

Reel stories: Movie shorts in a listening and speaking class

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Using movies in the classroom has always appealed to me as both a student and a teacher. Movies stimulate the imagination, relieve anxiety, and capture the attention of the viewer. The purpose of this paper is to present one technique for using video in a university advanced listening and speaking class. The video resource is the Internet. The films being used are movie shorts—complete stories told in a short period of time. These movie shorts were made for English speaking audiences around the world and are, thus, authentic material. Students have the opportunity to select and view videos of their choice as well as teacher selected movies.

授業に映画を取り入れることは、学習者としても教員としても常に発表者にとって魅力的であった。映画は想像力をかき立て、不安を和らげ、観る者の関心を引く。この発表の主旨は大学の上級リスニング・スピーキングクラスでビデオを使用した指導法の一つを紹介することである。ビデオの供給源はインターネットである。使用される作品は短編映画、つまり短い時間で物語が完結する。これらの短編映画は世界中の英語を話す人々向けに作られたものであるため、立派に教材になりうる。学生は教員と同様に自分で映画を選び、視聴する機会を与えられる。

A movie short is a complete film with a beginning, a middle and an end that is usually written, directed, and acted by the same professionals making the full length films that receive so much publicity. Professional awards are given to outstanding movie shorts. These short movies are presented in less time than full-length movies. Their duration can be from 30 seconds to 30 minutes. This limited time makes the short film more available linguistically to the L2 learner and provides the opportunity to view and be exposed to a wide variety of genre, characters, stories, and English.

A class called *Movie Shorts* was offered as an English listening and speaking class for high intermediate and advanced university students. The class met once a week for one semester. The Websites used for the Movie Shorts class were <www.channel4.com> and <www.atomfilms.com>. Short films from every English speaking country in the world can be found at these sites. The video files are streaming video and cannot

be permanently downloaded or saved. However, the videos remain on the Websites for quite awhile and are accessible from week to week. Students were given guided as well as free choice viewing opportunities. Videos used in class should be previewed by the teacher in order to find movies focusing on similar themes or within the same genre. If the class is small, everyone can view the same movie. If the class is larger, different movies with a common feature can be used for a whole group discussion at the end of the class. In the appendix is a sample of an in-class question sheet.

Quick Guide

Learner English Level: High intermediate to advanced

Learner Maturity Level: University

Preparation time: Variable

Class time: 90 minutes a week for a full semester

Materials: Computer with Internet access, large screen classroom projector, video camera

Procedure

On the first day of class:

Step 1: Provide students with a syllabus that presents the Websites, a course description, and homework expectations.

Step 2: Give students a movie vocabulary pretest and have them write definitions in their own words. Give this same test at the end of the course as well. A sample of the test can be found in the Appendix at the end of this paper.

Step 3: After students complete the pretest, hand out the

Movie Short Survey for students to interview two classmates regarding their movie watching habits and preferences. A sample of the Movie Short Survey is also provided in the Appendix.

Step 4: Provide students with a more detailed description of homework assignments. Students are expected to view and critique one Movie Short a week outside of class. A sample of the homework critique questions can also be found at the end of this paper in the Appendix.

Step 5: Explain the procedures for student presentations. For Presentation 1, students must present a movie short they enjoyed and would like to share with the class. The presentation outline includes many of the same pieces of information as the weekly homework critique. However, students are also expected to transcribe the dialogue and present each classmate with a copy of the transcription. For Presentation 2, students can follow the initial format as described above or create their own movie short individually or in groups.

Step 6: Make a presentation that follows the same procedures the students will have to follow, so the format is real with a model to imitate. The presentation outline and sample are also part of the Appendix.

For the remaining classes:

Step 1: Follow the routine of viewing a teacher selected movie, answering questions about the movie, meeting in groups with people who have viewed the same movie, and discussing the questions on the question sheet.

Step 2: After the discussions, distribute answer sheets

so students can compare answers with even one more respondent—the teacher.

Step 3: Students are given a schedule with dates in order to select their preferred days for making their presentations and to identify their preference for the second presentation. Moviemaking guidelines can be given to students opting to create their own film story. Sample guidelines can be found in the Appendix.

Step 4: Along with the class routine, allow time each week for individual student presentations.

Conclusion

This paper offers an idea and suggested procedures for its implementation—using online Movie Shorts in a university advanced listening and speaking class. The 90 minute class in which this idea came to life met once a week in a computer lab for twelve weeks. The biggest difficulty with this class was the equipment in the computer lab. Every week there was a new problem that needed solving, and every week a solution had to be found for the 90 minutes. This was the greatest challenge. Students seemed to have more success viewing movies at home on their personal computers. Even so, at the end of the course one student remarked in his assessment that this was the best English class that he had ever taken. I think if you are fortunate enough to use a CALL lab with up-to-date, state-of-the-art equipment, you will have a lot more fun with the use of Movie Shorts in a Listening and Speaking Class.

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Appendix 1

Movie Shorts Vocabulary Pretest/Posttest

Write a sentence that gives the definition for each of the words.

Example: director The director is the person who supervises the production of a show or a movie.

1. script _____

2. character _____

3. storyboard _____

4. set designer _____

5. plot _____

6. prop _____

7.authentic English material_____

8.genre_____

9.movie short_____

10.scene_____

Appendix 2

Movie Shorts Survey

Interview two classmates to determine their movie habits and preferences.

1. How often do you go to the movies?
2. When was the last time you went to the movies?
3. What did you see? Did you like it?
4. What is the name of your favorite movie?
5. What category (or genre) does it belong to: comedy, drama, romance, animation, action, sci-fi, thriller, suspense, musical, documentary, or other?
6. Which of the above genre do you prefer? Why?
7. Do you have a favorite movie actor or actress? Who is it?
8. Why do you like this actor or actress?
9. Do you prefer English speaking movies from the United States, Canada, England, New Zealand, Australia, Scotland, or Ireland?
10. When you watch English speaking movies, do you read the subtitles or follow the dialogue?
11. English speaking movies are considered authentic materials. They are made for English speaking audiences. The English used in the movies is the English spoken by native English speakers. Do you think watching English speaking movies helps you learn English? How does it help you?

12. Do you prefer to watch movies in a theater or at home?
13. When you go to the movies, do you go alone or with other people? If you go with someone, whom do you go with?
14. Have you ever made a movie yourself? If you have made a movie, what kind of movie did you make?

Appendix 3

Video Report Form

Start Viewing Time _____

End Viewing Time _____

Circle one.

This video was found at: Channel 4 Atom Films

Circle one or fill in the blank.

It was a(n):

animation comedy action movie drama
romance other _____

1. The title is _____.
2. It was made in (English speaking country name)
_____.
3. The video is _____ minutes long.

4. It took me _____ hours/minutes to do the assignment.
5. The main characters were (age, gender, name)
6. The story was about (Give a brief summary.)
7. I (would, would not) recommend this video because

Appendix 4

Presentation I

Video Shorts Presentation One Procedures

Do Not Select a Video that Supplies the Script!! You need to transcribe the script yourself. If you need help with the transcription, I will be happy to give you some assistance. Email me, call me or visit me with your questions.

I. Create an attention getting, opening sentence that relates to the video you are presenting. _____

II. In complete sentences, give the following information:

The Video Title

The Country of Origin

The Genre

The Length of the Video

The Main Characters

Age

Gender

Name

F. The location of the video.

III. Give a short summary of the plot of the video.

IV. Tell whether you liked or disliked the video and why?

V. Present each student with a copy of the video transcript.

VI. Point out some important features (language use, dialogue, story) in the transcript that you want the students to notice.

VII. Play the video for the entire class.

Appendix 5

Example: Video Shorts Presentation One

I. Attention getting sentence: How many of you drive? When you go to a gas station, do you pump your own gas, or does the gas station attendant pump it for you?

II. The name of this film is Fuel.

It was made in Great Britain.

It is a comedy.

It is three minutes long.

There are female and male characters ranging in age from 20 to 60 years. The names of the characters are not given. There are two groups of ladies, a group of males, and a gas station attendant.

The video can be found at the Channel 4 Website.

III. Summary: This film is about getting fuel at a gas station. It is a comedy, and there are some unexpected events that occur at the gas station.

IV. I liked this film because it had some unexpected surprises.

V. Script

Ladies: (walking to their automobile and mumbling) Oh, balls. It's not the thing to do. Wait. Come on hurry up. Never. You listen to me. Oh don't be so pathetic...

Lady #1: I don't think this is a good idea.

Lady #2: Shut up.

Lady #3: Who the hell's in charge here?

Man: Problem ladies?

Lady #3: Yes, fuel, lots of it.

Man: Of course, no problem and perhaps a little something

else? Well, eh?

(Spanish music starts to play.)

Man: Heh, heh, heh.

Ladies: Moaning and groaning with suggestive sexual noises.

(Man holds up his hand.)

Ladies: Laughing followed by sounds of inquiry.

(Man gives hand signal.)

Ladies: Scream.

Ladies: Sounds of relief followed by laughter.

VI. –a little something else?

Main Entry: 1. something

Function: pronoun

1 : some indeterminate or unspecified thing

2 : a person or thing of consequence

3 : one having more or less the character, qualities, or nature of something different <is something of a bore>

Main Entry: 2. else

Function: adjective

Other: a : being different in identity <it must have been somebody else> b : being in addition <what else did he say>

something else : something or someone special or extraordinary

from <www.m-w.com>.

Appendix 6

In Class question sheet for the movie short titled, *Short*

Use complete sentences to answer these questions. Find the film on Atom Films.

1. Why is this film called *Short*?
2. Write a brief summary of the plot of *Short*.
3. Where was *Short* made?
4. Who is the director of *Short*?
5. How many characters are in the story, and what are their names? Are they males or females?
6. How does the movie begin?
7. Where are Marty and his friends going?

8. Why was Marty thinking “a million to one” as he was climbing?
9. Go to <www.m-w.com> and look up the word *flaw* [2. noun] 1 b. Write the definition.
10. Marty’s dad used to tell him “if you find a person’s flaw, you have them for life.” What is Alison’s flaw?
11. Has Marty succeeded at winning Alison’s heart? How do you know? Explain.
12. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 is excellent and 5 is terrible), how would you rate this film and why?

Appendix 7

Helpful Suggestions for the Moviemakers in the Class
Guide to Movie Making*

1. Be gentle with the equipment. It is just a tool but a very expensive tool.
2. Ask for help if you need it.

3. The simplest part of a video or film is the shot, the image from a single, continuous running of a camera. Turn it on, turn it off; you have a shot. One shot next to another shot is a scene.

4. Talk about the purpose of your video with your video team. Define the purpose of your movie. What message do you want the audience to understand? Make a list of ways you can use your video to help people understand your message.

5. What's In, What's Out of the Frame? With any window, there is a wider world beyond the edges of the window frame. Use a toilet paper tube or a frame made of paper for a viewfinder. Look around you and choose an image through your frame. What is your image about? What story can you tell with it? What is most important in your frame? Where is that important thing in the frame? What other things are in the frame? What do those other things tell about the main subject of the frame? Everything in a frame becomes related by being in that frame. But what is outside of the frame? Is there a bigger or different story going on outside the frame? Look at a tape or television show and ask the same things. Why are the things in the frame chosen to be there? What message do they send?

6. Talk about the purpose of your video with your video team. Define the purpose of your movie. What message do you want the audience to understand? Make a list of ways you can use your video to help people understand your message.

7. Storyboard information

Go to the Internet and type in <thestoryboardartist.com>.

Click on Movie Storyboard Samples. Look at the storyboard samples. Moviemakers draw simple frames or pictures and use them to plan how they want to tell a story. The frames in a storyboard show relative positions of significant objects or actors and the camera's position - close-ups, wide shots, high angle, low angle, and point-of-view shots. Storyboards may take time, but they are necessary for making a movie that works.

8. For other storyboard samples, go to Google and type in movie storyboard samples.

*Ideas and suggestions came from Websites about teaching movies and moviemaking.