

## Super8



Niveau

Collège /  
Lycée

### Super8

**A film directed by JJ Abrams**

Produced by Steven Spielberg

Paramount Pictures Amblin Entertainment / Bad Robot

Country of origin: USA

112 minutes

First shown in 2011

### Story

During the summer holidays of 1979, a group of kids from Lillian, Ohio, make a zombie movie for a film festival using a Super8 light camera. They write the scenario, dress up, play the parts, shoot on location. On a night they are filming outdoors, a spectacular train accident happens next to them. They escape the explosions but they feel something has escaped from the train that is threatening and alien. The air force intervenes very soon and the peace of their home city is badly disrupted. The abandoned camera has kept a record...

### Starring :

- **Joel Courtney** as Joseph "Joe" Lamb, the painter
- **Elle Fanning** as Alice Dainard
- **Kyle Chandler** as Jackson "Jack" Lamb Deputy Sheriff of Lillian, Ohio
- **Riley Griffiths** as Charles Kaznyk, writer and film director
- **Ryan Lee** as Cary the pyrotechnician
- **Ron Eldard** as Louis Dainard, Alice's father
- **Gabriel Basso** as Martin
- **Noah Emmerich** as Colonel Nelec of the US AirForce
- **David Gallagher** as Donny, Jen's boyfriend
- **Bruce Greenwood** as „Cooper“
- **Zach Mills** as Preston
- **Amanda Michalka** as Jen Kaznyk, Charles's big sister
- **Glynn Turman** as Dr. Woodward, science teacher
- **Michael Hitchcock** as Deputy Rosko
- **Caitriona Balfe** as Elizabeth Lamb, Joe's deceased mother, Deputy Lamb's wife
- **Joel McKinnon Miller** as Mr. Kaznyk, Charles's and Jen's father
- **Jessica Tuck** as Mrs. Kaznyk, Charles's and Jen's mother
- **Dan Castellaneta** as Izzy
- **Richard T. Jones** as Overmyer
- **Dale Dickey** as Edie

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super\\_8\\_%28film%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_8_%28film%29)

## INTRODUCTION

### Interest of the film

A nostalgic flashback to a time when children used neither the InterNet nor mobile phones, description of a working class city in Ohio, the making of a no budget amateur film with ambitions, children relationships with friends and adults, fathers and children, inspiring tale about how ordinary people react and cope when confronted with an improbable crisis situation, also a fable about misunderstandings when meeting with strangers, an inspiring tale of courage.

## ANALYSIS

### Suggestions for work in the classroom

You will find here CRDP de l'académie de Strasbourg documents related to the film that may be used in class for activities with pupils of Collège or Lycée, from Troisième or Seconde.

### The Story

The film plays on different genres, the family relationships drama, the memory of childhood in Smalltown America, an emotional love story, a celebration of the creativity of youngsters, the fan culture about horror film, a scary monster suspense, spectacular special effects, excellent very young and professional actors, and a happy end of the kind that reminds of Spielberg films.

### Scenario of the film

On the summer of 1979, five boys from the same neighbourhood in the fictional industrial town of Lilian, Ohio, who are fans of horrorfilms borrow a Super8 camera to make an original film after a scenario written by **Charles Kaznik**. Later they introduce **Alice Dainard** a girl to add spice to their story. **Joe Lamb** will do the scary makeup, **Cary** will play the murderous zombie, **Martin** will be Detective Hathaway and his wife played by **Alice** worried by her husband's dangerous job. **Preston** plays different parts.

Joe's mother died the winter before in a factory accident that her widowed husband **Jack** Lamb thinks was caused by **Louis Dainard**. Alice and Joe make friends and come in conflict with their fathers' issues, so they work at the film in secret.

On a night the film crew is shooting in an abandoned railway station, they witness a train derailment caused by a light truck which drove deliberately onto the tracks. The children escape the catastrophe safe but badly shaken. The surviving driver of the truck who happens to be **Dr. Woodward** their science teacher at school, he warns them not to tell anyone about what they saw. As the AirForce steps in soon the inhabitants of Lilian begin to experience that something unusual and definitely disquieting has happened in the accident....



## Who is it addressed to ?

Super8 is family entertainment and adventure featuring a group of kids interacting in a fantastic fiction adventure, the violence and scary bits are not overly exaggerated.

Children of collège age will identify with the characters, parents will be moved by the nostalgic journey to their own childhood, and to a time when flying saucers bringing disquieting creatures from outer space were a popular theme.

## Why study Super8 in class ?

American English dialogues with child actors that pupils can relate to, playing situations that they understand and are not overmuch violent.

The fantastic element provided by the alien being recalls films featuring similar situations that pupils know about and will like to discuss.

The recreation of a time not so long ago when many implements of the everyday life or today's kids were nonexistent will provide a basis for discussing the passing of time.

(in 1979 there were neither InterNet in homes nor portable phones, and using a precious camera to make your own films was a great thrill).

The picture of life of Smalltown America in 1979 will add to the knowledge of cultural background in language class.

The delicate balance between fact and fiction, reality and the illusion created by actors and cinema on different levels (the film in the film effect, actors playing actors) will also be of interest for pupils.

## What will you find in this folder ?

- a collection of links to InterNet websites related to the film Super8,
- posters announcing the film that you may use as teaser matter before viewing the film,
- different trailer videos bringing hints about the mystery film,
- the technical aspects of the Super8 film format,
- suggestions of activities to do in language class with pupils using different material from the film and its background.

## Before viewing the film

The title of the film :

what is Super 8 ? NOT the film itself, but the title refer to a particular film camera format used in 1979 by amateur filmmakers ?

technical features particular to this format will be important in the film to justify the title do a research (InterNet or Encyclopedia) on the Super8 format and its social importance in the 1960s and later (the film plays in 1979).

The subtitle of the film : Of friends cameras and monsters

SUPER 8 The film and the camera technicals

SUPER 8 technical features of significance to the film

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super\\_8\\_mm\\_film](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_8_mm_film)

1979 in \*Lillian, Ohio

amateur film by children

cassette of BW or colour film

soundtrack

about 2 to 3' film pro cassette

camera handheld with manually focussed teleobjective

picture can be unstable and jumpy (sprockets are on one side of the film only)

## FILM ASSESSMENTS

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/aug/04/super-8-review>

by Peter Bradshaw

<http://www.boxofficemagazine.com/reviews/2011-06-super-8>

by Todd Gilchrist

Parental guidance : description of potentially problematic scenes in the film Super8. Categories are : *Sex and Nudity, Violence and Gore, Profanity, Alcohol/Drugs/Smoking, and Frightening/Intense Scenes.*

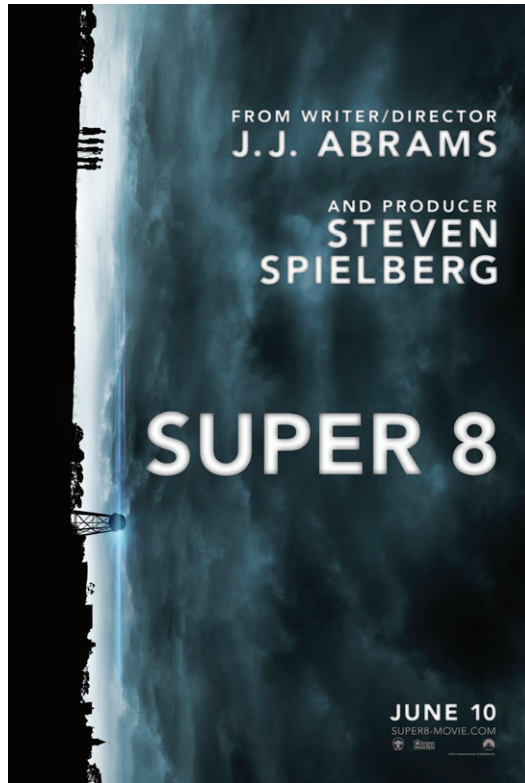
An interesting feature, objective and making no judgement

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1650062/parentalguide>

This could be used to start a discussion with older pupils about what should or should not be shown in film from the point of view of pupils.

## Posters

### Poster 1



A poster showing the silhouetted figures of the film making crew turned vertical. A reminder that the camera fell over and went on filming after the train crash.

### Poster 2

Drawn characters in 1970s style.

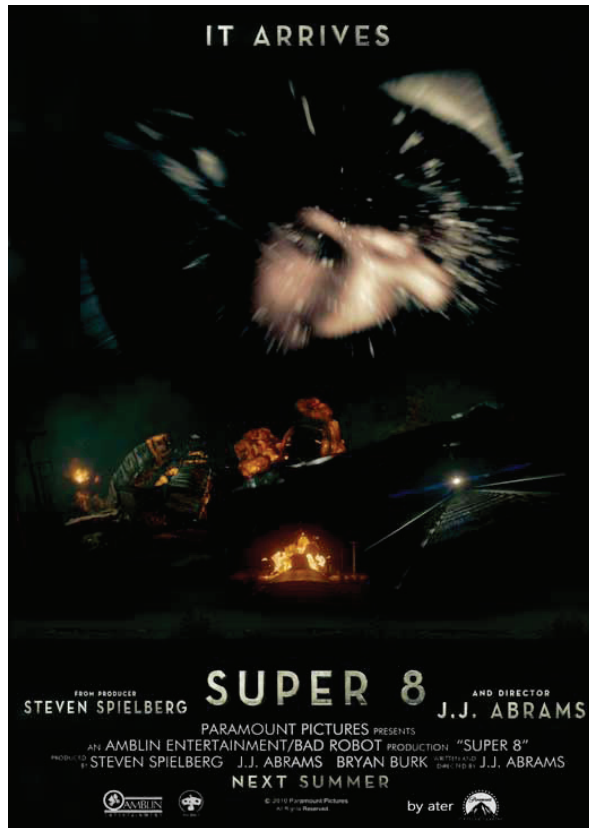


The poster imitates the composition of film posters popular in the 1970s, different characters from the film are shown in tense attitudes to evoke suspense, this is no reproduction of a specific scene.



### Poster 3

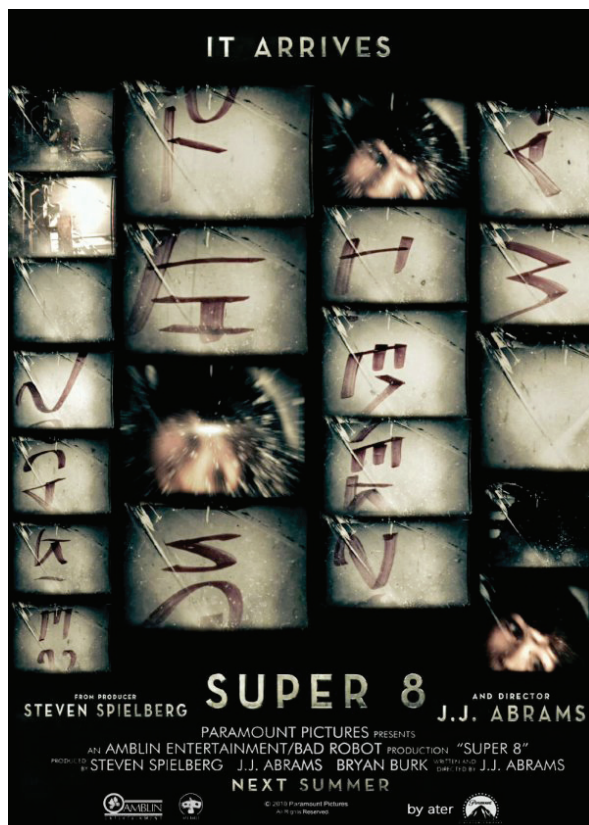
It arrives.



The subtitle alludes to the mystery of « something » arriving, probably something dangerous or scary, it recalls Stephen King's novel « It » about a monster attacking children.

### Poster 4

It arrives.



Poster 5

Alice & Joe holding hands.



The silhouetted figures of a girl and a boy standing and holding hands in front of a blending light source, the final positive message of peace after the drama and violence.

## Photos



The filming crew of The Case in action.

### Photo 1



Alice's father telling Joe not to come again to their home.

### Photo 2



The film crew of The Case meeting in the ice parlor to discuss details.



Photo 3



JJ Abrams on the set wearing a Bad Robots T shirt.

Photo 4



Kyle Chandler as Deputy Sheriff of Lillian County Jack Lamb.

Photo 5



Final scene : families reunited after the crisis.

Photo 6



Joel and Cary discovering the entrance to the alien creature's lair.

Photo 7



Detective Hataway and wife confronted to the murderous zombie, the film crew at work.

Photo 8



Deputy Sheriff confronting Air Force colonel.

## Trailers and film scenes

The official trailer announcing the film SUPER8 It arrives.

Train accident, no kids, hints at an army coverup.

<http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi1526990617/>

An introductory trailer, fast paced and lots of hints to spur imagination, 90 sec.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1650062/>

A trailer film, lots of shocking random violence and kids in the middle of it all.

<http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi778083609/>

A trailer containing excerpts from all the film, fastpaced.

<http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi532585497/>

A website full of photos and features about the cast of the film.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1650062/>

Rehearsal of love scene Hathaway and wife, 6 minute.

<http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi2561973273/>

An interesting scene of The Case played twice by the actors, first in a quiet very moving mood, then the same lines spoken aloud over the noise of a passing train.

Joe and madeup Alice playing a zombie.

<http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi28613657/>

A dense scene showing how Alice turns into a credible horror figure thanks to makeup and attitude, Joe is very impressed.

The vulnerability of the creature with comments from JJ Abrams and the maker of the creature.

<http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi3116408345/>

Interview of different people just after they saw the freshly released film: enthusiastic response and hearty endorsement.

[http://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video;\\_ylt=A2KLqllW\\_3JPERwAJoz7w8QF?p=super+8+film+abrams&fr=ytf1-yff50&fr2=piv-web&tnr=20&b=41](http://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video;_ylt=A2KLqllW_3JPERwAJoz7w8QF?p=super+8+film+abrams&fr=ytf1-yff50&fr2=piv-web&tnr=20&b=41)

## After viewing the film

Activities in class ORAL WORK in pairs or three, then in group.

### Description of Super8

WHERE, WHEN, WHAT, WHO, 2 or 3 pupils sit together to write down everything they remember about the film, each team has a different task, this will be then exchanged and completed in class (write meaningful keywords on blackboard, have pupils copy those then write a summary in a limited number of words.

WHERE does the story take place, indicate all the different places where the action takes place, and features that are of importance to the story.

WHEN does the story play, how far is it from our time, find out the elements that help date the story Do not forget there are also other films shown.

WHAT happens before and after the train crash, the accident is a turning point in the story.

WHO are the characters and their relationships, give a list of the names of the characters, pupils have to copy those as a constellation and draw lines between them indicating the relationships to the others (father-daughter-friend-neighbour, etc.).

### SUPER 8 About filming

In the film SUPER 8 we see a group of children with no professional experience shooting a short film with a small camera during the summer holiday. They want to remake a film they liked using the techniques they can control without outside help.

### The film in the film

The movie in the movie

Interview with JJ Abrams

<http://io9.com/5809032/jj-abrams-super-8s-monster-is-no-cuddly-et>

**Did the kids really write and direct the horror movie that they are filming throughout *Super 8*, which is ultimately shown during the end credits?**

I always knew that I wanted to have the movie that they were making show during the credits of the movie. What I wanted was that it would be there throughout the whole movie and you wouldn't really think about it, and then you get to see what all that effort was about. I thought it was a fun idea. They didn't write and direct it, but they wrote some of it, some of the scenes. So, for example, I would say to them, "OK, here's this scene. Here's the situation. Go off and write the scene." They'd go off and do a pass on the scene and then come back, and I was trying to get them invested in the movie itself.



**Activity in class**

Brainstorming about Filming The Case :

- the tools they need,
- the different things they have to prepare before filming,
- the decisions they have to make,
- how they distribute the jobs among the team.

Keywords will be written on board in logical order then used by pupils to build sentences in order to sum up orally or write a summary.

then

Watch the finished film The Case shown in the film credits

What part does each of the kids play in The Case ?

Charles

Cary

Joe

Alice

John

Preston

Interview with JJ Abrams by teenage reporter Damien Murphy.

<http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3756726>

Interviews of the cast

[http://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video;\\_ylt=A0PDoS9Uw0RPKHkA3VyJzbf?\\_p=super8+film&fr=&fr2](http://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video;_ylt=A0PDoS9Uw0RPKHkA3VyJzbf?_p=super8+film&fr=&fr2)

A list of trivia about the film that may be of interest as reading matter for pupils or to discuss, 27 items.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1650062/trivia>

**About monsters**

- Thoughts that may provoke pupils to react.
- Fiction is taller than reality.
- What is a monster ?
- What makes a monster special and different ?
- Can you imagine the film without the monster ?
- We only see the monster very late in the film, its presence is felt even when we do not see it.
- Unusual and worrying things happen after the train accident...
- What does the invisible presence cause the characters to do in the film ?
- What feelings did you have as a viewer of the film ?
- What tricks / techniques are used by the film director to make the invisible presence felt and to grip the attention of the viewers ?
- We know a film of fiction is about illusion and suggesting things that are made up. How come we forget this and get caught into a story like this one ?
- Will you have nightmares after watching violent or horror films ?
- Perhaps you avoid this kind of films because it makes you uneasy....

## “Scariest Thing I Ever Saw”

The monster in Super8.

An interview with JJ Abrams

From <http://trashwire.com/2011/06/10/abrams-pays-tribute-to-spielberg-in-super-8/>

On the DVD of the film there is a feature “It is alive!” explaining how the alien creature was designed in a process of over one year of research, “Cooper” was the code name.

### Stranded Aliens

A choice of films featuring aliens wanting to escape home from Earth where they feel unwelcome.

[http://www.mania.com/14-awesome-stranded-aliens\\_article\\_129151.html](http://www.mania.com/14-awesome-stranded-aliens_article_129151.html)

Some of the films may have been seen by the pupils, they will add their own references.

Making of the “monster” in SUPER8

<http://io9.com/5809032/jj-abrams-super-8s-monster-is-no-cuddly-et>

### “Scariest Thing I Ever Saw”

In SUPER8, the film directed by JJ Abrams, an alien creature described as The Monster plays a central part in the plot.

The creature is not shown directly in full light onscreen, only at the end of the film does it come in contact with the child heroes, and his actions are explained.

There is a long tradition of fantastic creatures out of the natural order of things, in stories, literature and in films. Basically they are strangers with special needs and intentions that interfere with the life of regular people. They can be scary or beautiful, have friendly wishes or be definitely hostile and dangerous. Humans tend to react violently to monsters.

### Questions to help start a discussion about the presence of *the stranger* in the film SUPER8.

- The kids want to shoot a horror film featuring a murderous zombi creature, Joe’s father does not like this much, can you explain the different interests ?
- The accident of the train derailing is frightening enough, then something escapes.... and it turns even more frightening. The intervention of the Army seems logical at first. What happens that makes people get more and more worried, then really frightened ?
- The being from an outside world has been in contact with Earth creatures for quite a long time. There is a basic misunderstanding. Imagine he could have been treated differently.
- The Army has taken over the problem of the monster. We are shown the methods they apply. What do they want to do ? Who is supposed to decide what to do ?
- We are shown the reactions of the people of the city. Some are sensible and reasonable, others rather crazy and hysterical.

### Activities in class

Have pupils look up in dictionaries for as many synonyms of “scary” as can be found (comparatives will be needed here : more...than, ..er than)

The alien creature was meant to be scary and not look nice. Pupils are interested in what creates fear. They know many fictional monsters from books or from films. Choose from their suggestions a few other famous alien creatures or monsters to compare with the Super8 “Cooper” creature: its origin, how it came in contact with humans, what are its needs and intentions, how people react to it and how the story ends.

Invent *My Scariest Thing I Imagine* and draw it. The drawings will be described by its author in class then the drawing shown and pinned in class. Name can be given.

## Recreating 1979

- Lots of details carefully designed in the background of SUPER8 indicate 1979, the recreated environment of the story
- Songs of 1979
- Clothing worn by children and parents : no brand names, no grunge, no street ghetto
- Absence of internet
- No portaphones
- Super8 camera
- Car models, BMX bikes
- Famous personalities
- Technical objects like television set
- any other things you find old fashioned seen from our time of 2012...

## Relationship between fathers and children

Mrs Lamb was killed in an accident in the steel mill where she was working. On that day she was not supposed to be at work but she took over from John Dainard who missed his shift. We later learn from his daughter Alice that he was drunk on that morning. Jack Lamb thinks John is responsible for his wife's death, whereas John feels guilty to a nice neighbour who was unlucky and paid dearly for helping him out. Alice and Joe Lamb must sort out the situation of growing up with lone fathers (Mrs Dainard left her husband some time ago probably due to incompatibility in characters). Both children come nearer as they feel for each other's pain.

Joe treasures a medallion bearing a photo of his mother and he watches old film reels of himself as a baby together with his mother. There is a very emotional scene when Alice watches the Super8 images in Joe's room, then tells about the shame and the guilt that her father experiences.

In the end, after the stress caused to the community by danger and fear, everyone finds back to friendship and good neighbourhood, parents to their children, and the lost alien back home good riddance.

Here a few scenes of confrontation between parents and children.

0h49'47" to 0h52'15" Jack telling his son Joe he'd prefer him to go to a baseball summer camp instead of painting horror makeup on his friends' face.

0h55'32" to 1h00'06" Alice and Joe exchanging their pain over family situation.

1h10'09" Alice returnig late home is confronted violently by her father and runs away into the night.