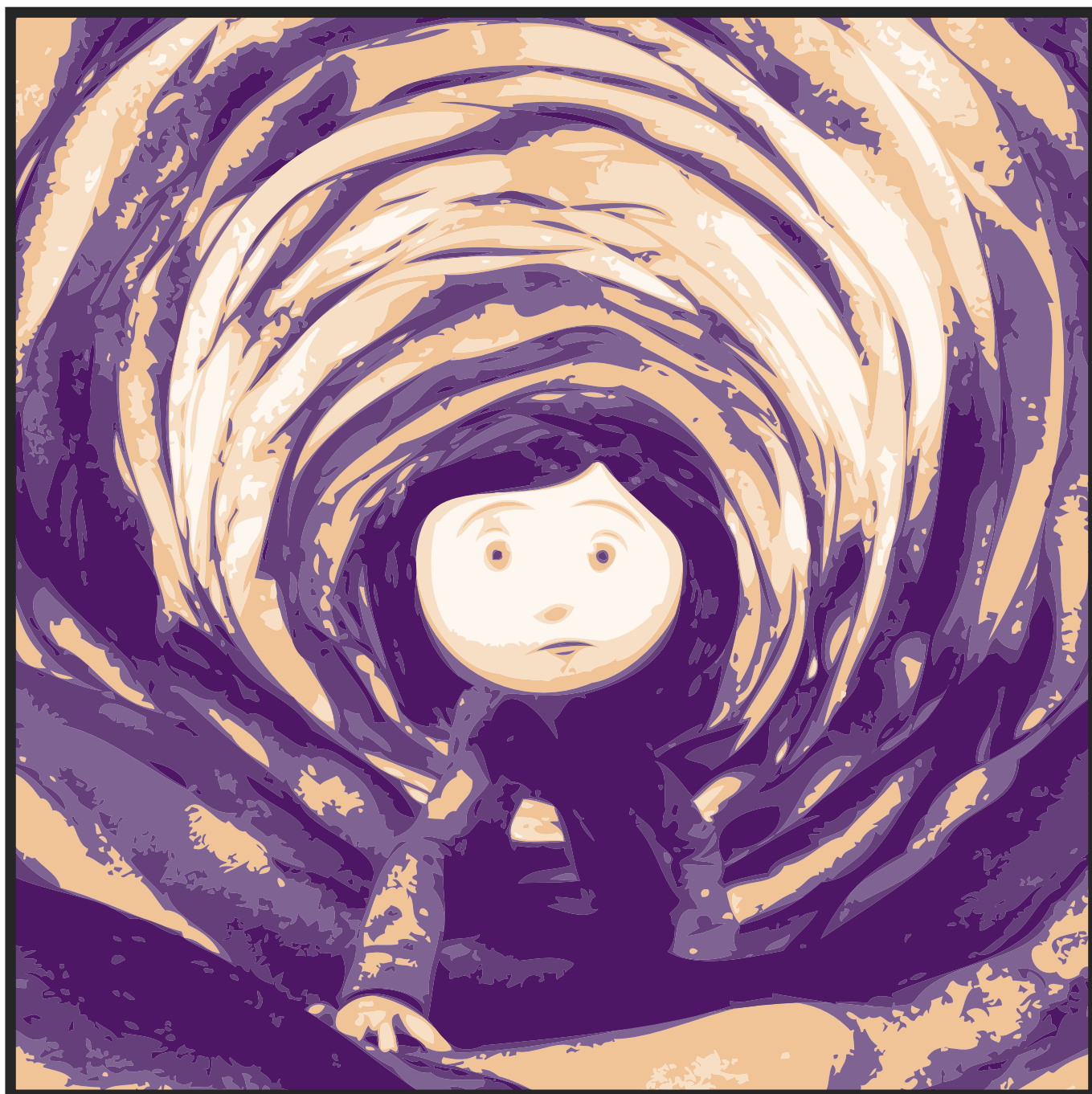


Coraline: Adapting the Novel for the Screen



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Introduction

Coraline, written by Neil Gaiman, is a novella in which the genres of fantasy and horror intertwine. The novella's dreamlike quality has led to comparisons to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It tells the story of Coraline Jones, whose family move into an old English Baroque style flat. Left to amuse herself, Coraline discovers a mysterious doorway in the flat, and walks through to discover a fantastical and nightmarish Other world.

Coraline was adapted into a screenplay by American director Henry Selick. The stop-motion film adeptly recreates the sinister atmosphere of the novella through use of film languages. This resource allows pupils to explore the conventions of writing a screenplay, and asks them to consider appropriate use of cinematography in their attempts to produce film versions of scenes from the novella.

Notes and useful links for teachers

This resource is tailored towards pupils who are working securely within level 3. Depending on the quality of answers elicited, it can also be used within level 4. The resource is available both in PDF and Word format.

There is a very useful guide to screenplay writing published by the Scottish Screen website at



www.scottishscreen.com/images/documents/crashcourseinscreenwriting.pdf. From page 74 onwards this document gives a nice introduction to the conventions of formatting a script.

The Oscars guide to Screenwriting is also available on Scottish Book Trust's website at



www.scottishbooktrust.com/files/oscars%20guide%20to%20screenwriting.pdf. This contains some useful activities and guides to formatting.

Henry Selick's entire screenplay is available at



www.scottishbooktrust.com/files/Coraline_Screenplay.pdf.

SOME OTHER USEFUL LINKS:



The Film Education charity: www.filmeducation.org/



Coraline movie website: www.coraline.com/



Neil Gaiman's website: www.neilgaiman.com/



The Oscars Educational Resources: www.oscars.org/education-outreach/index.html

Adaptation of Narnia:



www.scottishbooktrust.com/files/Narnia%20screenwriting.pdf

Learning Log

This page lists the skills you will be developing in the activities ahead. Come back often and check how you're doing. You might want to tick, colour or draw in the boxes to record your progress.

WHEN READING, I CAN...

- identify and comment on aspects of the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre using some relevant evidence.
- identify and discuss similarities and differences between different types of text.

WHEN WRITING, I CAN....

- consider the impact that layout and presentation will have on my reader, selecting and using a variety of features appropriate to purpose and audience

Having explored and experimented with the narrative structures which writers use to create texts in different genres, I can:

- use the conventions of my chosen genre successfully and/or
- create an appropriate mood or atmosphere and/or
- create convincing relationships, actions and dialogue for my characters.

WHEN I LISTEN, WATCH AND TALK, I CAN...

- compare and contrast different types of text
- gather, link and use information from different sources and use this for different purposes.
- I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by commenting, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts.

COMMENTS:

Activity 1 – Two ways of telling a story

CfE

Reading/
Understanding,
Analysing and
Evaluating: Lit
3-16a, Eng 3-
19a



The Other Mother, as imagined in
P. Craig Russell's graphic novel of *Coraline*

Before you read, think about the differences between the way stories – or narratives – are told in novels and in film.

- What advantages do you think novels have?
- What advantages do you think films have?

In your jotter, make a table like the one below:

Novel	Screenplay

Now go ahead and read the first few pages of chapter eight, in which Coraline challenges the Other Mother to a game in an attempt to free her parents and the lost children.

Then read the extract from Henry Selick's screenplay on the next page, which deals with the same scene.

As you read, use your table to record your ideas about the differences between the way each version works. Here are some questions to think about:

How are setting, dialogue and action conveyed?

How is character evoked?

What are the differences in layout?

Extract from Henry Selick's Coraline screenplay



INT.OTHER KITCHEN – NIGHT

Coraline pauses in the doorway.

CORALINE (V.O.)

(to herself)

Be strong, Coraline.

She sits at the kitchen table in her regular place, her back to the sink.

Tall Other Mother, humming happily, prepares a mushroom omelette and bacon. Fragrant cinnamon buns bake in the oven.

At the table's center, Coraline sees the box with her BUTTON EYES with needle and thread. A bead of sweat rolls down her forehead. As casually as she can, she asks:

CORALINE (CONT'D)

(anxious, trying to be cool)

Why don't we play ... a game? I know you like them.

The Tall Other Mother's button eyes FLASH.

TALL OTHER MOTHER

Everybody likes games.

CORALINE

(nods)

Uh huh.

Bacon sizzles and spits on the stove.

TALL OTHER MOTHER

What kind of game would it be?

CORALINE

An exploring game...a finding things game.

Other Mother tries to act disinterested, but her fingers drum with excitement.

OTHER MOTHER

And what is it you'd be finding, Coraline?

Coraline hesitates.

CORALINE

My real parents.

TALL OTHER MOTHER

(dismissive)

Too easy.

She folds the omelette over in the pan.

CORALINE

And, and the eyes of the ghost children.

Tall Other Mother smiles: now it's getting interesting.

TALL OTHER MOTHER

Huh.

The meal ready, she turns from the stove and takes the food to Coraline.

TALL OTHER MOTHER (CONT'D)

What if you don't find them?

CORALINE

If I lose, I'll stay here with you forever and let you love me.

(indicates button box)

And I'll let you sew buttons into my eyes.

TALL OTHER MOTHER

Hmmm... And if you somehow win this game?

CORALINE

Then you let me go. You let everyone go – my real father and mother, the dead children, everyone you've trapped here.

The Tall Other Mother smiles a malicious not in a million years smile.

TALL OTHER MOTHER

Deal.

She holds out her hand. Coraline doesn't reach.

CORALINE

Not till you give me a clue.

Tall Other Mother snorts, her smile sours. She slowly circles Coraline, and speaks as if talking to a very stupid child.

TALL OTHER MOTHER

Oh, right... In each of three wonders I've made just for you, a ghost's eye is lost in plain sight.

CORALINE

And for my parents?

Tall Other Mother - standing behind her in front of the sink - smiles wickedly and just starts TAPPING HER BUTTON EYE with her finger nail. Coraline turns away from her.

CORALINE (CONT'D)

(shrugs)

Fine. Don't tell me...

Extending her hand, Coraline starts to turn back.

CORALINE (CONT'D)

...it's a deal—

But the Tall Other Mother HAS DISAPPEARED and the tapping now is the FAUCET DRIPPING in the sink.

Coraline EXHALES, walks to the sink, stares at the dripping faucet.

CORALINE (CONT'D)

What does she mean “wonders?”

Out the kitchen window, the FANTASTIC GARDEN LIGHTS UP, answering her question. She FURROWS HER BROWS, thinks this was too easy.

CORALINE (CONT'D)

Hmmm.

CUT TO:

EXT. OTHER GARDEN – SAME

Coraline walks through the gates. The bright magic of the garden is DARKER NOW, with areas of black against areas of glowing flowers.

Now watch this scene in the film, following the screenplay as you go. You should see a very close relationship!

Activity 2 – Questions



Does watching the scene help you work out why various parts of the screenplay are set out in different ways?

How does the screenplay offer instructions for the director?

Does watching the film help you understand terms like INT/EXT or V.O.?

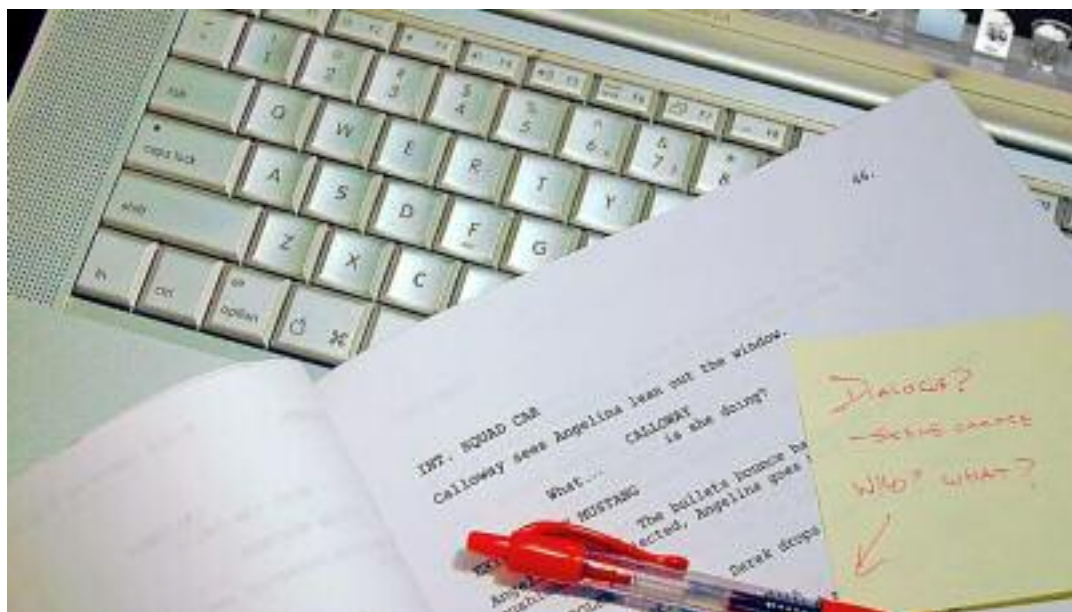
Be prepared to contribute your thoughts to class discussion!

Reading/Under
standing,
Analysing and
Evaluating: Eng
3-19a.
Listening and
Talking/Tools
for Listening
and Talking: Lit
3-02a.
Listening and
Talking/Finding
and Using
Information: Lit
3-04a

Activity 3 – Screenwriting format

CfE

Reading/Tools
for Reading: Lit
3-13a.
Reading/Findin
g and Using
Information: Lit
3-14a.



In this activity, you are going to use your screenplay extract, along with the support sheet “Screenplay Format” to learn about screenplay terminology and layout. You have two things to do:

1. Skim and scan the support sheet to find information on the screenplay features in the box below.

CHARACTER NAME
DIALOGUE
SLUGLINE

ACTION
SHOT
PARENTHETICAL

Now, write a short definition of each in your own words.

2. Highlight/underline and annotate your screenplay extract to show examples of as many of them as you can.

For example:

CORALINE
And for my parents?

character name –
always shown in
capitals

Activity 4 – Over to you

Now that you've learned about how a screenplay is written, and how it can be adapted from a novel, it's time to give it a try!

Choose a short scene from *Coraline* – around 2 pages would be about right – and write your own adapted screenplay!

Remember to follow the advice on your support sheet, and to stick to the conventions you've learned about.

The films below are the winners of the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay from 2005 to 2009.

Who knows – if you stick at it, you could be picking one up in a few years!



CfE

Writing/Enjoyment and Choice:
Lit3-20a.

Writing/Tools for Writing: Lit
3-24a.

Writing/Creating texts: Eng 3-27a, Eng 3-31a.

Support sheet – screenplay format

When screenplay writers are writing scripts to send to producers and agents, they need to follow the following screenplay formatting rules.

These rules tell them how to lay out everything in the script. This is so the script is easy to read. If it's difficult for someone to read, they're unlikely to read on, as they probably have a lot of scripts sent to them every day.

1. THE SLUGLINE

At the very start of a scene, you need to tell your reader three important things:

- Whether the action is inside (INTERIOR) or outside (EXTERIOR)
- Where the action is taking place
- What time of day it is

All these three pieces of information are contained in one line. This line is known as the Slugline.

For example, if we want to write a scene which takes place indoors in a bar at night, the slugline would look like this:

INT. BAR - NIGHT

SUPER can also be used to denote superimposed information, such as:

SUPER: "Three years later"

If in doubt, always begin sluglines with INT. or EXT. and end with DAY or NIGHT, unless a special time of day is dramatically essential, i.e. two lovers watching the sun rise: EXT. BEACH - SUNRISE.

2. THE SHOT

A shot must not be confused with a slugline even though it appears in capital letters in a similar format. A shot focuses the reader's attention on something specific within the scene, such as a person or object.

For example:

ANGLE ON JACK, CLOSE UP ON GUN or JACK'S POV. Sometimes screenwriters use a shot to draw attention to something, then follow this with a little description and then write BACK TO SCENE and continue the main scene action.

3. THE ACTION

This appears immediately after your slugline, is preceded by one blank line and runs from left to right margin, spanning the full width of the text on the page.

The action is a very short description of the characters and the surroundings. It should describe, very briefly, what is going on as the scene opens.

When writing action, try to write in small paragraphs, no more than four or five lines per paragraph, then double-spacing to the next paragraph.

4. CHARACTER NAME

This appears in capitals, toward the centre of the page.

5. DIALOGUE

This appears tabbed between the left margin (where sluglines and action are) and the character name margin.

Writing good dialogue isn't always easy. New scriptwriters tend to write way too much dialogue. Keep it realistic – people don't always say that much!

Your dialogue should reflect the personality of each character and give an insight into them. Make it sound real and conversational, so that the audience feels like a fly on the wall.

People rarely say exactly what they mean. There is always subtext. Indicate the truth and let the audience read between the lines. This is far more interesting than being told outright what to think. If a character reacts unusually aggressively to a seemingly innocent comment from another character, the audience will immediately try to read between the lines. The key is to make the audience think where possible rather than handing everything to them on a plate. Sometimes you don't even need dialogue – think about how you could express something visually instead.

6. PARENTHETICAL

Parentheticals appear left indented (not centred) within brackets beneath the character name and are used to express an attitude for the actor who is speaking, e.g., upset, crying, laughing, irritated, angry, etc. Parentheticals should be short, to the point, descriptive, and only used when absolutely necessary.

Storyboarding

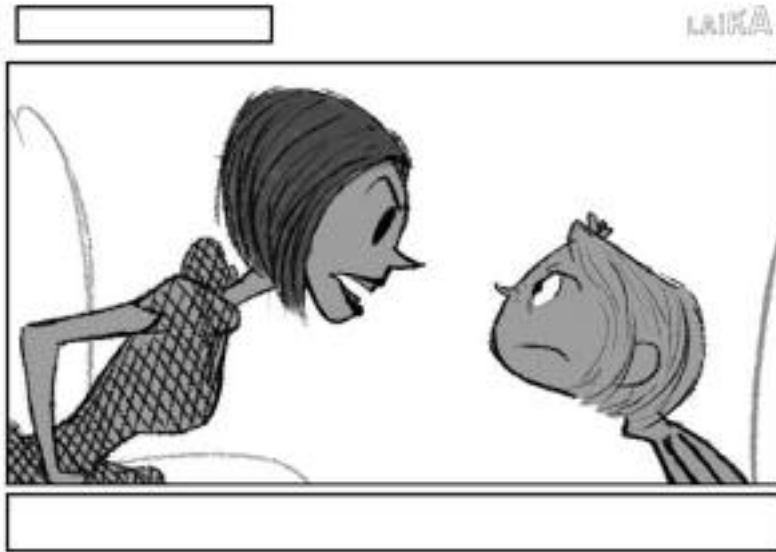


image from Graham Annable - gricklethings.blogspot.com

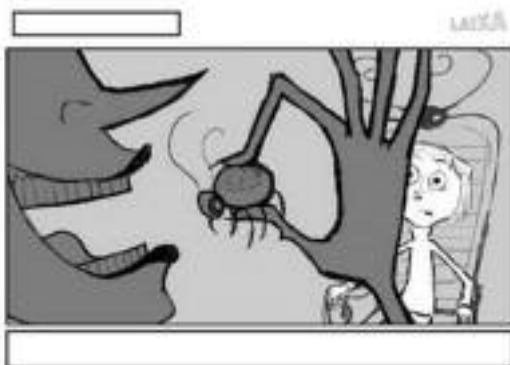
Now that you've written a screenplay for your chosen scene, the next stage is to prepare a storyboard.

Storyboards are sequences of illustrations – almost like comics – which provide a visual layout of events as they are to be seen through the camera lens.

They are made before filming to help the director and cinematographer visualise the scene.

The illustrations can be accompanied by notes on dialogue and the type of camera shot required.

Here is an example from a Coraline storyboard by Graham Annable, along with an extract from the screenplay.



OTHER MOTHER

They're Cocoa Beetles from Zanzibar.

Coraline is disgusted. The Other Mother takes back the dish and BITES OFF THE HEAD OF ONE.

Activity 5 - Think and discuss

What extra information does the storyboard add to the screenplay?

How would you describe how the frame is composed?

CfE

(Listening and Talking – Tools for Listening and Talking: Lit 3-02a. Reading – Understanding, Analysing and Evaluating: Eng 3-17a)

Activity 6 – Adding Production Notes

Below is another screenplay extract – this time of the moment just before Coraline is thrown behind the mirror. The storyboard for part of this scene is over the page. Can you add production notes on camera shots and any dialogue or sound effects? (the sequence is really one long zoom, of course, but try to identify each shot individually – use your AFI notes to help you)

The other mother STRAIGHTENS. Her button eyes, now DEAD, stare into Coraline's.

OTHER MOTHER

Apologise at once, Coraline!

CORALINE

No,

OTHER MOTHER

(tensely)

I'll give you to the count of three.

One...

Then she stands up, GROWING TALLER.

OTHER MOTHER

...two...

She grows TALLER STILL and SCARIER like a super model on steroids,

TALL OTHER MOTHER

...THREE...

This TALL OTHER MOTHER GRABS Coraline by her NOSE and DRAGS her to the hallway.

CORALINE

Ow, what are you doing!

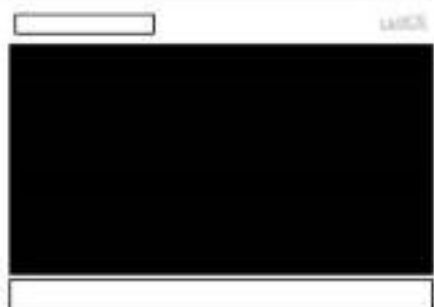
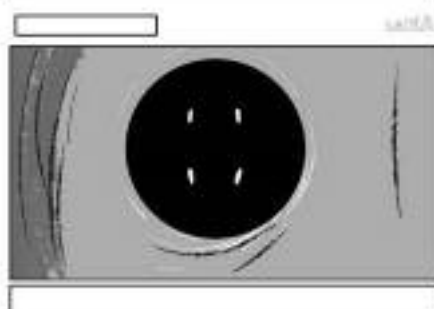
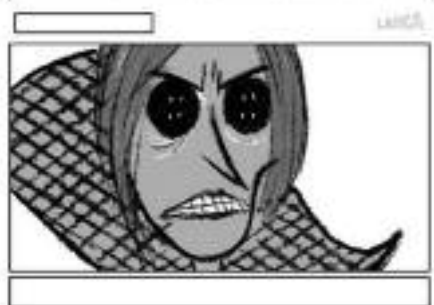
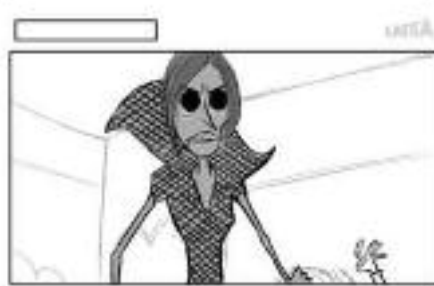
INT. OTHER HOUSE HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

She PULLS Coraline down the hallway to the mirror at the end. Coraline flails at the Tall Other Mother with her fists.

CORALINE

Ow, that hurts!

Writing – Creating Texts: Eng 3-31a



Activity 7 – your turn!

Now go back to the screenplay you wrote for your chosen scene from Coraline and try storyboarding it.

There is a template to use over the page.

Think about:

- what would actually be shown on screen at each moment.
- adding a description to complement the image.
- which camera shot would be most effective.
- whether you want to indicate camera movement such as zoom, pan or tilt.
- what dialogue or SFX would accompany each panel.

And remember – the quality of your artwork isn't a factor with storyboards – what's important is that you make your ideas clear!

Good Luck!

Project: Coraline

Scene: _____

