



First Light

Creating films with archive footage

A guide to using archive film footage in youth filmmaking projects – some considerations and tips

These notes have been prepared to encourage use of archive films in filmmaking. If you are interested in using archive film in a creative filmmaking project working with 5-19 year olds, you can apply to First Light's Young Film Fund for a grant of up to £30,000. Full application guidelines can be found [here](#).

Across the UK thousands of hours of archive films lie preserved and waiting for an audience, from newsreels, feature films, public information advertisements, to amateur footage, educational and industrial films, and experimental short films. The subject matter of this material is as diverse as imagination itself and the footage provides a unique window into national, regional and community histories, as well as casting light on different approaches to visual storytelling. Filmmakers and television producers have long recognised the value of incorporating archive footage into their films and programmes, however until recently youth filmmaking projects have rarely engaged with the rich screen heritage of the UK.

Digitised and copyright cleared archive film footage is becoming increasingly available, and incorporating its use into your youth filmmaking project can be exciting and rewarding for both the young people participating in the project and the workshop leaders, and can result in innovative and creative films. Including archive footage allows young people to make films about events in the past without using costly reconstruction. It can be an exciting way to engage them with local history and heritage – seeing places that they recognise in the past can really trigger young people's interest in finding out more about their community's heritage. The diversity of filmmaking styles and approaches to narrative found in archive collections can inspire young filmmakers to explore how pictures create meaning and how to tell a story visually.

These guidelines, aimed at practitioners already experienced in running filmmaking projects with young people, outline the additional considerations to take into account when planning to use archive films, and offer tips on different approaches to working with archive footage.

NB: References to archive film and film footage here include moving image material television as well as film.

1. How archive film footage can be used in youth filmmaking projects

There are many different possibilities for using archive film in your youth filmmaking project, and how you choose to will depend on the age group of the young people, the genre of film they are making, and the archive material that you are working with. Here are just a few examples:

- Archive film can be used in documentaries to make look at changes and similarities between past and present, e.g. a documentary exploring fashion trends over a period of time.
- Young people can use the archive material literally, as visual evidence in a documentary about a specific historical subject.
- Archive material can also be used more laterally, ignoring the original subject matter and historical context of the footage and repurposing it as a source of images.
- It can be useful as a research source.
- It can provide inspiration when thinking about ideas development and approaches to storytelling.
- For dramas and fictional genres of films, archive film can be used as a starting point for developing a fictional story linking the characters featured in the archive footage into a new story created by the young people.
- Archive footage can be useful in dramas to set the time and location of a film set in the past.
- Working with archive footage and simple green screen technology offers a range of creative possibilities, e.g. transport the actors back in time.
- You can also take a more experimental approach – for example, rewriting the narration, use the archive sound with images shot by the young people, incorporate animation.

2. Getting started – finding and selecting footage

Planning a youth filmmaking project that will work with archive film is not vastly different from planning any other youth filmmaking project. However decisions around which footage you work with can have implications on budgets and schedules, so it is important to start thinking about finding footage in the early planning stages of your project.

Sources of archive footage

The BFI National Archive

The BFI National Archive preserves one of the largest and most significant film collections in the world. Archive films from the BFI National Archive can be viewed online at:

<http://www.youtube.com/bfifilms>

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/creativearchive/titles/>

If you have access to an educational network you may also be able to view archive films at:

www.bfi.org.uk/inview (UK universities only)

www.screenonline.org.uk (UK schools, universities and public libraries)

For applicants to *First Light's Young Film Fund* the BFI will provide a selection copyright-cleared, digitised footage from the BFI National Archive. The films available for this purpose can be found [here](#).

If you would like to make a funding application to *First Light* for a project that uses one or more of these films go to www.firstlightonline.co.uk and click on the Funding Section for further details. If you are successful with your application the films you have selected will be sent to you in QuickTime format.

Other national collections

Scottish Screen Archive – housing a collection spanning over 100 years of Scotland's history, mostly non-fiction.

<http://ssa.nls.uk/>

National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales – a collection relating to the culture, life and history of Wales, with film dating back to 1898.

<http://www.archif.com/>

The Imperial War Museum – a national collection of films relating to the history of conflict.

<http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/>

Northern Ireland Screen runs the Digital Film Archive, focusing on films from Northern Ireland, and provides links to the collections where these resources are held.

<http://www.digitalfilmarchive.net/dfa/>

Regional and local archives

It is possible to research and source footage from many other organisations in the UK which hold archive films, particularly if you are looking for material specific to a local area or subject matter. Some of these collections are easier to search, view and access than others, depending on their digitisation programme and on copyright constraints, and the best approach is to get in touch with the archivists or education officers directly. See the links below for contact details.

Regional Film Archives

There are 8 regional screen archives in England, holding fascinating archive footage that can give insight into local and regional history. These collections are mainly non-fiction.

- North West: North West Film Archive <http://www.nwfa.mmu.ac.uk/>
- Yorkshire: Yorkshire Film Archive <http://www.yorkshirefilmarchive.com>
- North East: Northern Region Film and Television Archive <http://www.nrfta.org.uk/>
- East: East Anglian Film Archive <http://www.eafa.org.uk/>
- East and West Midlands: Media Archive for Central England <http://www.macearchive.org/>
- Central Southern England: Wessex Film and Sound Archive <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/wfsa>
- South East: Screen Archive South East <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/screenarchive/education/education.html>
- South West: South West Film and Television Archive <http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=20771>
- London's Screen Archives – archiving film collections related to London's heritage are held across many different archives rather than in one Regional Film Archive. London's Screen Archives is the network of these archives. <http://filmlondon.org.uk/networks/lsa>

Other collections

- Many museums and universities have substantial archive film collections.
- Some local borough archives hold collections of films relating to the local area. While not all boroughs have organised these collections to make them accessible, it is worth contacting your local borough archive or library to check what they have available.
- Broadcasters such as BBC and ITN hold archives on their own programmes and other newsreels of which they hold the license. This footage is generally very costly to access but is sometimes made available as part of specific projects or initiatives.

Intellectual Property Rights

Most archives which hold archive films are the custodians of this footage, charged with collecting and preserving this precious screen heritage, but they are not the copyright holders. As with music, to use archive film footage permission is needed from copyright holders, and this may involve substantial research to investigate and sometimes a usage fee. The archives themselves should be able to offer advice on this.

The films that are provided for use by applicants for the Young Film Fund Pilot and Studio grants will be supplied with rights cleared for use under conditions of First Light funding and in accordance with BFI licensing agreements.

Formats of Archive Films

Archives hold film footage in a wide range of formats, from different gauges of film stock (8mm, 16mm, 35mm), a multitude of video formats, and even highly flammable nitrate film. In order to include the archive footage in their film the young people will need to have access to a digital copy of the footage. For film formats this digitisation involves a telecine process, which can be expensive and, depending on the condition of the original material, there might also be additional restoration costs. Many archives have already had some of their collection restored and digitised. Unless you have significant additional budget for digitisation, the best approach is to work with archive films that are already available in a digital format.

The ideal format to receive the archive is as media files (e.g. QuickTime formats, Windows Media, mpegs etc) so you can use them in your editing programme. Different editing programmes require different media files so remember to check the guidelines of the software you will be using for compatibility requirements. Ask for as high a resolution as possible (bearing in mind how much hard drive space you have available). Alternatively if the archive can provide the footage on mini-DV you can import it into your editing programme as you would for any video footage. It is not advised to copy footage from a DVD, as this will be compressed and not as high quality.

Researching and Selecting Footage

As First Light projects should be led by the young people, we want to see that the young people have a chance to make decisions about which archive footage to include in their film, but given the vast collections of archive films available and the variance in quality and subject matter its likely that you will need to research and select a range of footage before involving the young people. There are two main approaches that can be taken when researching and selecting footage to use in your youth filmmaking project.

- Get in touch with a relevant archive (e.g. the Regional Film Archive in your area), get their advice on what archive film material they have available that does not have copyright issues and is already digitised. After viewing this material you might see some general themes (e.g. local celebrations and events) linking some of the footage that will make a good starting point for the film, or put together a shortlist of particularly interesting and inspiring clips.
- Have an idea/theme/historical subject in mind (ideally suggested by the young people) and research and seek out relevant footage. This option is by far the more time-consuming, and there is a great variance between archives in the level of catalogue information about their archive materials. If you do take this approach remember to build plenty of time for this in your schedule and check for issues of copyright and digitisation.

3. Tips when planning your filmmaking project

As a workshop leader or project manager planning your youth filmmaking project you already have many decisions to make around the structure of the project and content of the workshops. Integrating archive film footage into your project need not have a huge impact on the way that you structure your filmmaking project, but there are a few things to build into the usual stages of the filmmaking project that will make the process go smoother:

Ideas Development

However you plan to work with archive films (see section 1) a key thing is to engage the young people with the archive material from the beginning of the project.

- When planning a viewing session remember that many of the young people may have never seen archive film footage. They may not have even seen a black and white film let alone a silent one!
- Don't forget to explain what an 'archive' is, as the young people might not understand what it is.
- Think about how you can help to get the young people excited about the opportunity to watch this footage. If you are working in partnership with an archive they might have an education officer or archivist who can get involved at this stage and provide contextualising interpretation and local history information.
- You might also find it useful to show examples of contemporary films that incorporate archive footage, to get the young people thinking about how it can be combined with contemporary footage in a meaningful and dynamic way.

Pre-production

- Although you will have already done some pre-selection of the archive footage, once they've decided upon the idea for the film involve the young people in making decisions about which specific archive clips they're going to work with. This can then be included in their storyboards or shooting scripts (for documentaries).

Production

- You might want to consider the aspect ratio of the archive footage before beginning to shoot the film – the majority might be 4:3 so you might want to shoot all of the film at this ratio.
- If the young people are making a film about their local area, think about including some match shots (the same location seen in the archive footage shot from the same place).
- Green screen can be used to creative effect, using the archive footage as background for live action.

Post-Production

- Schedule a little more time for post-production than in a project not working with archive films.
- To save time make sure that you already have the archive footage on your editing system and ready to use in the project.
- Think about using music to help create the atmosphere of the era featured in the archive footage.
- Avoid having long sections of archive footage accompanied by voiceover; break it up with contemporary footage.
- Don't forget to include any necessary credits for the archive material.

Exhibition and Distribution

- Ask the archive that you are working with whether they would consider acquiring the young peoples' film as part of their collection, becoming part of the future's screen heritage!