Gang Violence In Freedom Writers

The American film Freedom Writers, set in 1994 conveys the story of a dedicated but idealistic teacher determined to inspire and educate a class of hostile teenagers. The film depicts gang violence and the effects of this on involved families and adolescents, and through this explores themes of racial and ethnic conflict, education, acceptance, and leadership. The film's director Richard La Gravenese uses certain film techniques to enhance the telling of the story to the audience. These techniques prevalently include the use of camera angles and movements, an appropriate and well-implemented soundtrack, and the core editing of the film.

Camera angles and movements can have a substantial effect on the outcome of a scene, and this film uses camera techniques to frame and capture elements of the story in a way that will most enhance the experience of the audience. The first examples of filming techniques being used to create certain atmospheres for the audience occur during the introductory portion of the film. As Eva begins narrating, providing the audience with background knowledge, the movement of the camera is smooth and isolated from the events occurring; shortly into the beginning narration, however, Eva experiences a gang initiation, and during this the camera movements are shaky and disorientating with frequent cuts, conveying a sense or aggression and adrenaline to the audience. The gang members providing the initiation are shot from below, making them appear large and intimidating, while Eva is shot from below, enhancing her small and vulnerable appearance. A similar approach is taken during a later scene, in which the character Brandy is shown being beaten by her father, his larger physique being exaggerated by the camera angle used. Several powerful uses of camera techniques occur in the setting of Miss Gruwell's classroom, such as the wide panning angle used to encompass the whole classroom in one shot when the class breaks into a fight during Gruwell's first day of teaching; this scene directly contrasts to one seen later in the film, when Miss Gruwell introduces a 'line game' in order to improve her understanding of her students. During this game a close up panning shot is featured, slowly moving along the row of students and displaying their morose expressions, as well as their glances at each other. These scenes, the first displaying the ability of the class to quickly digress into violence, and the second their ability to find common ground and respect, are enhanced and made effective by the filming techniques used.

The soundtrack featured in this film consists heavily of hip hop and rap music popular during the time the film is set in, especially songs with lyrics or styles usually associated with certain demographics and ethnic groups. This music not only helps to establish and maintain the era of the film's events but subtly enhances the film by contributing to the atmosphere and temperament of scenes. In contrast to the music previously mentioned, softer music lacking in lyrics plays during meaningful or heartfelt scenes, which is especially powerful during shots that are emotive yet feature Miss Gruwell's students before they have begun to convey their thoughts and feelings to her. One example of this is again during the 'line game' scene, as the students first begin to show that they have the capacity to sympathise with and respect each other; soft music consisting primarily of the piano is used to convey a sombre atmosphere even as the students barely begin to trust each other enough to show what they consider to be emotions that would make them vulnerable. During one portion of the movie, music is used in coordination with a particular style of editing to draw the audience's attention to the similarities between two students belonging to different racial communities, Eva and Sindy, when they play

the same song in their respective houses.

The editing of this film is essential in constructing a coherent storyline and expertly used to tie together camera shots and music into a story in which each film technique is employed to compliment another. The editing of key scenes in this film determines the pace and structure to be enhanced through the use of other techniques optimised for providing the audience with a compelling story. One example of impressive editing is that used during the scene consisting of Eva and Sindy preparing to spend an afternoon with their respective friends. Shots of each character doing mundane things such as getting dressed and brushing hair in their own methodical ways are skillfully tied together in a way that emphasises the similarities they share.

Another example of editing that vitally enhanced a scene is during the one depicting miss Gruwell's proposed 'toast for change'. During this scene, numerous film techniques are adeptly brought together to convey to the audience the redemption and trust that the class and teacher are experiencing. No music or background sounds are featured, in contradiction to the rest of the film, which forces the audience to divert more attention to the characters' dialogue and expression. The scene is shot using slow panning camera movements at a single height, conveying the sense of calm and equality experienced in the classroom and allowing complete focus on the characters' emotional expressions as they react to each others' speeches. Lastly, editing is used in this film to create a sense of realism, enhancing it even for those that can not personally relate to the characters' experiences; this is done using actual news footage aired during the early 1990s, all depicting culturally-motivated violence and several featuring the well-known Rodney King riots.

These techniques employed by director Richard La Gravenese expertly illustrate the key themes of this film by improving the quality of storytelling and enhancing the characterisation and plot advancement. Camera techniques combined with a suitable soundtrack and skillful editing are used to provide the audience with a unique view into the characters' thoughts and feelings and instil feelings of sympathy, apprehension or significance when respectively relevant to the events of the film.