

THE ART OF FOLEY SOUND



Recreating sound
and dialog in
a movie scene

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2016 California Teacher of the Year

FOLEY SOUND EFFECTS UNIT

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I really need to credit a student teacher who began his teaching career in my classroom a number of years ago. For one of his official observations and assignments, Oly Norris asked whether he could create a brand new unit on Foley Sound Effects. Over the years I have fine-tuned his idea into a 3-week activity that my students absolutely love.

This lesson/unit would work well in elementary, middle and high school. Although I teach middle and high school broadcast journalism and film-making, this activity fits my middle school program particularly well because we are not on the “daily grind” schedule for live broadcasting as we are at Carlsbad High. In other words, we have a little more time in the middle school program to really get our feet wet and hands dirty with the business of creating cool sounding noises.

Foley is the reproduction of everyday sound effects that are added to film, video, and other media in post-production to enhance audio quality.[1] These reproduced sounds can be anything from the swishing of clothing and footsteps to squeaky doors and breaking glass. The best Foley art is so well integrated into a film that it goes unnoticed by the audience.[2] It helps to create a sense of reality within a scene. Without these crucial background noises, movies feel unnaturally quiet and uncomfortable.

-Wikipedia

RESOURCES

- A sampling of Foley projects we have completed: <https://vimeo.com/channels/foley>
- Some history of Foley (and why it is called Foley): <http://filmsound.org/foley/jackfoley.htm>
- Seven minute video on YouTube that explains Foley: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_tgB4IzVMk
- Source for film clips: <http://www.movieclips.com/>
- Some sound creation ideas: <http://www.epicsound.com/sfx/>

We will spend about three weeks on this unit, from start to finish. It is an activity that we do in addition to our everyday routine where we are preparing a live broadcast and students are busy finding and telling stories for our broadcast. The unit could be compressed into a shorter time period, but we tend to move through the process methodically. The first, and perhaps biggest hurdle is finding the right scene. The “perfect scene” is a short segment of a film where there is both a variety of dialog and a variety of sound effects. We scour YouTube looking for just the right variety of dialog and sound effects in a clip that is typically 2 or 2.5 minutes in length. A perfect scene could contain dozens of individual sound effects and perhaps this is why the project can easily consume multiple class periods.

In a nutshell, this is the order of activity. This process is also explained in each of our Foley project videos which can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/channels/foley>

1. **Audition a variety of movie scenes.** Some of the most fun Foleys have been animated films where we are actually creating Foley from Foley. Our best source for finding and auditioning movie scenes is the website <http://www.movieclips.com/>. Once you have identified the scene, you'll have to scour YouTube for the actual scene (preferably in HD). Frankly I tend to do this in advance so that we do not spend too much time looking for a scene that we will not be able to find for the actual project. In other words, after students agree on three or four options, I look for HD versions of those scenes on YouTube and then they vote on the final scene for the project.
2. **Log the scene.** I typically import the scene into Final Cut Pro X and add a timecode overlay. I export this video as an HD file and project the film onto our classroom screen. The timecode is handy for logging sounds (sample log sheet will be at the end of this lesson document). During the logging exercise students are simply describing each original sound and noting the timecode.
3. **Brainstorm how you will recreate the sound.** In my case we listen to each sound and figure out how we will be able to recreate the sound using household items (that the students bring in). Pots, pans, Slinkys, spoons, wood, creaky tool boxes, sandpaper, sand- you name it. Your challenge is to rebuild all of the sound in the film from scratch. We will use the log sheet to record all of these final decisions so that we can methodically record each sound in subsequent class periods.
4. **Recording sound effects sessions.** I use a shotgun microphone attached to a Zoom H4N recorder to capture the best sound available. It is not a deal breaker if this equipment is not available, but so many of the sounds are subtle and a shotgun mic does work particularly well. You could improvise with a handheld (stick) mic or a lavalier mic that could be placed close to the sound source.
5. **Recording the dialog sessions.** Most of the time we are able to find (online) the original script for the film scene we are working with. We chose the film *Ratatouille* for our April 2016 Foley project and it was not difficult to find the script for that film (http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/a2/ratatouille-script-transcript.html).
6. **Tell the story.** We film all of this activity with a couple of cameras because, in our case, our final package features the behind-the-scenes video where we teach the audience about Foley, and then the actual Foley scene. You can view some of our recent Foley projects here: <https://vimeo.com/channels/foley>
7. **Edit the final masterpiece.** Typically a small group of students (2 or 3) will come in after school to edit the final video. One group is in charge of the "making of" and the other group painstakingly add in the new sound, matching it up as closely as possible to the original sound on the timeline. Eventually the original sound will be deleted from the timeline.

