



THE ORDINARIES

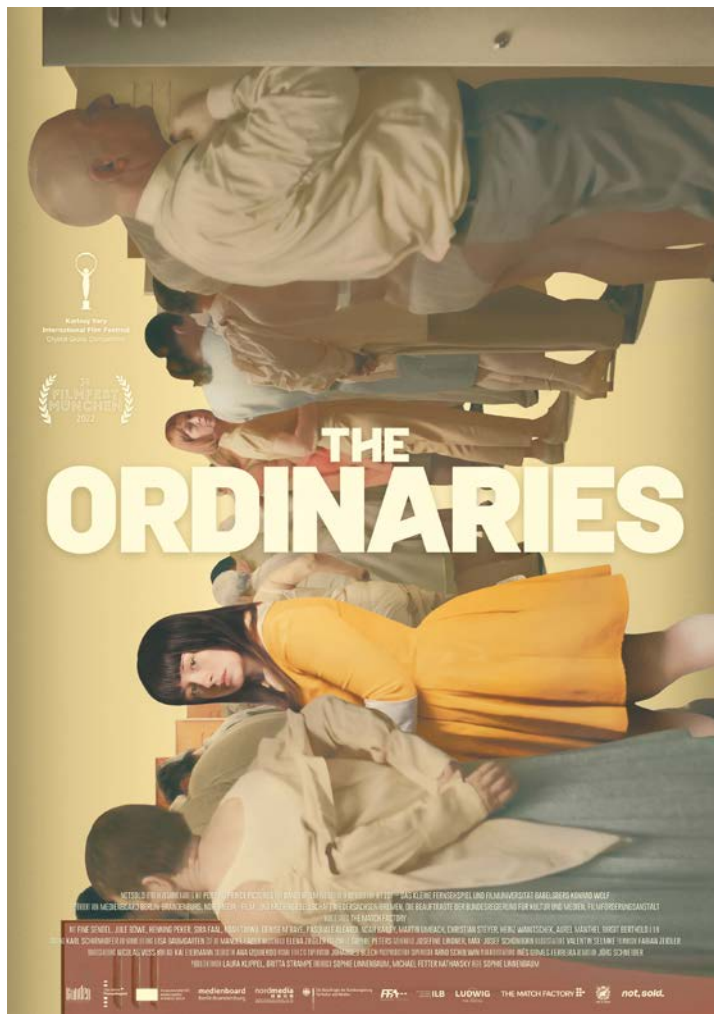
Material Pack for Secondary Schools

Anna Weiss-Tuite
February 2023



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Germany, 2022, 120 min.



Poster Artwork by Inès Gomes Ferrera © Bandenfilm

MAIN CREW

Writer: Sophie Linnenbaum, Michael Fetter Nathansky

Director: Sophie Linnenbaum

Producer: Laura Klippel, Britta Strampe

Production Design: Josefine Lindner, Max-Josef Schönborn

Director of Photography: Valentin Selmke

Steadicam Operator: Lasse Liebelt

Sound Engineer: Alexandra Praet, Leo Aderhold

VFX Supervisor: Johannes Blech

Costume Design: Sophie Peters

Make-up Artist: Elena Ziegler

Casting Director: Karl Schirrhofer

Editor: Kai Eiermann

Music Composer: Fabian Zeidler

Sound Design and Sound Mixing: Nicolas Voß

Postproduction Supervisor: Arno Scholwin

Colorist: Ana Izquierdo

Commissioning Editor ZDF: Jörg Schneider

MAIN CAST

Fine Sendel	as	Paula Feinmann
Jule Böwe	as	Elisa Feinmann
Henning Peker	as	Housemaid / Hilde
Noah Tinwa	as	Simon
Sira Faal	as	Hannah Cooper
Denise M'Baye	as	Frau Dr. Cooper

Topics: Identity, Family, Society, Exclusion

Subjects: CSPE, English, SPHE

Introduction for teachers

Short Synopsis

In a repressive three class-society, Paula, a simple Supporting Character, is about to face the most important test of her life: she has to prove she deserves to be a Lead. She is at the top of her class at the Main Character School – but so far has failed in generating great emotional music. In search of a solution, she finds herself in the abyss of the cinematic world, on the fringes of the storyline and lost amongst the Outtakes.

I would like to thank Sophie Linnenbaum for her time to answer my questions for the interview and the producer Laura Klippel who made the folder Instagram BEFORE & AFTER by the product designers Josefine Linder and Max-Josef Schönborn available for me. THANK YOU.

Methodological advice:

The material can be divided into two parts: One to be used before the screening (It is advisable to introduce the film and its topics prior to watching the film) and material for working on particular topics afterwards.

Each task or set of tasks comes with a short introductory advice for teachers on how to work with it prior to the worksheet itself.

When applicable, there are solutions at the end of the material pack.



Director of Photography: Valentin Selmke © Bandenfilm

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The first task is set to introduce the main character Paula, and the societal structures the film works with.

The task of watching the first 2 minutes 30 seconds of the film and answering the question can be set as homework. The discussion, however, needs to be done in class where the poster can be shown afterwards.

Introduction to THE ORDINARIES

1. Look at the start of the film THE ORDINARIES
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwhLMJKaNXQ>. Jot down ideas, questions, feelings, moods that come to mind.

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2. Paula, the lead character of the film, can be heard from the start telling us about her family, then we see her in her home. How is she being introduced to us? Consider her clothing, gestures, colour, lightning, sound and surrounding.

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3. If there are “ordinaries”, there have to be “extraordinaries” – which information do you get about the societal and family structures in the first 2.5 mins of the film the Paula is living in? (Think about both, the text you hear and the pictures you see)

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Have a chat with your neighbours: Where do you agree, where do you differ in opinion?

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Before watching the film, it makes sense to divide the class into groups with the aim to jot down information on the two characters they are given, as well as obviously enjoying the film:

Team A: Paula and her mother Elisa

Team B: Paula and her best friend Hannah

Team C: Paula and Hilde, the miscast

Team D: Paula and Simon

Team E: Paula and her father

Team F: Paula and the Cooper family

After the film has been watched, the following task can help in talking about the main relationships and their potential change within the film. In the plenary, the cards might be helpful to draw out how the beginning of the film looked like, and how (and why) changes happened.

If you use the cards, please make sure to have two sets, and maybe either have them ready for the smart board, or use them as enlarged cut-outs, so that the class can see the information well.

Relationships in THE ORDINARIES

In your teams, explore how the relationships change within the film and name critical incidents that caused the relationships to change:

Team A: Paula and her mother Elisa

Team B: Paula and her best friend Hannah

Team C: Paula and Hilde, the miscast

Team D: Paula and Simon

Team E: Paula and her father

Team F: Paula and the Cooper family

Bring your information to the class and together, make two schematic overviews:

One with the relationships of the characters at the beginning of the film (and reasons for the status quo).

One with the character's relationships at the end of the film (and the critical incidents leading to this).



© Bandenfilm Director of Photography: Valentin Selmke

Paula

Elisa

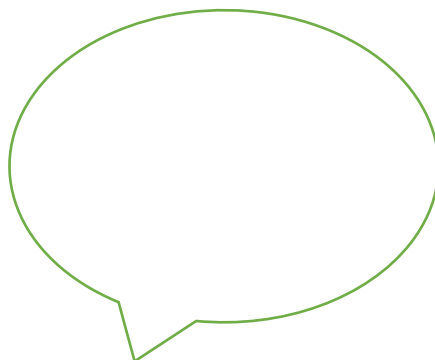
Paula's father

Simon

Hannah

Hilde

The Cooper Family



The next task explores the sub-text of a dialog between Paula and her mother Elisa.

Be brave and tolerate a relative high noise level as the students experiment with the sub text and its delivery. It is probably helpful, to establish working groups of students that are not usually working together to foster a new working environment.

Exploring a dialog

- In pairs, read the dialogue between Paula and her mum Elisa out aloud. What happens in this dialogue? Have a chat about the content in class.
- Because Elisa is a supporting character, her lines are very restricted and repetitive. Re-Write the script (and add tone and emphasis), so that Elisa tells her daughter what she really wants to say. Please be mindful of Elisa's knowledge about Paula and her father – how much does she want to give away and how does she do it?

Re-read your dialogues to the class.



I've been thinking.

That's good, darling. Thinking is important.

I've been thinking about Dad.

Your father was a very special Main Character.

Yeah?

Oh yes. Your father was a very special person.

Tell me about him, Mom. What was his storyline?

Did you dance to his Heart Reader?

Your father was a very special Main Character.

Then tell me something about him.

What did his feelings sound like?

Can you sing them for me?

Your father was a very special Main Character, darling.

He loved you very much.

And somewhere in between cuts, he's sitting there now, watching over us.

Good night, darling.

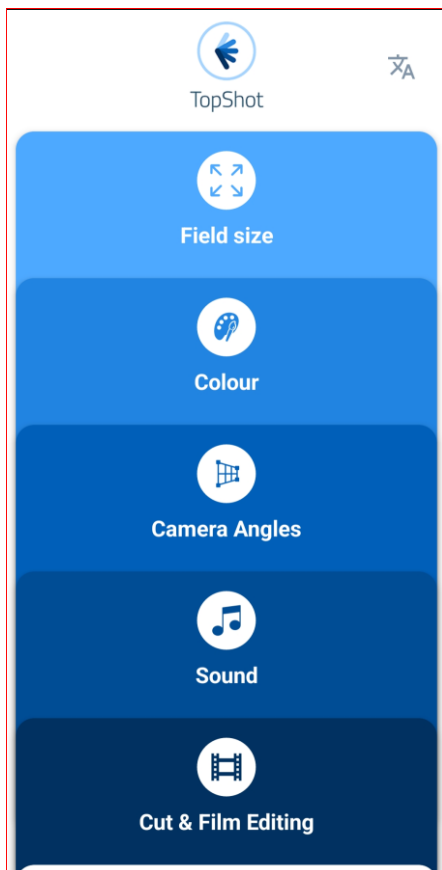
Good night, Mom.

Fotos: © Bandenfilm, cut-outs: AW-T
Original foto by Jonas Ludwig Walter

The central themes of the film conformity, exclusion and othering are being looked at in the next task that not only works with the app TopShot to introduce cinematographic elements, but also gives the student vocabulary to talk about what they have seen.

In the second step, quotes from the script are being analysed to see which structures are used in the ORDINARIES to keep the Main Actors in power and keep the power structures intact.

You will need some safe devices that the app can be installed to (free of charge).



Central themes in THE ORDINARIES

1. Split into teams of three. Research the meaning of one of the following expressions and explain the meaning to your team-members: *Conformity*, *Exclusion*, *Othering*.
2. Colour, sound and lightning are used in the film to highlight the different groups. As part of creating a scene, they add meaning to the groups associated. With the help of the App TopShot, do some research, which elements are used for which group.
3. Think about other characteristics used for each group. (E.g. speech patterns, abilities, material possessions).

Write all these thoughts into the chart.

Then, consider where Paula is in all that – and whether or not her position shifts within the film.



4. How does the principle of exclusion work in the film? Look at the quotes from the script and discuss what information lies underneath the text.

1. We need the
Outtakes. You or I
working here would be
a waste of emotional
potential.

2. Their defects don't make
Outtakes dangerous. It'
people convincing them
their defects don't matter.

So you censor them?

Not all of them.

3. I think it's the other way around.
That music makes the emotions.
Rather than emotions make music.

That's why they banned music for us.

They're scared of what they'd hear.

4. Did you know Outtakes
don't archive their dead?

What do they do with them?

They just go to a black screen.

*But where do they go to
remember their dead?*

There's nothing to remember.

5. Hilde.

What?

I have a name.

Outtakes don't have names.

Hilde.

6. The Outtakes are evil. They
want to get rid of us.

What are you talking about?

They want to replace us.

5. Can you think of examples in the real world where the principles of otherness apply? Discuss those examples in your team.

Paula is hoping to become a Main Character and is practising her monologue that evokes her emotions throughout the film. This monologue changes over time, and in the next task, the class is asked to represent this change through tableaux.

More information on the method tableau can be found here:

<https://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/tableau>

If you haven't used this method yet: Be prepared for the class to get a little louder than usual, but be prepared to be amazed at what you will see.

- To avoid long planning and or giggles / standing around: give the class a reasonable short period of time (3-4 mins) to prepare. If the first attempt doesn't work so well, allow a re-take.
- Be a "photographer": Before the groups go into their tableau to present, let them stand in a group, then pretend to take out your camera and count down from 5-1 before taking the "picture". At 1, the picture needs to be assembled.
- Let the other students look at the tableau with a reasonable distance and comment on what they see.
- Don't let the tableau stand too long.
- If the class is comfortable with the method, let the tableau re-assemble and tap on the shoulder of a person who then states what they are thinking *in role* for even more information.

Paula's monologue(s)

Paula is a Supporting Character and hopes to graduate to be a Main Character soon. For the upcoming final exam, she is working on an emotional monologue. This monolog changes over time.

1. Read the three versions and discuss, how and why they change over the course of the film.

I If You Were Still Here.

If you were still here, we'd be in amazing scenes together.
If you were still here, then you'd tell me important things.
If you were still here, you'd do amazing things for me.

Wonderful, Paula. Wonderful.

II If You Were Still Here.

If you were still here, we'd be in crazy dance scenes together.
If you were still here, you'd give me good advice for my storyline.
If you were still here, you'd run into every burning building for me.
You'd give me...
If you were still here...
you would...

Strange.

Very strange.

Did the Outtakes infect you?

Utter garbage!

III If You Were Still Here.

If you were still here, then we'd...
then I'd give a speech for you.
I would talk about what an especially special father you are.
About your beautiful monologues.
About how we dance around the house together.
If you were still here, you'd be so deeply moved, my speech would bring tears to your eyes.
Your Heart Reader would play stirring music.
And you'd be proud.
So proud.
But you aren't here.
I only have you now,
Mom.
You only have limited dialogue.
You never really know what to say.
You don't have any music.
And luckily you've never tried to dance around the house with me.
And you're scared.
You're so damn scared, Mom.
But you know what?
You're the bravest mom I know.
You built us a castle, but I just saw a prison.
You locked us in, so I could fly.
I always thought you couldn't see me.
That you know nothing about me.
But it was me who couldn't see you.
Or I would've seen who you really are.
You're extraordinary.
You're the most incredible Supporting Character I know.
And you're right.
They wouldn't have seen me.

So original!

What is she doing?

It's a performance!

- It's not a performance!

It's real!

- Paula is an Outtake!

2. In teams of three to four, make tableaux of the three monologs. Think about the facial features, the distance between the roles, the line of the eye, as well as actions we might (not) see.
3. Present your tableaux in class and discuss the outcomes.

As a homework, a review on the film is suggested to round up the series of tasks around THE ORDINARIES. This can be for a school magazine.

The interview with Sophie Linnenbaum (for the background of the making of the film as well as director's comments), and the structure presented will hopefully help in phrasing the text.

After a feedback session on form and language, these reviews should be made available to all students (anonymously?), so that the overall impression can be shared and the best review can be submitted to the school's magazine or TY blog.

The ORDINARIES – write a film review

So, what did you think of the film? Look at the pointers below on how to structure a film review. It will definitely help, if you write down ideas to each point of the checklist and then start to put numbers down so you know in which order you want to present the information.

For the introduction, read through the interview with the director Sophie Linnenbaum on page 19/20 and do a little research on the main characters – while doing so, jot down the most important information.

Don't forget your audience: you are writing for people that are thinking about watching the film. Consider: Will they understand what's going on? – Are you giving away too much? Is your opinion well explained and logically structured?

Have fun with the writing. The suggested structure below hopefully helps you:

1. Introduction (this includes title, release date, background information on length, country of origin etc.).
2. A summary of the story and plot elements (How did the film move forward? Were there tensions / rising action, was there a climax?).
3. Analysis of creative elements. These are e.g. dialogue characters, use of colour camera techniques, mood, tone, symbols, costumes or other things that contribute or takes away from the overall plot quality of script such as performance, lighting, hair, and makeup, costume and set design. Consider: Where these elements important to the plot and movie in general?
4. Your opinion. Explain why you think the director has (not) succeeded in doing so. Give examples or reasons from the film to support your opinion. Consider how the actors fit their roles: Did they portray the role of a specific character successfully? Did they have good acting skills? Don't forget the film maker: Write about the director and their background in order to present the significance of the film for their career / filmography.
5. Conclusion. Re-state your evidence and present why you think the filmmaker was (not) successful in their work. Explain, why you would (not) advise people to go and watch the movie.



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Interview with director Sophie Linnenbaum

(Anna Weiss-Tuite, January 2023)

1. How long did it take from having the initial idea for THE ORDINARIES until the night of the premiere?

From the first draft for the film to the premiere, it took us four and a half years. (Apologies – the time frame starting from the initial idea is very hard to distinguish, because I didn't start working on it, when I had the idea, but way later).

2. How different was the experience to finish a feature film to your previous work?

I was very happy to have gathered some experience with shooting series, to get a feeling how it is, to have to produce several minutes a day for a longer period than when making a short film. But I would say making this movie was the longest endurance run for me so far.

3. What is added to the process of screen writing to have a co-writer?

I love working with great colleagues in all departments, because it always enriches the film in so many ways. So having a co-writer for me means having a sparring partner for all the ideas and one extra brain to build this world, we had to create. Michael Fetter Nathansky was a perfect match for me in terms of his skills and perspective.

4. When writing our scripts, do you write a story first, or do you already think of possible treatments (e.g. cinematography, colour or music) in the process of developing your ideas?

I would say it is an ongoing process. I start with the story but preferably the other departments come in early and we can play Ping Pong on certain ideas, find out if things that I have in my head work out, or if they translate into filmic language and I can go back to the writing room with all the inspiration.

5. There are many homages to films and genres in THE ORDINARIES that every film-buff is likely to fall in love with the film. Are they a reward in themselves for the viewer, or do they underscore the meaning of the characters?

That's a lovely question. This world is a filmic metaverse, so it wouldn't exist without all the references and quotes. Of course they are sometimes quite specific and hopefully they can be a little sweet treat for the audience. But for us it was also very important to find universal filmic references, pictures that are imprinted in our filmic knowledge, without even thinking about it, in order to create a world that is intuitively understandable for everyone.

6. How did you come up with the emotive music generator?

We were looking for something that represented the supremacy and privilege of the higher class, but different from the status symbols of our world. Since music is often referred to as the glutamate of film and has a special place in terms of creating emotional depth, we decided to limit music by connecting it to the music generator which is only available for the upper class, and therefore sharply separate the different social classes.

7. THE ORDINARIES could be seen as a film about family ties, but also as a critique on society. Are you balancing both, or is the family here a microcosm of society?

You nailed it ;) Identity, Family, Society - it's kind of a big mangle of questions about us and our stories, who tells them and how they shift reality.

8. Why is Paula not questioning the tablets she has to take after her night in the underworld?

Paula is used to taking tablets for "her weak heart" as her mother tells her, since she is a little child. So not taking them seems much more far-fetched to her than questioning them.

9. Why did you chose a man to be the maid and ultimately Paula's guide to the truth?

The Maid, Hilde, is a so-called "miscast" which is an attribution of society on her. She thereby symbolizes the treacherousness of our world, which decides over the heads of the actual protagonists what is considered normal and what is abnormal. This valuation of people, which is closely related to their position in society, is questioned by the figure of the maid and the film.

10. The theme of looking for identity is not only found in THE ORDINARIES, but also in other films you made previously. Have THE ORDINARIES resolved this, or have you already made plans to explore this further in the future?

I would not only look for that, but above all the examination of the possibility of shaping identity itself as a part of the shaping of our social and political world is an important topic for me.



© Jonas Ludwig Walter

The last task deals with staging a scene. Here, the students can see how a scene was set, designed and ultimately filmed, and set a scene themselves.

For this task, you need cameras or mobile phones and a bit of mobility to allow for the students to plan and picture the development of their scene. It also needs to be done over two days to allow for props to be brought in from home.

For the feedback, it makes sense to receive the photos via mail so that you can put them up on the whiteboard to make them visible for the whole class. No people should be seen in the final shot and the scenes should be made available to the class before the pictures are shown. Let the class guess which scene from THE ORDINARIES was staged by each group.

Before and after - how to stage a scene

Scenes don't only need good actors and dialogue. They also live off e.g. props, set, lighting, colour and music. Let's concentrate on setting, props, angle of the shot and lighting.

1. Look at the three pictures below and discuss, what needed to be done in order to create the atmosphere conveyed at the border to the world of the cut-outs.



Final set with lighting



Set with props in place



Original location for shot

© Josefine Lindner, Max-Josef Schönborn. Many thanks to Laura Klippel for making them available.

2. In groups, pick a scene from the film. Imagine THE ORDINARIES was set in Ireland – where would you imagine differences? Consider: Which scene works well for your school / the school surroundings?
 - a. Hand in the scene with the names of all members of the team you are working with to your teacher.
 - b. Consider the mood you would like to present.
 - c. Make a sketch: Consider, where you can take the picture, what props are needed and if you need specific lightning or filter (if you are taking pictures with your mobile phone, try out different filters and see how they change the overall aesthetics).
 - d. Think about the angle you are taking the picture from.
 - e. Take the picture – at least 5, maybe even more.
3. Show the class the best picture of your set and let them discuss what they see and which mood in their opinion is dominant in the set (and why).

Suggestions for solutions

P 6: Introduction to THE ORDINARIES

2. Paula: The apartment looks small and everything seems to be in the same beige. She is sitting on a chair, sad music is playing, we learn that she is “practising” emotions and that she has a “heart reader” in her chest that her mother points to.

3. Paula’s mother is a supporting act – her colleague does not have a name but a number (4872), we don’t see her from the front, she too is wearing muted colours and her speech pattern is quite monotone.

Paula’s father was killed in the “Great Massacre”, he is a Main Character that fell in love with Paula’s mother on set.

We can see Paula and her mother leaving the high rise they probably are living in, in a stream of people that are also wearing colours in muted tones. In the background, we can hear music that reminds us of a marching song.

P 13: Central themes in THE ORDINARIES

- Main Characters: song, dance, big colourful houses, clothes, school. Complex dialogs. Saturated colours, medium/close ups, blockbuster look, eye-level shots
- Supporting roles: very limited vocabulary, muted/cold colour, basic living arrangement in high rises
- Cut-outs: neutral colour, dark, shadows, at time only black-white. Ragged look, often with obvious restrictions (jump-cuts, echo, flickering, muted

P 14: Principles of exclusion

1. Take economic advantage of a group
2. Punishment of free speech
3. Ban on basic rights
4. Expression of superiority / belittling a group
5. De-humanising people
6. Planting irrational fears to divide groups.