

Media Study

from *Gulliver's Travels*

Film Clips on Media  Smart DVD-ROM



READING 12B Evaluate the interactions of different techniques used in multilayered media.

From Page to Screen

In *Gulliver's Travels* Jonathan Swift achieved a rare feat—a novel that both entertains with its fantastic adventures and criticizes with its biting satire. In 1996 Charles Sturridge directed a TV miniseries version of Swift's popular novel. In this lesson, you'll view a clip from Gulliver's first voyage, to the island of Lilliput.

The Filmmakers' Challenge

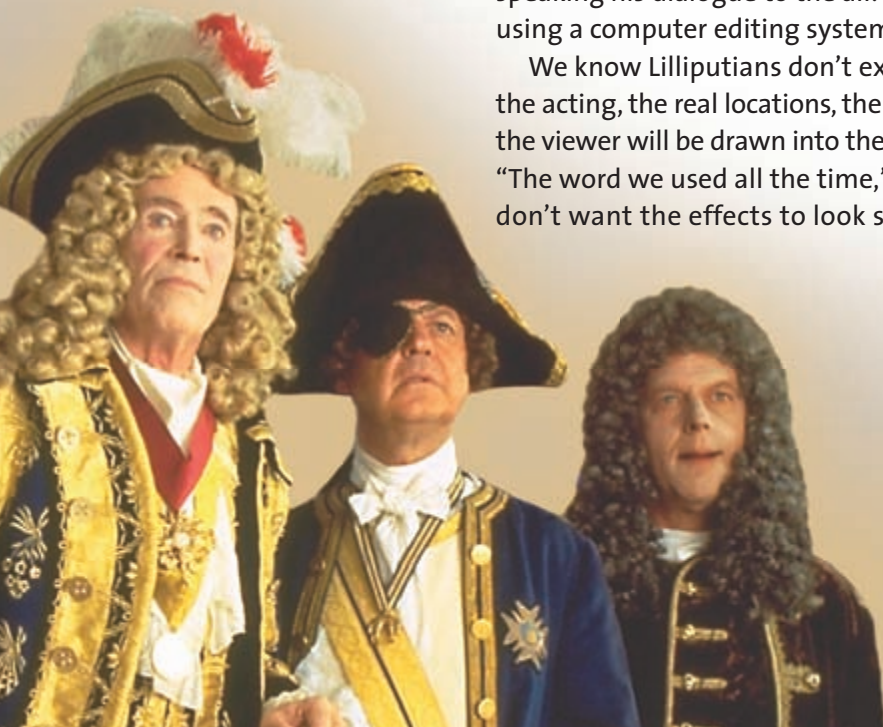
Adapting *Gulliver's Travels* to film was an ambitious undertaking. The incredible characters and fantastic world that sprang from Swift's imagination almost 300 years ago had to be re-created believably for the screen. To achieve this goal, the filmmakers used a wide array of special effects, from **computer-generated imagery**, filmed images created from computer graphics, to



Gulliver meets the Lilliputian emperor.

models, scaled-down copies of settings, creatures, and objects. The scene you'll view was filmed using **bluescreen** effects. It was filmed on two locations. The actors portraying Lilliputians were in a real palace in Portugal, and the actor portraying Gulliver was in a studio with brightly lit blue walls, ceiling, and floor, speaking his dialogue to the air. The two scenes were then merged into one, using a computer editing system.

We know Lilliputians don't exist. However, if the elements of the scene—the acting, the real locations, the bluescreen effects—are combined just right, the viewer will be drawn into the story as though the six-inch people were real. "The word we used all the time," says Sturridge, "was 'unspecial' effects. We don't want the effects to look special. We want them to look invisible."



Comparing Texts: Suspension of Disbelief

In order to enjoy any work of fiction, a reader or viewer suspends disbelief to accept the unreal as possible. Suspension of disbelief is made possible through realistic details, through the characters' convincing reactions to the unbelievable events, and through the tone of the text or film. We know we're dealing with fiction—it's "just a movie," or "just a book"—but if the details are presented correctly, we experience the story as though it were real.

Read the following passage from *Gulliver's Travels*. Compare the treatment of the Lilliputians in the text with the film clip's special effects. Note the details that cause you to suspend your disbelief and accept these little people as real.

In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left leg, which advancing gently forward over my breast, came almost up to my chin; when bending my eyes downwards as much as I could, I perceived it to be a human creature not six inches high, with a bow and arrow in his hands, and a quiver at his back. In the meantime, I felt at least forty more of the same kind (*as I conjectured*) following the first. I was in the utmost astonishment, and roared so loud, that they all ran back in a fright; and some of them, as I was afterwards told, were hurt with the falls they got by leaping from my sides upon the ground.

Viewing Guide

MediaSmart DVD-ROM

- **Film:** *Gulliver's Travels*
- **Director:** Charles Sturridge
- **Genre:** Fantasy adventure
- **Running Time:** 5 minutes

In the clip from *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver has been captured by the Lilliputians. They bring him to the palace to present him to the emperor. To critically analyze the clip, you may want to view it more than once.

NOW VIEW

CLOSE VIEWING: Media Analysis

1. **Analyze Special Effects** Describe what you think the director meant by "unspecial," invisible effects. Do you think the filmmakers achieved their goal in this scene?
2. **Evaluate Actor's Performance** This scene was filmed with the actor playing Gulliver acting alone in a blue room. Was he successful in convincing you that he was truly a part of the scene's setting? Explain.
3. **Compare Suspension of Disbelief** Compare the ways in which Swift's text and the film version allow you to suspend disbelief and accept the fantastic elements of the story. Think about the following:
 - the tone of Swift's writing and its translation to film
 - Gulliver's reactions to the impossible events
 - the details included in the text and film