

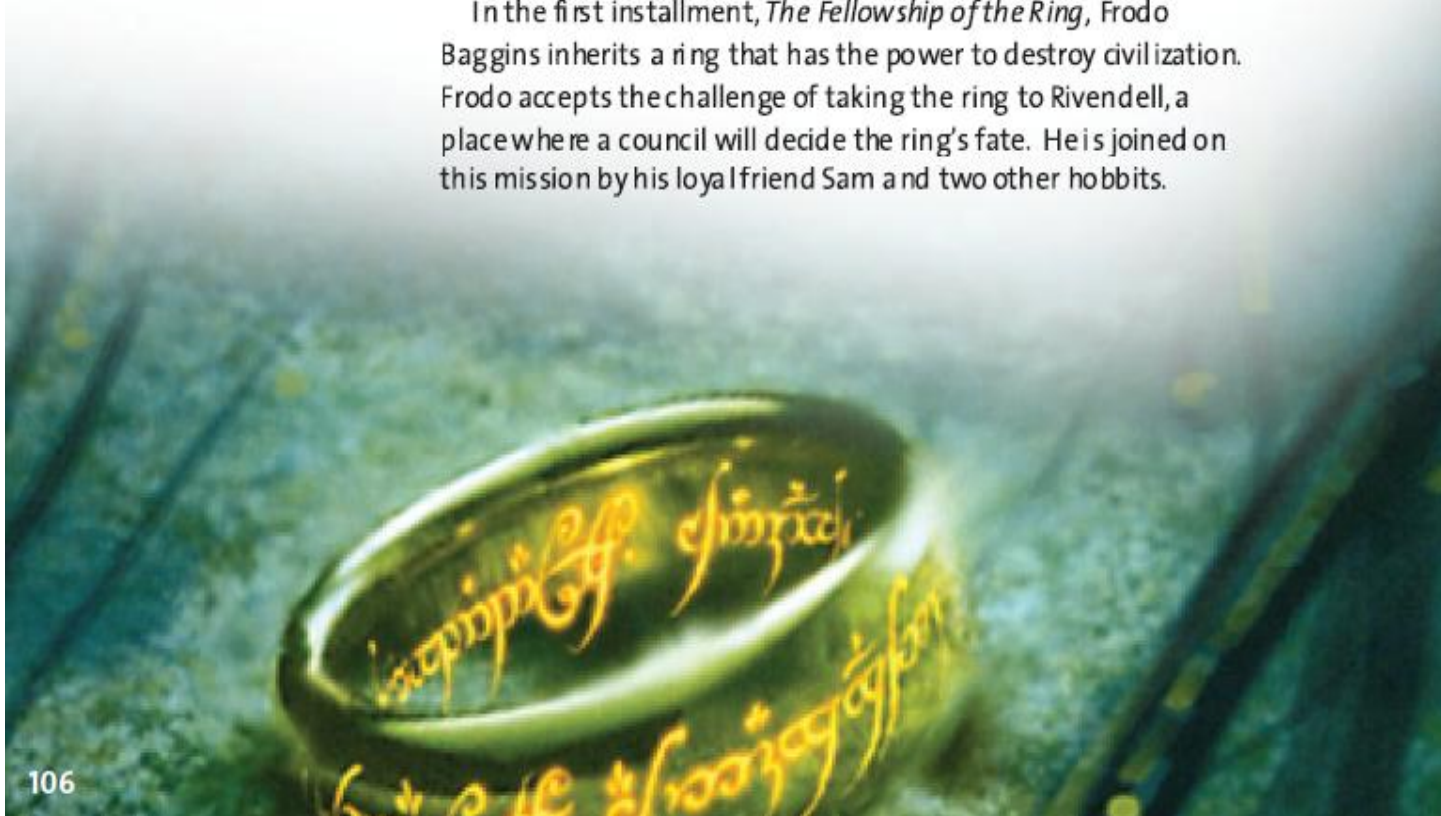
What keeps you in SUSPENSE?

KEY IDEA Have you ever been thrust into a situation that made your heart pound and your palms sweat? In this scene, Frodo Baggins, a young hobbit, has hardly started on a mission when he senses something ominous. Notice how the director builds *suspense* as danger reveals itself.

Background

Imagining Tolkien's World In 1999 the director Peter Jackson began to transform J. R. R. Tolkien's fantasy epic *The Lord of the Rings* into one of the most critically acclaimed movies of all time. As one reviewer stated, "This astounding movie accomplishes what no other fantasy film has been able to do: transport viewers to an entirely different reality, immerse them in it, and maroon them there...."

In the first installment, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo Baggins inherits a ring that has the power to destroy civilization. Frodo accepts the challenge of taking the ring to Rivendell, a place where a council will decide the ring's fate. He is joined on this mission by his loyal friend Sam and two other hobbits.



Media Literacy: Suspense in Movies

Suspense is a feeling of growing tension and excitement. Writers build suspense by making readers feel uncertain about what will happen next. Like writers, directors have the ability to make viewers feel excited or nervous as events unfold from one scene to the next. A skillful director can use basic filmmaking techniques, such as **camera shots**, **editing**, and **sound**, to create suspense and draw viewers into the action.

FILM TECHNIQUES

A **shot** is a single, continuous view filmed by a camera. A director sets up shots that will advance a story's plot and tell the story in a compelling way.

Editing is the process of selecting and arranging shots in a sequence. Editors and directors build tension by increasing the pace from one shot to the next.

Sound consists of the **music**, **sound effects**, and **dialogue** used in a scene. Sounds can be manipulated to increase viewers' emotional response to the scene.

STRATEGIES FOR VIEWING

- Pay attention to **point-of-view shots**; they show what characters see. In suspenseful scenes, they can make viewers sympathize with the characters and feel as if they are in danger themselves.
- Notice how **high-angle shots**, in which the camera looks down on objects or persons, can make characters seem helpless. **Low-angle shots**, with the camera looking up, can make characters seem powerful or threatening.

Be aware of **pace**, which is influenced by the length of time each shot stays on the screen. As suspense increases, the length of shots gets shorter. **Quick cuts**, which may last no longer than a second, perhaps even less, are used to create excitement and build viewers' anticipation.

- Listen for the use of **music**. Shrill tones or quick, steady beats often signal danger.
- In particular, notice how any prolonged **absence of sound** affects you. Silence can heighten a tense moment.





MediaSmart DVD

- **Film Clip:** *The Lord of the Rings*
- **Director:** Peter Jackson
- **Rating:** PG-13
- **Genre:** Fantasy
- **Running Time:** 4 minutes



Viewing Guide for The Lord of the Rings

In this scene Frodo and the other hobbits take a peaceful break from their journey only to discover that a Black Rider is pursuing them.

As you watch this clip, pay attention to particular moments that draw you into the action and create suspense. Plan on watching the scene several times. To help you analyze suspense, refer to the questions that follow.

NOW VIEW

FIRST VIEWING: Comprehension

1. **Recall** How do the hobbits escape the Black Rider?
2. **Summarize** How does the setting change as the scene progresses?

CLOSE VIEWING: Media Literacy

3. **Make Inferences** What techniques does the director use to lead you to believe that the Black Rider is evil?
4. **Analyze Sound** How does the director use sound to increase tension in the scene? Think about sound effects, music, changes in volume, and absence of sound.
5. **Analyze Camera Shots** How does the director use **point-of-view shots** and **high-angle** and **low-angle shots** to influence viewers' perception of the events? Think about the following shots:
 - Frodo's view of the road
 - Frodo's view of the horse's mouth and bit and hoof
 - the shot of the Black Rider standing directly above the hobbits' hiding place
6. **Evaluate Editing** Toward the end of the scene, the Black Rider is closing in on Frodo and the other hobbits. What effect do the **pace** and the use of **quick cuts** have on viewers?

4. *At key moments, the director uses the absence of sound to build suspense. Music and sound effects are used to signal the presence of danger; the volume of the music increases as the situation worsens.*

5. *Point-of-view shots show what the characters see. Frodo's view of the road indicates that something is coming. Low-angle shots convey that the Black Rider is powerful or menacing. High-angle shots convey helplessness and danger.*

6. *The pace and quick cuts increase the suspense. Viewers probably become anxious about Frodo's fate as the hobbit nearly comes within reach of the Black Rider.*

Write or Discuss

Evaluate Suspense A director's ultimate goal when filming a suspenseful scene is to make viewers feel the tension and anxiety that the characters feel. Evaluate the effectiveness of the director's portrayal of a suspenseful situation in the scene you viewed. Think about the following:

- the film techniques the director uses to create suspense
- specific emotions and reactions you think the director is trying to evoke
- your reactions to the clip

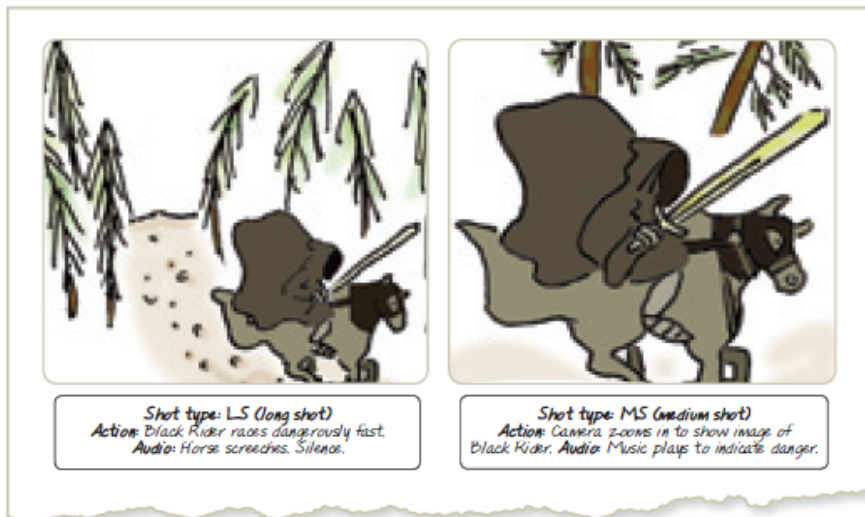
Produce Your Own Media

Create a Storyboard A storyboard is a device used to plan the shooting of a film and to help the director envision what the finished product will look like. Create a storyboard revisiting the beginning of the *Fellowship of the Ring* scene. Your storyboard should emphasize the Black Rider's point of view and should include between eight and ten shots.

HERE'S HOW Think of your storyboard as a set of rough sketches that includes descriptions of each shot. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Break down the incident shot by shot, in chronological order.
- Consider using a variety of shots and angles, including close-ups, high-angle and low-angle shots, and point-of-view shots.
- Once you establish the scene, use point-of-view shots to show what the Black Rider sees.
- Think about the sounds you want to accompany each shot.

STUDENT MODEL



MEDIA TOOLS

For help with creating a storyboard, visit the **Media Center** at ClassZone.com.

Production Tip

Use abbreviations of shot types in your storyboard.

POV = point-of-view shot

LS = long shot

MS = medium shot

CU = close-up shot

ELS = extreme long shot

MEDIA STUDY: *from* THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Summary

FROM THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING (FILM)

Setting: Middle-Earth

Frodo Baggins is a young hobbit (a half-size human-like creature), who is given a ring by his uncle Bilbo. Frodo learns that this ring is the One Ring, a ring with evil powers created long ago by a Dark Lord named Sauron. Frodo must take the Ring and leave the Shire before agents of Sauron come looking for it. Frodo starts on his journey accompanied by his friends Sam, Merry, and Pippin.

In this scene from the film adaptation, Sam, Merry, and Pippin have stopped to collect some mushrooms. Frodo, sensing danger, urges his friends off the road. The four hobbits barely escape being discovered by a rider in black, sent by Sauron to capture Frodo and recover the Ring. As the hobbits hide under the roots of a huge tree, Frodo is affected by a strange influence and begins to slip on the Ring. Sam takes action by shaking Frodo back into awareness and distracting the rider. As the hobbits race through the woods that night, they are confronted by more of the mysterious black riders. Merry leads his friends to Buckleberry Ferry, which will allow the hobbits to escape to the other side of the river. Frodo narrowly outruns one of the riders and jumps onto the raft just as it is pulling away from the riverbank, leaving his pursuers behind.