



LESSON PLAN

MAPPING MELTON

Social Studies, Grades 3–8

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About TAMI's Melton Barker Juvenile Productions Collection

Throughout the twentieth century, so-called “itinerant filmmakers” traveled throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, visiting smaller cities and making a business out of the creation of local “stars.” These “town booster” or “home talent” films featured community landmarks, businesses and, most importantly, local residents. Many of these “itinerant” films did not feature a narrative structure; rather, the camera simply panned groups of school children, business owners, and factory workers. Other itinerant films, however, either concocted some sort of limited narrative, or mimicked popular Hollywood films and genres as a method through which to focus upon the local community. The local talent films, their premieres heralded and touted in the local print press, were then exhibited along with other short subjects before major theatrical features.

One of the most prolific itinerant film directors was Dallas native, Melton Barker. He and his company, Melton Barker Juvenile Productions, traveled all over the country – from Texas and New Mexico to North Carolina and Indiana – filming local children acting, singing, and dancing in two-reel films that Barker titled “Kidnappers Foil” (where a kidnapped child named “Betty Davis” is rescued by local youth) and *The Last Straw* (featuring a bank robber foiled by a group of children).

OBJECTIVE

Using archival footage, web resources, and geographic knowledge, students will understand the term “itinerant” and apply this knowledge to the creation of a map documenting key United States landforms and the travels of itinerant filmmaker, Melton Barker.

PROCESS

Prior Knowledge

Students should have a working knowledge of how to create a map and significant geographical features and regions of the United States.

If you plan to use Google Earth or similar technology, make sure students understand the basic software operation before beginning.

Hook

Ask the students if anyone knows what the word “itinerant” means; if not, have the students look up the term in a dictionary or in an online encyclopedia.



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Work with students to brainstorm synonyms for itinerant; these could include traveling, wandering, roaming, etc.

Group students into pairs and have each group brainstorm jobs that might require the workers to be itinerant. Ask the students to share examples of what they discuss with the class.

Show students the video, “Hugh V. Jamieson Interview at KERA”

https://texasarchive.org/2010_00481; ask them to take notes over the challenges itinerant filmmakers would face while traveling.

To summarize, have students discuss what challenges might exist for itinerant filmmakers, or other itinerant workers. Follow the question by asking if they see any benefits to traveling jobs.

Lesson

Using TAMI’s introduction to the Melton Barker Juvenile Productions Collection and the Melton Barker website, www.meltonbarker.org, explain to students that Melton Barker traveled around the United States filming the same “Kidnapper’s Foil” production in many different cities.

Ask students to consider why Melton Barker would have traveled to many towns to film the same production. Encourage students to consider what filming the same production would have meant in regards to props, costumes, the need to write “script,” etc. Ask them how filming the same film would be a benefit to a filmmaker? A detriment?

Choose one of the “Kidnapper’s Foil” films from the TAMI Video Library, <https://texasarchive.org/taxonomy/term/115722> and watch the film as a class.

While students are watching, have them create a timeline of key events in the story.

When they finish the film, have them use their timeline to write a brief summary of “Kidnapper’s Foil.” Ask students to share their summaries.

As a class, discuss what they thought about the film. What did they like about it? Not like about it? etc.

Now that they have seen the film, ask them if they have any additional ideas about why Melton Barker traveled to many different towns to film the same production.

Tell students they are going to create a map to document Melton Barker’s travels during his time as an itinerant filmmaker. Give each student a copy of a map of the United States or ensure that students have access to mapping software such as Google Earth. Have them use their books or the Internet to label or pin the following:

- Mississippi River



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- Rocky Mountains
- Pacific and Atlantic Oceans
- The Great Lakes

Use the Film Search page on the Melton Barker Web site, <http://www.meltonbarker.org/film-search/>, to select a list of additional locations where Melton Barker traveled that you would like to have your students map.

OPTIONAL: Have students label the cities with both their name and the date that Melton Barker visited them to film “Kidnapper’s Foil.”

When students have completed their maps, ask them to work with a partner to identify any patterns in the travels of Melton Barker.

Ask students to share their observations. You may want to ask the following questions to encourage discussion:

- How many states did he visit to film “Kidnapper’s Foil”?
- Were there states he visited more than others?
- Looking at the years he visited cities, is there a pattern to his travels?
- Why do you think he visited some states and not others?

Independent Practice

Have students use the locations and dates on the Film Search page on the Melton Barker Web site, <http://www.meltonbarker.org/film-search/>, to create a diary of his travels.

Ask them to act as Melton Barker and create 3-5 entries as he travels around the United States.

Share the following list of suggestions with your students regarding the content of their diary entries:

- A description of the film being made
- Discussion of what it was like to work with the young actors and actresses
- Notifying a town that he would be arriving to film
- Descriptions of landforms, cities, or scenery as he travels from one location to another
- Pictures of the filming or what he would see on his travels

Ask students to suggest any other ideas in a group brainstorm before they start writing.



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Encourage your students to be creative and to include specific details, including a description of what they saw in the “Kidnapper’s Foil” video.

OPTIONAL: Ask students to share their diary entries with the class and discuss similarities and differences.

Optional Learning Extensions

To encourage students to act as history detectives, ask them to complete any of the additional research activities suggested below.

Encourage students to research additional itinerant filmmakers and report their findings to the class.

Ask students to find additional information about Melton Barker and the films he created. Student discoveries could be written in a report or shared with the class in a formal presentation.

Have students use internet archives to find and share period newspaper articles about both the travels and productions of Melton Barker. (Barker would often print an announcement in a paper seeking talent prior to arriving to film.)

To add a drama extension into the classroom, students could research more information about the creation of the “Kidnapper’s Foil” film. They could then use this information to create their own class production of “Kidnapper’s Foil.”



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Videos



The Local Gang in “Kidnappers Foil”: Childress, TX, c. 1936

22:22

https://www.texasarchive.org/2006_00125



The Local Gang in “Kidnappers Foil”: San Marcos, TX, 1943

19:09

https://www.texasarchive.org/2006_00124



The Local Gang in “The Kidnappers Foil”: Childress, TX, 1948

17:26

https://www.texasarchive.org/2006_00126



Hugh V. Jamieson Interview at KERA

6:09

https://www.texasarchive.org/2010_00481

RESOURCES

Melton Barker and the “Kidnappers Foil,” <http://www.meltonbarker.org/>

National Film Preservation Board, <https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-film-preservation-board/about-this-program/>

National Film Preservation Association, <https://www.filmpreservation.org/>

TEKS

Social Studies, Grade 3

5A – Use cardinal and intermediate directions to locate places on maps and globes such as the Rocky Mountains, the Mississippi River, and Austin, Texas, in relation to the local community

5D – Create and interpret maps of places and regions that contain map elements, including a title, compass rose, legend, scale, and grid system

Social Studies, Grade 4

6A – Apply geographic tools, including grid systems, legends, symbols, scales, and compass roses, to construct and interpret maps



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Social Studies, Grade 5

6A – Apply geographic tools, including grid systems, legends, symbols, scales, and compass roses, to construct and interpret maps

6B – Translate geographic data into a variety of formats such as raw data to graphs and maps

Social Studies, Grade 6

3A – Pose and answer geographic questions, including: Where is it located? Why is it there? What is significant about its location?

4D – Identify and locate major physical and human geographic features such as landforms, water bodies, and urban centers of various places and regions

Social Studies, Grade 7

8A – Create and interpret thematic maps, graphs, charts, models, and databases representing various aspects of Texas during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries

STAAR

Social Studies, Grade 8

10B - Compare places and regions of the United States in terms of physical and human characteristics

29A - Differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States

29C - Organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps

30A - Use social studies terminology correctly