

“Show don’t tell,” it’s the simplest and most unique rule to storytelling, including the medium of film. “Show don’t tell” refers to the idea of conveying information and emotion through visuals and actions taking place in the story, and avoiding relying on direct exposition or narration. In other words, it means allowing the audience to infer or experience ideas or themes for themselves, rather than simply being told what to think or feel.

This is why “show don’t tell” is considered the “Golden Rule” it’s simply smart storytelling. Instead of lazily expositing the story to the audience, the writer or filmmaker must carefully weave their moral into their narrative. It requires a level of planning, creativity, and dedication to their craft that is worthy of respect and admiration.

Thankfully, for the most part, films that exhibit this rule do tend to receive this critical acclaim. Moments like the opening of Pete Doctor’s *UP*, the intricate mystery of Rian Johnson’s *Knives Out*, and even the bright color contrast of George Lucas’ *Star Wars* have stayed with critics and fans for its beautiful communication of emotions. Due to this mutual appreciation, these beloved and respected moments became intrinsic to what one means when one refers to “smart storytelling.” Yet despite this recognition one genre of stories seems to be deprived of it. Monster movies.

Monster movies might be the genre with the most divided appreciation between fans and critics, perhaps second only to horror. Monster movies are a type of film that features one or more monsters as central characters or antagonists. These monsters can be fictional creatures, such as dragons or werewolves, or they can be real-life animals that have been enlarged for some reason. Despite their popularity nearly from the dawn of cinema with films like the groundbreaking story Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack’s *King Kong* (1933), the first-ever summer blockbuster Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* and not to mention the Universal Monster

movies of the 1930s and 1940s played a significant role in saving Universal Studios from bankruptcy.

The monster movie is a genre that dates pre-dates the Hollywood sign, yet despite its significance in the industry, monster movies often don't receive much thought or respect. With the public conceptions of the monster movie resting on the shoulders of men in rubber suits catfighting, and ridiculous popcorn movies meant to turn your brain off and ingest.

Here lies the crux of this writing, if showing not telling defines a film as intelligent, then out of the definition, monster movies are the most intelligent and sophisticated stories being told today. That might sound confusing, what does the rule show don't tell have anything to do with monster movies? The answer lies plainly in the monster.

In the most beloved monster movies, there lies a meaning lurking beneath the monster. These creatures aren't necessarily just animals, they are a physical manifestation of an idea. When someone watches Ishirō Honda's *Gojira*, they aren't just watching a giant lizard destroy a city. Well admittedly yes that is what is being shown, there is so much more going on behind the scene. The burden of that meaning falls upon Gojira, or in the west, Godzilla. Godzilla isn't just a giant lizard, he was designed as an "explicit metaphor for nuclear menace."<sup>1</sup> With this new meaning, when one sees Godzilla destroy and terrorize, it serves as a visual of the fear the people of Japan had towards nuclear weapons after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When Godzilla pokes his head over a mountain, it isn't just his head, it's a mushroom cloud.

This fear is never told, it's shown using the force of Godzilla as a vehicle. It doesn't stop at Godzilla, the alien in John Carpenter's *The Thing* isn't just some random alien, it's a representation of the dangers of paranoia, *the Babadook* isn't just some paranormal force, it is a

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<sup>1</sup> Whalen, Andrew. "Godzilla' Director Honda Ishiro Describes 'Hatred' of Nuclear Weapons." *Newsweek*, Newsweek, 29 Oct. 2019, <https://www.newsweek.com/godzilla-film-series-1954-ishiro-honda-criterion-nuclear-metaphor-1468513>.

metaphor for grief and how it tears us apart, and the human and monster link shown in *Colossal* shows how we are the ones who tear our lives apart. These films communicate stories of fears and faults we all have, yet don't discuss them directly once. No other genre has this possibility.

Now it should be made clear that defining the intelligence of an entire genre is ridiculous, not every monster movie has a meaning behind it, and that doesn't make them bad. There are reasons one can enjoy any story for any reason. But the next time you see someone write off a monster movie, maybe consider giving it a chance and looking a little deeper into who or what the monster really is.

## FILMS MENTIONED

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Johnson, Rian, director. *Knives Out*. Lionsgate Studios, 2019.

Lucas, George, director. *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*. Walt Disney Company, 1977.

Cooper, C. Merianand, and Schoedsack, B. Ernest, directors. *King Kong*. Warner Brothers Studios, 1933

Spielberg, Steven, director. *Jaws*. Universal Pictures, 1975.

Honda, Ishirō, director. *Gojira*. Toho Co., Ltd, 1954.

Carpenter, John, director. *The Thing*. Universal Pictures, 1982.

Kent, Jennifer, director. *The Babadook*. Causeway Films, 2014.

Vigalondo, Nacho, director. *Colossal*. Neon (United States) Mongrel Media (Canada) Versus Entertainment (Spain) Dreamfact Entertainment (South Korea), 2016.