

Media Study



READING 12A Evaluate how messages presented in media reflect social and cultural views in ways different from traditional texts.

12B Evaluate the interactions of different techniques used in multi-layered media. **12C** Evaluate how one issue or event is represented across various media to understand the notions of bias, audience and purpose. **12D** Evaluate changes in formality and tone across various media for different audiences and purposes.

from A History of Britain

Film Clips on Media Smart DVD-ROM

What brings HISTORY to life?

Judging only from the serene countenance displayed in Queen Victoria's portraits, one could characterize the Victorian age as a time of stability and high decorum. However, Victoria's image belied the supercharged reality of the Industrial Revolution, which by the latter years of her reign had irrevocably altered England's physical and social landscapes. In this lesson, you'll watch a documentary excerpt to examine how it depicts this complex period of **history**.

Background

Urban Sprawl By the mid-19th century, power-driven machines and factories had become widespread in England, leading to

changes in social patterns. As the production of goods shifted from the countryside to the cities, people flocked there in search of factory work. The population of England's most important city, London, exploded, and many other cities doubled, tripled, and even quadrupled in population.

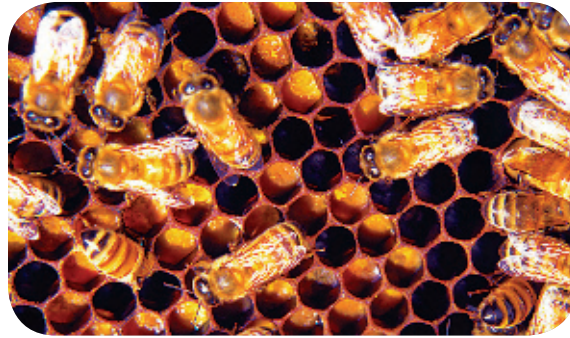
The city of Manchester became the leading example of the progress and price of industrialism. As French writer Alexis de Tocqueville described it, "From this filthy sewer pure gold flows." A leading manufacturer of textiles, Manchester generated fabulous profits. The factories required a large labor pool, but the housing and working conditions were abysmal. People crowded into tenements and row houses. Smoke belched from Manchester's factories and blackened its skies. Textile dyes and wastes polluted its nearby river.

The Industrial Revolution transformed not only Great Britain but the world. The results were so far-reaching that many of the period's technological innovations—factories, railway and canal systems, and shipping and steel industries—are global necessities in the 21st century.

A History of Britain is an acclaimed 15-part documentary that first aired on British television. It covers Britain's history from its earliest civilization to modern times. The clip you'll view is from the episode "Victoria and Her Sisters," which explores the impact of the Industrial Revolution and how writers of the day, such as Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, expressed discontent with industrialism and deep concern for the downtrodden working class.

Media Literacy: Documentary

A **documentary** is a nonfiction film that is often about social, political, or historical subjects. In recent years, historical documentaries have changed as filmmakers have adopted a more cinematic style of storytelling. They now combine conventional documentary features with stylistic devices.



ELEMENTS OF DOCUMENTARIES

Conventional Features of Documentaries

Visual

- Filmmakers create **footage**—unedited material as recorded by the camera. The footage often includes representative pieces of a time period, such as paintings, photographs, and writings.

Sound

- Voice-over narration**, or the voice of an unseen speaker, is heard as the footage plays.
- Music** might be from, or in some way reflect, the time period of the subject.

Contemporary Features of Documentaries

Visual

- Filmmakers apply camera techniques to still images. Moving the camera to **pan** across the subject or to **zoom** in closer reveals details.
- A **reenactment** is the re-creation of key events or settings. Such scenes are used to portray a time and to highlight the filmmakers' themes.
- Documentary filmmakers might include images in symbolic ways, to comment on the times.

Sound

- In today's documentaries, one narrator might deliver facts while actors portray the people of a time, reading real-life letters, diary entries, and so on. Using the historical figures' own words gives the portrayals a human dimension.
- As with feature films, a **musical score** helps to set the overall mood and to add drama.

STRATEGIES FOR VIEWING

To better appreciate a historical documentary, think about how it is constructed.

- Be aware of the filmmakers' desired effect. Ask: How might the filmmakers want me to feel or react?
- Determine the filmmakers' perspective. Notice in particular the tone of the voice-over narration. Ask: What point of view or message is conveyed? What subject matter do the reenactments depict? How does this footage emphasize certain themes or ideas?
- Examine the content. Ask: What's the whole story? What might be missing?

- **Film:** *A History of Britain*
- **Running time:** 4.5 minutes
- **Genre:** Documentary

Viewing Guide for A History of Britain

The clip describes the factory system in Manchester, England, and the writings of Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell and Thomas Carlyle. As you watch, consider how the documentary is constructed both to deliver and to dramatize the information. To help you analyze the clip, refer to these questions.

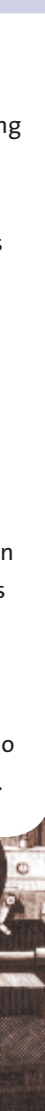
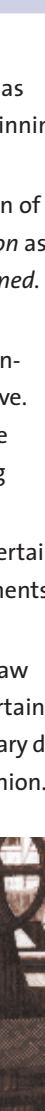
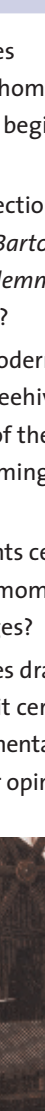
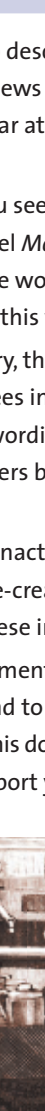
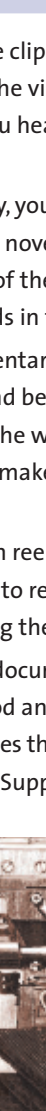
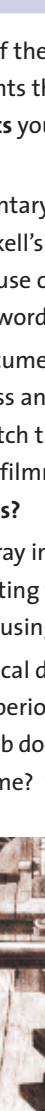
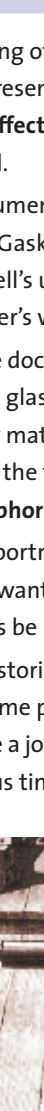
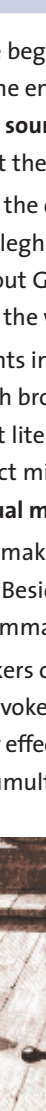
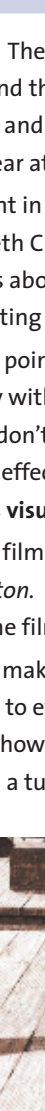
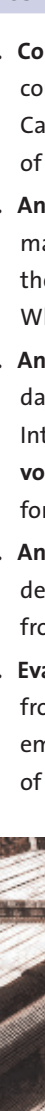
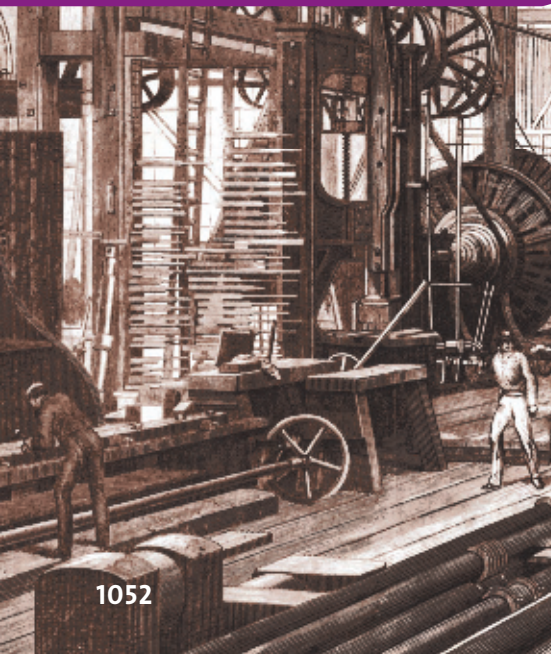
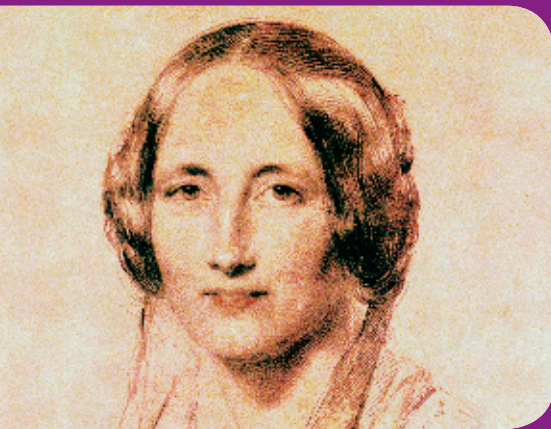
NOW VIEW

FIRST VIEWING: Comprehension

1. **Recall** What images in the modern-day footage look as though they could have been recorded in late 1800s?
2. **Clarify** What different kinds of voice-over do you hear in the clip?

CLOSE VIEWING: Media Literacy

3. **Compare Sound Techniques** The beginning of the clip describes conditions in Manchester, and the end presents the views of Thomas Carlyle. Compare the **music** and **sound effects** you hear at the beginning of the clip with what you hear at the end.
4. **Analyze Visuals** At one point in the documentary, you see a section of magnified text from Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton* as the voice-over narrator talks about Gaskell's use of the word *clemmed*. What is the effect of presenting the writer's words in this way?
5. **Analyze Symbols** At certain points in the documentary, the modern-day footage shows a factory with broken glass and bees in a beehive. Interestingly, these images don't literally match the wording of the **voice-over narration**. What effect might the filmmakers be aiming for in using these images as **visual metaphors**?
6. **Analyze Reenactments** The filmmakers portray in reenactments certain descriptions from *Mary Barton*. Besides wanting to re-create moments from the past, why might the filmmakers be using these images?
7. **Evaluate Documentary** The makers of historical documentaries draw from an array of techniques to evoke a time period and to elicit certain emotions. Based on the clip, how effective a job does this documentary do of putting you in touch with a tumultuous time? Support your opinion.



Write or Discuss

Summarize Perspective This documentary clip comes from a 15-part series praised as a work that “re-animates familiar tales and illuminates overlooked aspects of England’s past.” For the excerpt you’ve viewed, consider what perspective the filmmakers were trying to convey. Briefly summarize that perspective. Think about

- the tone of the statements in the voice-over narration
- what the symbolic images represent
- other stylistic devices used to comment on the effects of the Industrial Revolution

Produce Your Own Media

Create a Voice-over Script Consider that many documentaries attempt to capture viewers’ interest in the opening statements about what the documentary will cover. Choose a time period, from either the distant or recent past, that was marked by rapid and widespread change. In a page or two, create a **voice-over script** that introduces an imaginary documentary series.

HERE’S HOW Here are some suggestions for creating your script:

- Do research to characterize your time period accurately.
- Determine your perspective. Was the time period the best of times or the worst? Plan how to convey your views through the tone and pace of your delivery. Make sure to emphasize any dramatic details.
- Have a partner listen carefully as you read your voice-over script. Then have him or her summarize your information and comment on your delivery. If necessary, refine your tone or revise any part of the script that was difficult to follow.

Further Exploration

Explore Documentary Techniques The documentaries of Ken Burns are admired for their distinctive storytelling style. Burns is credited with reinventing the historical documentary. Such works as *The Civil War*, *Jazz*, and *Baseball* illustrate the signature techniques that have inspired a new generation of filmmakers. View these documentaries to find examples of the signature techniques—the distinctive camera techniques, the mixture of period and contemporary footage, and the emotionally effective voice-over and music.



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Media
Tools

THINK
central

Go to [thinkcentral.com](https://www.thinkcentral.com).

KEYWORD: HML12-1053

Tech Tip

If an audio recorder is available, record your voice-over.