



Elizabeth Daley, Educator For the Love of Film

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on August 29, 2023 by David Bender

- Access **The Thread** episode of Elizabeth Daley on our [YouTube channel](#) or at [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)
- Access her long-form interview on [LifeStories.org](#)

Learning Objectives

Social Studies Focus

- Understand the origins of film as an industry and its growth as an academic discipline
- Explore the cultural influence of film and television and how it shapes American culture
- Examine the historical evolution of media and the impact and changes technology has had on the industry

English Language Arts Focus

- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one educator
- Analyze the structure and purpose of a narrative, identify key themes in the episode, and synthesize information from a spoken text
- Introduce critical media skills by practicing film analysis such as identifying themes, discussing character development, editing choices, and filmmaker's intent
- Analyze, reflect on, and discuss the title "For the Love of Film" after watching the episode
- Use Elizabeth Daley's episode as evidence to write a commentary or synthesis essay on an assigned topic

Episode Overview

Dean Elizabeth Daley came to the USC School of Cinematic Arts as its interim director in 1991 and has helped mentor young filmmakers who have gone on to great creative achievement, including *Black Panther* director, Ryan Coogler, and *Grey's Anatomy's* creator, Shonda Rhimes. You may not know her name, but there is no one in Hollywood who doesn't immediately take Elizabeth Daley's call -- from Steven Spielberg to George Lucas, from Ron Howard to Robert Zemeckis -- all of them USC alumni. This episode of **The Thread** is a fascinating behind-the-curtain conversation with Dean Elizabeth Daley, who shares her secret of cultivating great storytellers and -- spoiler alert -- storytelling is the secret of life.



Biography

Elizabeth M. Daley is a media professional, academic, and the longest-serving Dean of the USC School of Cinematic Arts. Before becoming a leading figure in film and television, she earned a bachelor's and master's in Theatre from Tulane University and a Ph.D. in Communication Arts from the University of Wisconsin. Prior to joining USC, Daley produced for MGM Television and was the Director of Taper Media Enterprises. In 1989, she became Chair of USC's Film and Television Production Program and was appointed Dean in 1991. Under her leadership, the school expanded into Animation, Digital Arts, and Interactive Media. She is the inaugural holder of the Steven J. Ross/Time Warner Dean's Chair, founding Executive Director of the USC Annenberg Center for Communication, and Executive Director of USC's Institute for Multimedia Literacy. Her honors include the Women in Film Business Leadership Award, and she serves on numerous boards including Avid Technology. Daley is also a former chair of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council and a member of the Directors Guild of America along with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Photo: Exterior view of the USC School of Cinematic Arts. (Alamy)



Teaching Tip: First Take

A **First Take** is a warm-up writing or conversation exercise created uniquely for *The Thread* that strengthens media literacy skills. Like an opening song in a musical, the first stanza of a poem, or even the first impression one person makes on another, the First Take asks students to reflect and share their initial thoughts and feelings about the episode's opening.

Suggested Steps

▣ **Watch and then read aloud** the opening of Elizabeth Daley's episode with students:

"We are fundamentally storytelling animals. We have to tell stories. We don't seem to be able to survive without telling them. It enables us to deal with a very difficult and complex world, and frame it in some way that we can understand. So every once in a while, I will have a colleague from another unit come over and say, you know, we've discovered in our field that storytelling is really important. And I want to say – I don't, but I often want to say – well, I could have saved you some time. We could have told you that 6000 years ago because people have always told stories and just whatever medium is available they will use."



▣ **Ask and Discuss:** What do you learn about Elizabeth Daley as an educator from the opening of her episode? What insights can you infer?

▣ **Next,** as a class, discuss the role of "the opening" in any form of storytelling – an interview, film, play, or song. What is their point of view on why the filmmakers chose this as the opening for the episode? What ideas, topics, or themes may the filmmakers be foreshadowing?

▣ **Last,** have students do a one-minute quick write reflecting on how the opening connects with the episode's title, "For the Love of Film." Then, have students get into pairs and share their thoughts and feelings.



Photos: Dean Elizabeth M. Daley (L) and Director Steven Spielberg arrive to the ceremony to commemorate Lucas film's donation of \$175 million to support USC's School of Cinematic Arts on October 4, 2006 in Los Angeles, California. (Getty) top; TV writers go on strike, 1988. (John Barr/Liaison) lower left; Ryan Coogler, director of 'Black Panther', attends a photo call during the 71st Cannes film festival. (Alamy) lower right



Teaching Tip:

The Thread Up Close

Step One: Watch Elizabeth Daley's episode "For the Love of Film" here.

Next, have students discuss and debrief the episode using these suggested questions:

- ▣ What do you learn about the influence of film and television on culture, law, and policy?
- ▣ What do you learn about the history of film from this episode?
- ▣ What leadership skills did Dean Daley lean into to revitalize the USC School of Cinematic Arts?
- ▣ How can you explain media literacy from the point of view of Dean Daley?
- ▣ What does film mean to you?

Step Two: After discussing the questions in Step One, have students return to *The Thread* episode and engage in a close read and analysis of his interview using the transcript and video as a reference. Depending on the lesson, question, or theme you are aligning *The Thread* with, have students annotate the transcript, select passages that reflect the assignment, and explain their reasoning in class.

Here is an example of a *Thread* lesson connection: If you are reinforcing the importance of media literacy throughout your curriculum, this passage from Elizabeth Daley (edited for clarity and brevity) expresses a provocative point of view to begin a discussion:

"I had an experience in the very early 2000s of having a wonderful conversation with George Lucas in which he said, 'Don't you think anyone who cannot read and write with our language — and he meant the language of cinema, the language of sound and image and rhythm and time and space — is functionally illiterate in today's society, perhaps as literate as you or I would have been had we left the university unable to write a short essay?' And I responded, 'Of course, you make perfect sense, because if you don't know how to take the tools of media and create meaning with them and understand how meaning is created with them, you are living as a read-only participant in the society, and you often don't really understand what's going on around you.'"



Photos: Producer Shonda Rhimes arrives for the 2016 the White House Correspondents' Association annual dinner at the Washington Hilton hotel in Washington, DC, April 30, 2016. (Alamy) *lower left*; "Clash of the Titans" Ray Harryhausen. (Alamy) *lower right*



Connections: *The Thread Up Close*

- ▣ After learning from Dean Daley, how do you think film reflects and shapes our culture?
- ▣ What do you think are the challenges in our media landscape today?
- ▣ How do you define media literacy? What can you do to be a more critical consumer of media?
- ▣ What do you think students have to contribute to our understanding of our world, our lives, to making great stories, to benefiting the media?
- ▣ Do you agree or disagree with this claim of Dean Daley's: "We write your history. What goes on those screens becomes the truth. For better or worse, it becomes the truth. That is what people are seeing, believing, reading and understanding. And if you don't know it and you can't make things that are just as good, you don't have a chance."
- ▣ How do you understand the title after watching this episode? What new or surprising insights about films did you learn as a result of Elizabeth Daley's career and point of view?
- ▣ What new insight did you learn about (yourself, your community, your world) from her stories?

Activity: For the Love of Film

In this exercise, students will engage in a media analysis exercise using a film they love.

Step One: Have students choose one film they love and that mattered to them.

Step Two: Using [this handout](#) from NAMLE "Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Experiences," have students write out their answers to the questions using their chosen film.

Step Three: In pairs or small groups, have students share their responses before engaging a class discussion using this question:

- ▣ Did engaging in a media analysis of your favorite film change or shift your affection for it? If so, how? If not, why not?

Extended Learning: Have students read Elizabeth Daley's article, "Expanding the Concept of Literacy" linked in Additional Resources and write a commentary essay on the merits of integrating media literacy into their k-12 education.



Additional Resources

- ▣ Learn about [USC School of Cinematic Arts - official website](#)
- ▣ Read Elizabeth Daley, "Expanding the Concept of Literacy," [EDUCAUSE](#) Review