

The Hate U Give

(Tillman Jr. USA, 2018)

Component 1

Core study areas: Film form and contexts

Additional study areas: Specialist writing

Rationale for study: *The Hate U Give* is a contemporary film for a timeless issue – racial profiling and discrimination. The film is a shocking, energising and insightful look at modern America that will outrage and move spectators. *The Hate U Give* alludes to the Black Lives Matter movement and explores the issue of police brutality through evocative performances, recognisable characters and situations, interesting use of cinematography and *mise-en-scène*, and an engaging soundtrack.

Starting points – useful sequences and timings

- Starr introduces us to her family and local area: 00:03:09 – 00:06:41
- Kalil is shot by the police: 00:25:14 – 00:29:08
- The protest and Starr: 01:45:37 – 01:55:10

Core study areas 1: Key elements of film form (micro features)

Cinematography

- Light and colour are used to establish mood and tone. Garden Heights is established as a welcoming place using rising sunlight which is golden and warm. By contrast, the establishing shot of Williamson School is blue and grey, suggesting a coldness that emphasises Starr's general lack of comfort in the school.
- Throughout the film, shot sizes and angles are conventional, suggesting relative power or

relationships. People who are close are framed together, the angles of which suggest power. This is particularly evident with Starr, such as when she confronts Hailey and later in the film when she addresses the crowd about what really happened to Kalil. Camera movement follows the protagonist and the action on screen.

Mise-en-scène



Image by AF archive / Alamy Stock Photo

- A significant aspect of *mise-en-scène* is the difference between Garden Heights and other locations in the film. Starr's home life and local area are presented in a warm, comforting glow, although they are also depicted as generally 'normal', recognisable and sometimes 'run down'.
- The house designs are more prosaic than other areas. Stores and restaurants lack frills and expensive materials, and the general production design of Garden Heights is unshowy, lacking pretension and generally unremarkable.
- By contrast, Starr's school, Williamson Prep, is made up of glass and shining materials that look new and well-looked after. It also features large, bright, open spaces that lack personality or comfort for Starr, and therefore the audience,

as the sterile nature creates a sense of alienation or coldness. The exception to this is the protest/riot which takes place in Garden Heights, where the previous warmth and comfort of the area is amplified to the point where it is literally on fire. This mirrors the emotions of the local citizens and symbolises the destructive nature of anger.

Editing

- The editing is functional and creates a consistent pace to scenes which are dominated by dialogue. However, there are several instances of montage that help establish locations or movement to and/or from locations.
- There are also several instances of slow motion throughout the film, often where Starr interjects via voice-over to explain key information. Here, the filmmaker removes diegetic sound and slows down the frame rate so that things appear much slower than usual, creating an almost dream-like aura.
- The pace increases somewhat during some of the final scenes but doesn't rush through moments. In some scenes it allows the audience to linger on details and specific information or, crucially, to consider the thematic ideas being presented.

Sound

- As typical for an adaptation from a novel, the film employs a voice-over. This allows us to appreciate some of Starr's internal conflicts and allows her to provide exposition/backstory. It also allows Starr to explore and discuss out loud any thematic issues and questions for the audience to consider.
- Throughout the film there is an unobtrusive score which underlines the main emotional beats of the film. The soundtrack features predominately contemporary hip-hop tracks and also classic tracks from 2Pac, who is a key influence on the film and on the novel's author, Angie Thomas.
- The lack of other diegetic sound in some scenes where Starr narrates allows the audience to focus on her words and makes them privy to Starr's emotions, enabling the audience to understand how she feels.

Core study areas 2: Contexts

Social

- *The Hate U Give* is an adaptation of a 2017 young adult novel by Angie Thomas. It is Thomas' debut novel and was expanded from a short story she wrote in college. The short story was a personal reaction to the police shooting of Oscar Grant and stemmed from Thomas' belief that there was a lack of literature dealing with issues that affected young black American people.
- The narrator of the book and the film is 16-year-old Starr Carter, who attends an elite school in a predominantly white, affluent part of the city but who lives and grew up in a poorer area. Mirroring other instances of young black people being the victims of police brutality and hate-crimes, Starr witnesses a white police officer shoot and kill her childhood friend, Khalil. Starr speaks up about the shooting, and tensions over the incident culminate in a riot after the police officer is not indicted for the shooting.
- In covering issues of race and racial inequality, the novel and film attempt to expand readers' understanding of the Black Lives Matter movement, the difficulties faced by black Americans who employ 'code switching' and the prevalence of gun crime. As a result, the book faced significant controversy upon release, but was a commercial success and won several awards.

Cultural

- Author Angie Thomas cites 2Pac Shakur as an important influence on her life. Even the title is derived from 2Pac's tattoo 'THUG' which was an acronym for 'The Hate U Give'. The film uses 2Pac's music and the positive messaging within it and is the basis for the conversation between Khalil and Starr before his murder as a way of reinforcing that the two are simply enjoying each other's company and discussing their differing tastes in hip-hop.
- Starr's footwear of choice are Nike Air Jordans, a popular trainer that has specific connotations of being a 'sneakerhead' – someone who collects and enjoys sneaker-culture. They are shown in the film several times and even referred to by

a character early in the film. Those who have a similar passion will respond positively to the inclusion of Starr wearing Jordan 11s to school and the shared interest of Jordans held by the students at Garden Heights and Williamson Prep.

Political

- The murder of black Americans by police officers is an issue which has plagued the USA, and the increase in availability of cheap, accessible technology to record and share events easily via social media has significantly increased the profile of these killings. Most recently, the killing of George Floyd brought world-wide attention to the issue and saw protests across the globe, most notably in the USA where an estimated 450 separate protests took place.
- The film implicitly refers to the Black Lives Matter movement. This political movement first began in July 2013 with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media as a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting of teenager Trayvon Martin. The movement later gained national attention with demonstrations following the 2014 deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York City. Late in the film, a protest features that shares symbolic and literal comparisons to the BLM movement and acknowledges instances of civil unrest.

Institutional

- Adapted from the 2017 novel of the same name, *The Hate U Give* (or THUG) was author Angie Thomas' debut novel. As the novel was a critical and commercial success, the rights to the adaptation were snapped up and sold to Fox 2000, an independent branch of film studio 20th Century Fox.
- The film was shot and released quickly. Filming began in September 2017 and it was released just 13 months later, capitalising on the success of the novel. The production budget was \$23 million and it grossed approximately \$35 million at the worldwide box office. While it's suggested that the marketing costs meant that the film made a significant loss, this is slightly offset by the critical reception of the film which was universally positive.

Key sequence analysis

Introduction to Starr and her home and school life

00:03:18 – 00:13:14

Cinematography

- The house is bathed in warm, golden light. The light is soft and high key and creates a comforting and welcoming environment.
- Many shots in the house are medium-close-up to close-up, allowing us to see the warm, friendly smiles on faces and appreciate the affectionate eye-lines that show connections between the family members.
- The parents are mostly shown in two shots; placing them together in the scene reinforces their love and connection to each other. Outside, shots are much wider, helping to establish the core locations and general atmosphere.

Mise-en-scène

- Props such as the star lantern, photos of friends and Air Jordan 3 trainers all quickly establish Starr's age, interests and name.
- One or two parts of the local area look rundown, but overall, the area is designed to look very normal and recognisable, even unremarkable.
- The local high school is shot through a fence, connoting segregation and penitentiaries. As the family travel closer to the well-respected high school, the houses become larger and the area more affluent.

Editing

- Continuity editing is used to create a montage.
- We learn a lot in a short period of time, and the use of montage not only shortens the journey to school but provides snippets of important aspects of Starr's home life, family and journey through Garden Heights.
- The continuity editing also ensures that the morning routine feels natural and relatable for the audience. We only see the key parts of the morning that may be part of our own regular morning routine.

Sound

- The first scene after the opening title begins with non-diegetic soundtrack of Kendrick Lamar's *DNA*, a song which celebrates, critiques and explores his and others' African American heritage and culture. It is an engaging song and appealing for the target audience; a thematic message of the song runs parallel with the film. However, the song is soon cut off and, after a short beat, is replaced by a (largely) instrumental version of *Hold On* by Pusha T. The song lyrically recalls the rappers' drug dealing past as we see that Garden Heights is somewhat controlled by the 'drug lord' king and open drug dealing.
- Starr's voice-over is crucial in this scene, providing detailed exposition and aligning the audience with her. It also reflects the way exposition is delivered in the novel. Similarly, the limited use of dialogue establishes the world and develops her character and relationships. We gain an insight into what Starr feels and believes about the people at school, such as her friends and boyfriend through her voice-over, and then we hear from them directly in limited dialogue.
- The combination of slow-motion scenes narrated by Starr with no other diegetic sound aligns the audience with Starr, rather than allowing others to 'speak for themselves' initially. It also keeps the audience focused with no distractions from possible foley or ambient sounds.