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“Cinemagicians, like Méliès!” workshop

Partnerships in France : Les Enfants de cinéma, Du cinéma plein mon cartable traveling cinema in Landes, Le Méliès cinema theatre in Grenoble.

Context: The special effects are as old as cinema itself. George Méliès, a French magician, is their father. In 1896, he accidentally discovered the same "stop trick". According to Méliès, his camera jammed while filming a street scene in Paris. When he screened the film, he found that the "stop trick" had caused a truck to turn into a hearse, pedestrians to change direction, and men turn into women. Méliès, the stage manager at the Theatre Robert-Houdin, was inspired to develop a series of more than 500 short films, between 1914, in the process developing or inventing such techniques as multiple exposures, time-lapse photography, dissolves, and hand painted colour. Because of his ability to seemingly manipulate and transform reality with the cinematograph, the prolific Méliès is sometimes referred to as the "Cinemagician." His most famous film, *Le Voyage dans la lune* (1902), a whimsical parody of Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*, featured a combination of live action and animation, and also incorporated extensive miniature and matte painting work.

Activity Summary: We won't talk much about the surimpression, because it's too complicated to organize with little technical means, as well as the crossfading succession which requires the use of a computer. First of Méliès' special effect, it allows an unlimited variation: transformation, disappearance, appearance, displacements...

Target Audience: 25 persons (children, young people or adults).

Resources:

- A digital or film camera
- A tripod
- A computer
- A screen or a white wall for the projection
- A big object

Film link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlQw1F5Nzzk>

Details of the activity:

1) Watching

First, you need to watch *A trip to the moon* by George Méliès and analyze it, especially the special effects.

2) Shooting

Now, it's time to be yourself a cinemagician!

For the special effects by substitution or appearance/disappearance, here are some examples with, each time, the camera on tripod:

- You can film an empty seat, and then stop the recording, without moving the seat, and ask children to sit, and then start the recording again, until the last child, and finish by filming the empty seat again. Watch the film from the beginning: The children appear and disappear each.

Variations :

- The magician: Give a magic wand (in our case, a ruler) and ask the child to cast a spell to the empty seat in front of him and not to move. Stop the recording and make the child sit and then start the recording again.
- Hide and seek: You need to put in the middle of the frame an object large enough to hide a child (an armchair, a sheet, etc.). You film the child leaving from the edge of the frame until he arrives behind the object. Then you stop the recording and ask another child to leave the hiding place to go to the other edge of the frame. Watch the film from the beginning: the children transform themselves while going behind the object.

Other Méliès' special effects :

- Playing with the depth of field: When someone is close to the camera, he seems tall. Conversely, when he is far, he seems to be small. The possibilities of special effects are huge.
- The example of « the finger punch »: A child is close to the camera in front of a table, another one in front of him, but at the end of the table. The tall one looks down, the small one just a bit up. The tall one stretched his finger in front of him and the smaller one acts as if he had a punch on the head...
- Film the other way round: Ask the child to drop a pen, and then open and close several times his hands. Watch it: after some magic spells, the pen comes back in the child's name, another. Variation: A child raises his arms for victory and then let them drop. While watching, it seems that the child stands up by the force of his arms.
- Camera vertically: For this exercise, your camera/phone has to be on a tripod. You need to put the camera on a wall in a way that we have the feeling that the wall is the floor. Ask a child to stand on the wall and fake some press-ups with two hands, then one, and with none.

3) Discovering the films all together

Then, all together, we can discover the work done. What works? What doesn't?

What's distinctive / innovative?

- To learn film terms and about the history of cinema
- To understand how the special effects work
- To work as a group

What were you hoping the impact would be?

- Creativity
- Group work