discussion. We have limited the commitment to watching key films between discussion sessions to a maximum of two feature-length films (or an equivalent amount of time).

What is required for participation?

Every participant is registered with us: we will send you a letter of recognition when your enabler lets us know you've completed the programme.

To participate, you will need a broadband connection and an email account, but other than that, the only software you need is a pdf reader (you're probably using it to read this) and a web browser. There is no charge for the materials we supply, but it is strongly recommended that participants buy a copy of the box set of *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, either themselves, or shared with another participant. It is possible for a group to share one box set, but doing so makes for logistical difficulties and holds back the learning process. The box set of *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* is widely available and can easily be found at a discount - at the time of writing, Amazon is the cheapest in the UK, but this can change in an instant.

How are film study groups made up?

We recommend that a film study group should be no larger than seven individuals, and no smaller than three, because outside these limits, the benefits of discussion are lost. If there are more of you, we suggest you consider forming two groups. Each group of participants is asked to designate an enabler, whose role will be partly to chair discussion meetings, partly to organize the meeting schedule and make sure everyone has the resources they need, and partly to act as a link with us.

I'm not in a group yet. What should I do now?

If you're not yet a participant, but you're interested in being one, talk to other people in your film society or community cinema and see if there are others who would like to form a study group. If there are, discuss who will be the enabler, register the group and get the rest of the documents for the programme. For details about how to do this, go to the **Get the Picture** website (www.getthepicture.org.uk).

I'm thinking of being an enabler. What's involved?

An enabler gets the whole show on the road by bringing people together, registering the group, making sure that participants have all the documents they need, and organizing and chairing meetings. A fuller description of the enabler's role is given in the programme document *How to be an Enabler*, which is part of the programme document set, and is available from the **Get the Picture** website. And you shouldn't forget that enablers are also participants, so they do the same learning activities as other participants as well as their enabling duties.

We've got a group together. What next?

First, review the standing of your group. Does it have an enabler, and enough members to run? Does the enabler know the members are ready to get going? Is the schedule of meetings set up? Your group will probably need an organizing meeting, to resolve all these issues. Has the enabler registered the group with **Get the Picture**? Does everyone have all the relevant documents?

If the answer to these questions is yes, you're ready to get stuck into your preparation for the first meeting. At the very least, this will consist of reading all documents through carefully, and watching the films on the *Key Film* list relevant to the first meeting.

Meetings and discussions

Film society and community cinema members talk about film quite a lot, but the film study group discussions are supposed to be qualitatively different to the ones you might have in the bar after a screening. They are chaired and structured: you (the participants) set the length of the discussions, but they should be

- focused on the topic at hand
- flexible enough to allow wide-ranging discourse about the topic
- a relaxed and engaged learning experience for every group member.

They are absolutely non-competitive, and there is no place in them for grand-standing or point-scoring. For a group to be successful, every member has to know when to shut up as well as when to speak, when to give space to others as well as when to take it for themselves. They are a collaborative learning experience, in which listening is at least as important a skill as speaking. You are responsible for your fellow group members' experiences, as well as your own. And it's your duty as a group member to remind any participant who doesn't observe these basic ground rules that they've read this guide too (and maybe need to re-read it).

The normal learning routine

A participant should each expect to spend at least an evening (or its equivalent) on viewing a chapter, reviewing the topics the group has decided to discuss, and preparing your own contribution to this discussion. These activities are fundamental - if you go to a meeting under-prepared, you won't be able to participate properly, and this will diminish the experience for everyone.

How much time you spend on individual activities will depend on how much time you have, but you should always bear in mind that they are designed to feed back into group discussion: the more you do individually, the richer the discussion will be.

Study notes and discussion topics

Each set of study notes contains a wealth of references relating to its chapter. There is NO NEED to feel overwhelmed! They are suggestions, not a prescribed programme of work. There is no requirement to follow up all the references in your individual study. We know that some people have a lot of time, but most do not. So follow up those lines of research that appeal to you, and maybe decide as a group what to focus on.

The discussion topics in the study notes have been carefully elaborated to allow the arguments that Mark Cousins develops over the course of all 15 chapters of *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* to build, in a way that brings maximum learning benefits to group participants. A range of topics is provided - some trickier to tackle than others - and groups need to decide which topics to discuss. In a single meeting a group is unlikely to be able to do justice to all discussion topics, so be prepared to choose.

Is this 'proper' film studies?

This programme has been created to address a need arising out of the collapse of adult informal film education nationally. In such education, the stress is on the development of each individual, and its informality means that it is free to sidestep the requirements of formal film studies courses. These include the need to cover the full range of knowledge and concepts involved in film studies, and we don't aim at such full coverage.

That said, you may well find some film studies terminology in the study notes, and we ask you take this on board and use it. Where needed, we'll include a glossary to help with this, and you will find suggestions for background reading and reference texts if you want to explore the formal side of film studies in more depth.

Do I need to mug up on film studies to participate?

Definitely not! As you go through the programme you may find you want to do some background reading (we recommend some titles in the study notes) but as long as you're willing to prepare properly for the discussion meetings by watching the relevant chapter of *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* and the key films, reading the notes fully, thinking about the issues, and doing at least some of the individual activities, you'll be doing what's required.

Digressions and enhancements

In a separate advice note, you will find suggestions about digressions and enhancements. We intend that groups should be free to digress from the main course of the programme, if all the members want to head off in a different direction. And if a group wants to do more background work than we recommend, we want it to be free to enhance its programme by additional reading, screenings and discussions. The *Digressions and Enhancements* advice note contains specific suggestions about routeways your group could follow.

What do I do now?

If you want to start a film study group, talk to other potential participants, get yourselves organised and decide who will be the enabler, and register and enrol on the **Get the Picture** website. If you're an enabler, you should first read *How to be an Enabler*. Both enablers and participants should read *How to be a Participant*. Then everyone should read the *Study Notes* for Chapter 1. All the documents you need are available in pdf form for download via the **Get the Picture** website (www.getthepicture.org.uk).

And now, avanti tutta!

About Get the Picture

Get the Picture is a small voluntary partnership whose members have a long track record of service to film societies and community cinemas, and a deep and enduring interest in developing educational opportunities for film society members and community cinema audiences. Our aim is to use the full range of our professional expertise to further this interest.