

WALL•E, directed by Andrew Stanton



TYPE OF TEXT: FILM

ORIGIN: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Text synopsis

Some people consume far more than they need, while others have little to live on. *WALL•E* is an animated film that questions unconstrained consumption. It makes a powerful statement about the need to live sustainably so the needs of future generations will not be compromised.

WALL•E is about a future Earth that is covered in garbage. Humanity has fled into space, and Buy N Large, the corporation that made the products littering the earth, has built robots to clean the planet.

Through an accident, only one robot has remained active: WALL•E (waste allocation load lifter: Earth-class). This little robot goes about his impossible task of cleaning up a planet with quiet determination, collecting and compacting garbage, and recycling parts to keep himself functioning.

One day, EVE (extraterrestrial vegetation evaluator) arrives. EVE is a reconnaissance robot sent to find out if Earth can once again sustain life. She is a stunning robot (stunning in more ways than one), and WALL•E is enchanted and falls in love.

By coincidence, WALL•E has found a plant in the garbage, evidence that life is starting to appear again on Earth. Following her reconnaissance directives, EVE takes the plant. When a drone ship arrives to retrieve EVE and the plant, WALL•E hitches a ride to the *Axiom*, the spaceship where the people from Earth have sheltered for over seven hundred years.

The inhabitants of the *Axiom* are obsessed with aimless consumption and spend their lives in hover chairs. After so many generations spent consuming too much and not moving, they have become obese, and the microgravity of the spaceship has caused them to evolve so that their bones have almost disappeared. The bone loss makes movement difficult, which is why they spend their days in hover chairs.

In his efforts to protect EVE, WALL•E unleashes a robot mutiny and stimulates Captain B McCrea to order a return to Earth, where it is now possible to live once again. AUTO, the ship’s autopilot system that shares characteristics with the rogue HAL 9000 computer in Stanley Kubrick’s film 2001: *A Space Odyssey* resists this order.

WALL•E is damaged in the battle to save the plant, but a quick chip replacement and refit, and finally a kiss from EVE, re-energises him. While Earth still looks very barren, the humans learn how to plant and grow crops. Gradually, the planet begins to heal.

The closing credits use different historical art styles to show the earth healing and repopulating.

Links to Australian Curriculum: English at Years 7/8

Language	Literature	Literacy
Language variation and change Language for interaction Text structure and organisation	Literature and context Responding to literature Examining literature Creating literature	Texts in context Interpreting, analysing and evaluating

Cross-curriculum priority links	General capability links
Sustainability	Literacy Information and communication technology (ICT) capability Critical and creative thinking Personal and social capability Ethical behaviour



Features to consider

When you read or view a text, it is important to consider when and where the text was created (its background and context), and how the text is structured. These features help your understanding and analysis, and lead to a more informed evaluation and response.

When watching a film, a multimodal text that combines images, print, sound and spoken text, there are more features to consider, including other texts that have influenced the director and the cinematic techniques that are used.

Background and context

Animation has not always been as popular and successful as it is today. Pixar Animation Studios is behind some of the most successful animation films in cinema history, including *WALL•E*, but in the early 1980s it was just a small computer graphics organisation. Then, Steve Jobs, who had left Apple for a time, bought Pixar in 1985. Jobs built a truly creative team at Pixar so that when he finally sold Pixar to Disney in 2006 it was an internationally famous studio.

The concept for *WALL•E* began in 1994. Pixar was about to release *Toy Story*, and the Pixar team of Andrew Stanton, John Lasseter, Pete Docter and Joe Ranft organised a lunch meeting to consider new projects. At the meeting, Stanton asked, ‘What if mankind had to leave Earth and somebody forgot to turn off the last robot?’ and *WALL•E*, which had the working title of *Trash Planet*, was born. From the same meeting also came ideas for *A Bug’s Life*; *Monsters, Inc.*; and *Finding Nemo*—so it was a productive meeting by any standards!

Once released, the film went on to win many awards, including an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for the best animated feature film, and a BAFTA award for the best animated film. It also won the 2009 Hugo award for best long-form dramatic presentation; the Hugos are awards for science fiction. *WALL•E* is the first Pixar film to be nominated for six Academy Awards.

Text structure

The film about a little robot called *WALL•E* and the fate of humanity is set in 2805 AD on a denuded and desolated Earth that is littered with waste.

The story unfolds in a chronological order in three acts. Films often employ a three-act structure—a beginning, a middle and an ending. The beginning act is often used to introduce characters and set the scene; the middle act adds a complication; the final act resolves the issues. This neat structure, employed by many scriptwriters, links the introduction, complication and resolution.

In *WALL•E*, viewers are introduced to the main character and the devastated Earth in the early part of the film. We follow the robot around and see his daily life.

Then a complication is introduced: EVE arrives and *WALL•E* falls madly in love with her. He is ready to do anything to win her, including hitching a ride to the spaceship. The second act ends with *WALL•E* in crisis and about to be crushed in a garbage chute.

The last act contains the resolution. WALL•E's robot rebellion is having an effect, and he manages to save the last plant found on Earth. He gets the spaceship *Axiom* heading in the right direction back to Earth, wins EVE's heart and brings humanity back to its beginnings.

Interpret, analyse, evaluate

Of the many elements that go into making a film, setting and characterisation are among the most important. *WALL•E* is an animated science-fiction film and a romantic comedy with a strong focus on characterisation; it manages to make its lead character, a robot who cannot speak, lovable and human.

Characterisation

The film uses sound instead of dialogue; yet, WALL•E is an endearing character, a jaunty robot who never loses his optimism and willingness to keep trying.

WALL•E displays many human characteristics. He is industrious, inquisitive, practical, inventive and tenacious. The filmmaker demonstrates these qualities in WALL•E's character by showing you how he has managed to maintain and repair himself by salvaging parts from other broken-down robots. WALL•E's appearance is worn and boxlike. His big eyes are deliberately designed to look like binoculars, and the zoom lenses make him childlike and appealing. The camera focuses very much on WALL•E and his adventures as he tries to tidy up the world and prove that it is able to sustain life.

When EVE arrives, WALL•E progresses from loneliness to love, and his love is the trigger for a hitchhiker space-chase as he follows EVE back to the *Axiom*. WALL•E is a hero whose tale of love and renewal sits equally alongside the issue of environmental sustainability.

The vivid characterisation in *WALL•E* helps to drive the plot. Characters like WALL•E and EVE also inspire with their courage and tenacity.

By the way, the dot between 'WALL' and 'E' is called an interpunct. It was used by the Romans to separate words in the classical Latin language before spaces were used to separate words.

Intertextuality

The film delights in playful references to many other texts. Such references to other texts are known as 'intertextuality', where a writer or filmmaker borrows or transforms part of a work by someone else, or refers to other works using images or allusions. References to older or more familiar works can help you to understand a new text. You do not have to understand all the references to enjoy a text, but it can enrich your appreciation when you do.

WALL•E pays homage (tribute) to other texts, including films such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Star Wars*, books such as *Robinson Crusoe*, and brands such as Apple.

The late Apple guru Steve Jobs also owned Pixar when *WALL•E* was made, and the film contains many sly and humorous references to Apple. When Apple computers boot up, they make a characteristic sound, and the same sound is heard when WALL•E is fully charged by the sun. EVE's sleek design mimics some of the features of the iPod, and so it should; it was co-designed by Apple's Jonathan Ive, the man responsible for the iPod's design.

Other references and allusions abound. WALL•E, a lonely robot on a deserted Earth, is an obvious echo of *Robinson Crusoe*, a lonely man on an isolated, desert island. Instead of Crusoe

rescuing Man Friday (a captive of cannibals), WALL•E leaves earth to rescue EVE when she is shut down and taken back to the spaceship.

AUTO, the ship's autopilot, shares traits with HAL 9000, the onboard computer in 2001: *A Space Odyssey* that goes mad and kills some of the crew.

Another link to 2001: *A Space Odyssey* is Richard Strauss's composition 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'. In Kubrick's film, this music plays in the scene when an ape-man flings a bone high into the sky. The bone then spirals into a spaceship and the scene symbolises humanity's evolution. The same music plays, just as symbolically, in the moment when Captain B McCrea stands for the first time.

Sound as dialogue

The early part of the film has no spoken dialogue. Instead, the first forty minutes is filled with a wonderful array of sounds.

Although without words, WALL•E's sounds clearly communicate his emotions and thoughts to his cockroach friend. When EVE arrives, she and WALL•E communicate through gesture and sound. As he looks at EVE, WALL•E's clicks and whirrs end on an uplifted note, indicating his interest in her and suggesting a wistful questioning. EVE's sleek sounds rebuff his fumbling interest. The two robots' sounds are quite different. EVE has a more musical and synthetic sound, while WALL•E has a buzzing resonance.

Renowned sound designer Ben Burt recorded thousands of sounds for the film. The sound of EVE's laser gun was achieved by hitting coiled wire. Pulling a bag across carpet generated sounds of wind, and a thunder sheet provided a tempest.

The scarcity of dialogue means that *WALL•E*, much like the Mr Bean films, can be understood in many cultures.

Themes

WALL•E has an environmental message encased in a love story. The film shows you how the balance of our world can be disrupted. For human society to live sustainably means that people should meet their needs without compromising the needs of future generations. The representation of the Earth as a grimy, brown shell is a message that says if humanity fails to live sustainably we will reduce a diverse and vibrant planet to an uninhabitable dustbowl.

The drone-like people on the *Axiom* are thoughtless and reduced to aimless consumption—merely eating and drinking and consuming. Their placid acceptance of a directionless life contrasts with WALL•E's efforts to restore the planet. He is the catalyst that gets them moving and thinking again.

Through the actions of a little robot, the film demonstrates what humanity needs to do to live sustainably. WALL•E's love for EVE and his attempts to protect her have parallels in the love and protection required to preserve the planet.

At the end of the film when people return to Earth, the credits listing those responsible for the production of the film are placed on a series of slides that show people planting crops and working together to revive the Earth. These slides show colour returning to the once brown planet. They also show the people collaborating and committed, ending the film on a hopeful note that the lesson can be learnt.

Text extract

Considering a selected extract of a text in more detail can assist you to better understand the text as a whole.

These two film stills are from different times in the film. The first shows WALL•E at the start of the film, going about his job collecting, compacting and stacking garbage. The second from towards the end of the film shows the sleek robot EVE and Captain B McCrea in some disarray as they battle AUTO and try to save the plant from destruction.



At the start of the film, WALL•E works alone on a desolated Earth.



Captain B McCrea, EVE and AUTO are on the bridge of the *Axiom*.

Features to consider in this extract

The two stills highlight two vital and interconnected areas in this film—setting and characterisation.

Setting

In this first still, viewers are shown a devastated Earth, covered in piles of garbage waiting to be compacted into towers, with dust and haze everywhere. Here, the use of colour is significant. The animators have used shades of brown and faded yellows. Greens and blues, the colours we associate with life, are missing from the colour palette. When WALL•E does find a living plant in this desolation, its frail green is immediately obvious and seems very precious.

In this bleak setting, WALL•E is hard at work. His isolation and loneliness are portrayed in how small and alone he looks among the rubbish piles.

Characterisation

The way the animators have drawn the three characters in the second still provides many clues about them.

Captain B McCrea is struggling to fit into his clothes. His uniform jacket is draped across his shoulders. Like all the other people on the *Axiom*, he has gained weight due to overconsumption and inactivity. The microgravity has affected his bones and made movement difficult. This still shows a look of surprise on his face; he is watching the precious plant he thought lost in the garage chute reappearing on top of WALL•E's head as WALL•E peers out of the chute.

In the background is the malevolent red lens of AUTO. AUTO's glowing red light strongly resembles the evil HAL 9000 of *2001: A Space Odyssey*; HAL 9000 was also portrayed using a glowing red lens. AUTO's shape—his white face and ship's wheel—also resembles a spider hanging and waiting to attack, which is what he does when the captain commands him to set course for Earth. The captain battles with AUTO to gain control of the spaceship.

By the scene from which this still is taken, EVE has changed from the cold and hostile robot of the early part of the film. Her sleek white form, reminiscent of an egg, remains the same, but her experiences with WALL•E have been a catalyst for an inner transformation. EVE now sees the wider implications of her directive to find evidence of life on earth. In this film still, EVE is still incapacitated by the red chain placed on her by AUTO; however, once free, she works with WALL•E to free humanity by showing them life is once again possible on Earth.

OVER TO YOU

1 Description

In **WALL•E**, the Earth's landscape has been dramatically destroyed by human greed, neglect and indifference. Such despoiled landscapes exist on Earth today—places that have been exploited and distorted by human activity.

- a Find images of damaged landscapes online.
- b Briefly describe what has happened to the landscape and what the consequences have been for the people (and animals) who live there.
- c Give your point of view about the landscape and the effects humans have had on it.

2 Interviewing characters

WALL•E has many wonderful characters for you to explore. Working in groups, list the main characters in the film and allocate one character to each group.

- a As a group, research the character by closely looking at how the character is represented in the film.
- b Rehearse a role-playing interview where one person in the group takes on the role of the character and the rest of the group asks the character relevant questions. Work as a group to script questions and answers to reveal what you have learnt about the character. Select a prop that helps to represent the character to the class.
- c Present your group's interview performance to the class. Once the scripted questions have been answered, invite the rest of the class to ask more. The end result should be that the whole class has a better understanding of the main characters.

3 Responding to the landscape

You move through many different landscapes every day, such as when you travel to school and after-school activities, and go to the supermarket with your parents. On your journeys you see a variety of landscapes.

Take a closer look at the environment around you and keep a diary for a week. Each day's diary entry should record sounds, sights and feelings about your landscape. Consider the colour, shape and texture of the landscape around you. Consider the difference the time of day, the time of year and the changing climate make to your observations. Also consider how people, including yourself, have affected the landscape.

Use your notes to create a slideshow presentation or blog that includes sounds, words and images, and reflects your response to the environment.

4 Writing a speech

WALL•E is a film with a warning message: if we do not look after the planet we live on, we will be the losers. Working with a partner, write a speech about an environmental issue you feel passionate about. It can be global warming, renewable energy, sustainable farming, recycling or plastic waste. Whatever issue you select, and whatever position you take, ensure you support your arguments with facts.

5 Panel debate

Professor Tim Flannery argues in his book *We Are the Weather Makers: The Story of Global Warming* that global warming must be addressed now or it will be too late. Al Gore, former vice-president of the United States of America and climate-change campaigner, has written a book and launched an iPad app on the choices people have to deal with global warming or ignore it. Other people, such as Lord Christopher Walter Monckton, are sceptical and dispute the science of climate change.

Assign roles to people in the class and stage a panel discussion or debate. In the discussion, real people—such as Flannery, Gore and Monckton—and fictional characters from the film—such as WALL•E and Captain B McCrea—argue about what we should do to preserve the Earth’s environment.

Before you begin, organise a planning and research session to discover the beliefs and arguments of the real people. Also, look closely at the film to establish any arguments the fictional characters might put forward.

6 Investigating an environmental initiative

Environmentalist Tim Silverwood is co-founder of Take 3—A Clean Beach Initiative, a non-profit organisation devoted to raising awareness of marine debris and reducing plastic waste in the ocean. In 2009, Tim began thinking about proactive ways in which the public could contribute to reducing the amount of waste entering the oceans and minimise harm to marine ecosystems. He collaborated with a group of surfers, beach-lovers and a marine biologist to form the non-profit organisation.

The Take 3 message is simple: take three pieces of rubbish when you leave the beach and you have made a difference.

What more can you find out about the Take 3 initiative and the work of Tim Silverwood? Visit the following websites and write a report for the class.

- a [Tim Silverwood’s website](#)
- b [Take 3 website](#)
- c [Algalita Marine Research Institute website](#)
- d [5 Gyres website](#)



Texts to take you further: sustainability

WALL•E shows you what can happen when the balance between human actions and the environment is lost, but many other texts also show the negative effects of environmental exploitation.

The Dream of the Thylacine by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks paints a picture of the extinction of a species.

Novels like Tim Winton's *Blueback* and *Lockie Leonard: Scumbuster* show you people who have lost the care, respect and responsibility required to sustain their environments. But these texts, like Rebecca Stead's *First Light* and Jackie French's *Walking the Boundaries*, also invite readers to share the growth of protagonists who come to understand the need for balance in the way humans interact with each other and the environment.

Many texts show the power of individual and community actions to improve the environment. Picture books like *One Small Island* by Alison Lester and Coral Tulloch and non-fiction texts like *We Are the Weather Makers: The Story of Global Warming* by Tim Flannery, and even iPad apps like Al Gore's *Our Choice*, encourage hope that environments can be preserved or restored.

In the film *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron, the Na'vi people on the planet Pandora live sustainably, meeting their present needs without compromising the needs of future generations. They face the threat of exploitation and annihilation with courage and creativity.

Films like Susan Beraza's *Bag It* show a response to the mountain of plastic we throw away every week. Initiatives like Tim Silverwood's *Take 3*, which encourages people to take three pieces of rubbish off the beach when they leave, illustrate how a small action done often by many people can have a profound effect.

Fiction

- Jackie French, *Walking the Boundaries*
- Ruth Park, *My Sister Sif*
- Gary Paulsen, *Hatchet*
- Rebecca Stead, *First Light*
- Tim Winton, *Blueback* and *Lockie Leonard: Scumbuster*

Non-fiction

- Tim Flannery, *We Are the Weather Makers: The Story of Global Warming*
- Tim Winton and Richard Woldendorp, *Down To Earth: Australian Landscapes*
- Tim Winton, *Land's Edge: A Coastal Memoir*

Film

- *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron
- *Bag It*, directed by Susan Beraza
- *Fly Away Home*, directed by Carroll Ballard
- *Happy Feet*, directed by George Miller and Warren Coleman
- *Into the Wild*, directed by Sean Penn
- *March of the Penguins*, directed by Luc Jacquet (documentary)

Television

- *Enough Rope*, Andrew Denton interviews Tim Winton
- *On a Wing and a Prayer*, ABC television (documentary on endangered cockatoos)

Poetry

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'
- Ted Hughes, 'The Jaguar', 'Hawk Roosting' and 'An Otter'
- Judith Wright, 'Platypus'

Picture book

- Alison Lester and Coral Tulloch, *One Small Island*
- Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks, *The Dream of the Thylacine and Fox*

Digital

- Al Gore, Our Choice (iPad app)

Initiatives

- Tim Silverwood, Take 3