Hugo
Education Resource Kit

HUGO, MARTIN SCORSESE, 121 MINS, USA, 2011.
FILM SYNOPSIS

The film Hugo is set in 1930s Paris and tells the story of a young orphan boy, Hugo Cabret, who lives in the walls of a train station, monitoring and fixing the station’s clocks. Hugo discovers a secret left by his father in an automaton. He unlocks the mystery and embarks on a quest that will transform both those around him and lead him to a safe and loving place that he can call home.

Hugo is based on the book The Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick which was inspired by the work of Georges Méliès.

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

Identity and Belonging

- Do you believe everyone has a purpose?
- What do you believe your purpose is? Is a purpose the same as having a goal or an ambition?
- Why might having a sense of purpose be important to people? Do you think having a purpose helps to shape a person’s identity?

Time

- What if all the clocks on earth stopped? How would it affect the day today? Your year? Your life?
- Consider the saying “Time and tide wait for no man”. What might be some of the positives and negatives of not being able to stop time?
- What would you do if you had the power to control time?

Art and Film

- What is Art? Discuss what Art means to students? How important is it? Can we do without it? What kinds of things are considered Art? (Painting, drawing, literature, theatre, poems, songs, photos, films).
- In the film, Hugo, one of the characters states, “Films had the power to capture dreams”. What does this mean?
- What films have captured your imagination? Can you name any films that use dream-like imagery?
- Why might it be important to preserve films?
- Ask students what they know about both the origin and history of film.
AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

Initial response to the film

• Which aspects of the film stand out? Which scene was the most memorable?

• How did the story make you feel? Did it make you happy, laugh, angry, upset or sad? Why?

• What did the students think about the ending?

• What was the message of the film?

Characters, Identity and Belonging

• List the main characters and describe their role in the story.

• Who is your favourite character? What is the role of that character in the story? What is he/she like? Why were they your favourite character? Who was your least favourite character? Why?

• In the film *Hugo*, Hugo states, “Maybe that’s why a broken machine always makes me a little sad, because it isn’t able to do what it was meant to do... Maybe it’s the same with people. If you lose your purpose... it’s like you’re broken.” Discuss this quote as a class. Have you ever felt broken? Why? What made you feel better or ‘fixed’?

• In *Hugo*, Georges Méliès, who does not want to remember the part of his life where he created fantastic and magical worlds through films, states, “My life has taught me one lesson, Hugo Cabret, and not the one I thought it would. Happy endings only happen in the movies.” Why does Méliès say this? Why does he want to forget about the films he made? Do you think the film *Hugo* has a happy ending? Why or why not?

• The main character Hugo states, “I’d imagine the whole world was one big machine. Machines never come with any extra parts, you know. They always come with the exact amount they need. So I figured, if the entire world was one big machine, I couldn’t be an extra part. I had to be here for some reason. And that means you have to be here for some reason, too.” What does this mean? Focus on the themes of belonging and purpose explored in the film.

• When Hugo is unable get the automaton working he becomes upset and says, “You don’t understand. I thought... I thought if I could fix it then I wouldn’t be so alone.” Why do you think Hugo wanted to fix the automaton so badly? How would a working machine make him feel like he belonged? Do you think that Hugo thought he would feel closer to his father if he could get the automaton working?

• ACTIVITY: The choices we make demonstrate our identity. This may include the films we enjoy, the hobbies we undertake or the sports teams in which we participate. With a partner, choose a favourite film. Imagine you have to convince someone to see that film. List five reasons why they should see that film (without any spoilers).

Time
• Key to the film *Hugo* is the idea of time. Hugo’s father was a clockmaker and Hugo’s job is to maintain the clocks in the train station. The film also focuses on how our past helps to shape the person we are. What do you think *Hugo* teaches us about time?

• In *Hugo*, Mama Jeanne says to Georges Méliès “Georges, you’ve tried to forget the past for so long, but it has caused you nothing but unhappiness. Maybe it’s time you tried to remember.” Explore this quote as a class. What does Mama Jeanne want Méliès to remember and why does Méliès want to forget?

**Film and Dreams**

• Georges Méliès’ films were set in fantastical worlds with magical creatures and adventurous and creative storylines. *Hugo* focuses on how films can allow you to escape reality and explore a dream-like world. Two quotes from the film explore this concept:

  o Georges Méliès: “If you’ve ever wondered where your dreams come from, you look around... this is where they’re made.”

  o Georges Méliès: “My friends, I address you all tonight as you truly are; wizards, mermaids, travellers, adventurers, magicians... Come and dream with me.”

  What do these quotes teach us about the connection between the cinema and dreams?

• **ACTIVITY:** Conduct a research project on Georges Méliès. Focus on his history and the films he created. Watch and analyse some of these films as a class.

• **ACTIVITY:** Create a film based on your own dreams. Follow the pre-production, production and post-production process (for more information and interactive resources look at [www.generator.acmi.net.au](http://www.generator.acmi.net.au)) basing your narrative on magical worlds and creatures. Think about the simple effects used by Méliès in his films. Can you replicate or mimic these effects using new technology? Think about incorporating green screen technology, movie SFX applications or post-production effects.

**The History of Film**

• *Hugo* reminds us of the essential role that Art plays in our lives.

  o Why is it important to preserve different forms of art, especially film?

  o What piece of Art is important to you? Why would you feel the need to preserve it for future generations? How would things change if it were lost?

  o **ACTIVITY:** Ask students to draw a piece of Art that they would like preserved for the future.

  o **ACTIVITY:** In *Hugo*, the automaton’s purpose is to write one message. Ask the students to write or draw one message they feel is important to preserve. Once having done that, ask them to write a script for a short film based on that message (For more information and interactive resources look at [www.generator.acmi.net.au](http://www.generator.acmi.net.au)).
• It has been widely reported that people ran out of the cinema for fear of being hit by the train during the first screening of the film, *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station (L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat)*.

  o Why do you think the audience had this reaction?

  o ACTIVITY: Hold a class debate with one side arguing that this was true and the other side arguing that this was false. Ask students to research the history of film to back up their arguments.

  o ACTIVITY: At the conclusion of the debate conduct a class vote to see how many people believe that this is true and how many think that it is false.

  o When *Hugo* was originally shown in cinemas it could be watched in 3D. How does this new technology relate to the rumours about the audience’s response to *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*?

  o How do we physically respond to film? Have you ever closed your eyes during a scary scene? Flinched when a 3D effect comes close to your face? Or reached out to touch a moving image on a screen?

• ACTIVITY: Students are invited to ACMI’s free permanent exhibition Screen Worlds where they can view the work of the Lumière Brothers and Georges Méliès. The film *Hugo* is centred around the work of Méliès, who was inspired by the Lumiere brothers. Look for the following interactive stations in the exhibition:

  o *The Magic Lantern*
  The magic lantern is a slide projector created in 1880 by William Charles Hughes. It was used by both scientists and entertainers. Scientists used magic lanterns to present scientific lectures and entertainers used them to create supernatinal allusions. Audiences associated illusions with work of super natural beings and even thought they were dreaming. The magic lantern projected images of magical or supernatural creatures onto smoke. These shows were called phantasmagorias.

  o *Phenakistiscope*
  The Phenakistiscope was a popular toy in the 19th century. It produces optical allusions through motion. You are able to spin the flat disc and look through the slits in the disc to see the moving image. When images are shown in quick succession the brain fuses the images together. So we think we are seeing one image, but it is just an illusion, it is our brain making that connection.

  o *Fractured Flickers: Mutoscope*
  Mutoscopes and similar flip book animations were commonly found in amusement parks and holiday locations. Look through the peep hole and turn the handle to see the photos come to life. The Mutoscope uses the same technology that flip book animation uses today.

  o *The Lumiere World/The Arrival of Film*
  The Lumiere brothers invented the first camera projector and called it the Cinématographe. They were interested in documenting real events, such as the train arriving at the station. Here you can watch *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* by selecting the film on the interactive scene, as well as watching other Lumiere brothers films. Think about what is different in this film to the films we watch today (1895, 50-second, black-and-white, silent,
documentary film). It has been said that when this film was first shown the audience ran out of the cinema because they thought the train was real, not a moving image.

- **Georges Méliès**
  Georges Méliès, *A Trip to the Moon*, that features in *Hugo*, is a beautiful film that allows the audience to escape into the dream-like world. Rather than documenting real events Méliès focused on creating imaginary worlds and character. He used his dreams to inspire the stories of his films. At this station you can learn more about Méliès and watch some of his films by using the interactive screen.

- **TY the Tasmanian Tiger 3D Zoetrope**
  *Please note:* This display is not appropriate for students with epilepsy. Moving images are not only about watching, they are also about interacting, exploring, feeling and discovering. The Zoetrope works in a similar way to the Phenakistiscope. Like the Phenakistiscope, 2D Zoetropes were popular moving image toys before the arrival of film. At this station ask students how they think the Zoetrope works. How does it trick our eyes?