

FLASHBACK

NCTE/IRA Standards:

Objective: Understand flashback and use it correctly in a screenplay or other literary form.

Procedure: Display the pages of the guided learning unit one at a time.
The components include:

- An explanation of flashback
- An example of flashback
- Some keys to writing appropriate flashbacks

Allow the students a few minutes to skim each component before reading the text aloud. Reading the text aloud increases the likelihood that all students will be able to understand and participate. Pause appropriately to explain concepts contained in the instructional text, especially concepts that may be unfamiliar. Solicit comments from the students and ask questions to promote their thinking or evaluate their understanding. Elaborate on the instructional text according to the needs of the class.

Practice: As a class activity, have the students think of examples of flashback from movies. If students cannot think of any, use some of the examples below:

Movie: *Ray*

Flashback: When Ray Charles was a small boy, he saw his brother drown.

Movie: *Kung Fu Panda*

Flashback: The snow leopard Tai Lung thinks back to when he was a young student.

Movie: *Titanic*

Flashback: Almost all the action in the movie is a flashback by one of the major characters. This is unusual for a movie because most flashbacks are short.

Movie: *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

Flashback: The movie begins with a flashback explaining the history of the Ring and how Bilbo ends up with it.

Ask the students to think of some movie ideas. Have the student's think of a flashback that might fit in each movie. If necessary, start them with the example of a movie about the life of a sports hero like Jackie Robinson. A movie like this might include a flashback to Jackie as a boy playing baseball with his friends or family.

Extending the Activity: Arrange students in small groups of 2 to 4. Have the students think of a new movie or use one of the movies a member of the group created for the synopsis activity. Ask the groups to write two flashbacks that would fit in the movie. The flashback example from *Forrest Gump* should be available to the students. If possible, have the student's type and print their flashbacks using the format from the *Forrest Gump* example. Display the completed character profiles or print them out and distribute them to the groups. Allow the groups to read all the character profiles and comment on them.

Internet Search Suggestion: Have the students search for movies with flashbacks.

Flashback

Flashback is used in many movies and books. It is a look into the past by one of the characters or as part of the story. Screenwriters use flashback to give the audience some background information. Flashback might be used to show why characters act in a certain way or why events in a movie are taking place.

When a flashback happens in a movie, the normal course of action stops. The scene shifts to a time in the past and often a different place. When characters are shown in a flashback, they are often younger than they are in the regular part of the movie.

Screenwriters are careful when they use flashback so they don't confuse the audience. If there are too many flashbacks, it is hard to follow the action of the movie. Flashbacks are also used only for important ideas.

The most common use of flashbacks is to explain something about major characters, like why they are doing something. A second common use of flashback is when a character tells about a person, place, or thing in the past, like what an area looked like long ago.

Here is an example of flashback from the movie *Forrest Gump*. The format of this flashback shows how it appears in a script for a movie. The abbreviation EXT. means an exterior or outside camera shot. The abbreviation INT. means an interior or inside camera shot. V.O. is the abbreviation for Voice Over.

Keys to Using Flashback

Make sure the flashback is important to the story.

Avoid using too many flashbacks.

Include information in the flashback that will help the audience understand the story better.

Place the flashback in the movie where it makes sense with the story.

Keep the flashback short so the audience doesn't get lost.

Have strong visual images in the flashback.

Use just a few characters in a flashback.

Include at least one primary character in the flashback.

Give the characters strong lines in the flashback if they speak.

Avoid interrupting important action scenes with a flashback.

A Flashback from *Forrest Gump*

In the beginning of the movie, the adult Forrest Gump is sitting on a bench. It is 1981. A black woman in a nurse's outfit sits down on the bus bench next to Forrest. Forrest starts talking to her.

The black woman stares at Forrest as he looks down at his own shoes.

FORREST

I've worn lots of shoes. I bet if I think about it real hard I could remember my first pair of shoes. Forrest closes his eyes tightly.

FORREST

Momma said they'd take me anywhere.

INT. COUNTRY DOCTOR'S OFFICE - GREENBOW, ALABAMA - DAY
(1951)

A little boy closes his eyes tightly. It is young Forrest as he sits in a doctor's office.

FORREST (V.O.)

She said they was my magic shoes.

Forrest has been fitted with orthopedic shoes and metal leg braces.

DOCTOR

All right, Forrest, you can open your eyes now. Let's take a little walk around.

The doctor sets Forrest down on its feet. Forrest walks around stiffly. Forrest's mother, MRS. GUMP, watches him as he clanks around the room awkwardly.