

# Using Movies in the Foreign Language Classroom: The Movie Journal Approach

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Foreign language teachers often want to use movies in the classroom because movies are a rich source of both language and culture and contain themes that can stimulate thought and discussion. However, showing movies to students without doing the time-consuming preparation of tasks for students to do before, during, or after watching the movie can limit the educational benefits. Using a movie journal solves this problem, and contains questions that students answer after watching a section of the movie in class. Writing in a movie journal before discussing the movie leads to more productive discussions as students have a chance to think about what they want to say and how best to express these ideas in the foreign language.

映画は言語と文化の宝庫である。思考や活発なディスカッションを促進させるテーマを含んでいるため、外国語教師はよくクラスで映画を使っている。視聴前・視聴中・視聴後に学生たちが行うタスクを準備して使用している。しかし、その準備には多大な時間がかかる。だからと言って、課題の準備もせずに、ただ映画を見せるだけでは教育的利益は損なわれる。映画のセクション毎に学生が質問に答える形式のMovie Journalは、その問題を解決することができる。映画について話し合う前にMovie Journalで事前学習をすることで、学生たちが何を言いたいのか、自分の考えを外国語でどのように表現すれば一番伝わるのかを考える機会が生まれ、それがより活発なディスカッションにつながる。

**M**any educators and researchers are enthusiastic about the use of movies in foreign language classrooms as movies provide exposure to natural language used in authentic linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural contexts (Baratta & Jones, 2008; Ismaili, 2013; Zhang, 2013). Watching movies in the classroom has been found to help students build vocabulary skills, improve listening ability, and stimulate thought and discussion (Curtis, 2007; Kaiser, 2011). Watching movies has also been found to increase motivation in students to study the foreign language and interact with the target culture (Ismaili, 2013; Luo, 2004; Ruusunen, 2011). In addition, students generally show a positive reaction to the use of movies in their classrooms (Ismaili, 2013; Kabooha, 2016).

However, it is also generally understood that these many benefits will be limited if movies are just shown to students and not combined with effective teaching methods and tasks. This paper

will describe: a) the benefits of using movies in the foreign language classroom, b) some of the common ways teachers optimize the benefits of watching movies in class, c) a movie journal format developed by the author, and finally, d) how this movie journal can be used to help students benefit from movie watching in class.

## Benefits of Movie Use

Many teachers and SLA researchers have written about the benefits to students of using movies in EFL classrooms (Baratta & Jones, 2008; Goctu, 2017; Ismaili, 2008; Kabooha, 2016; Kaiser, 2011; Luo, 2004; Ruusunen, 2011; Zhang, 2013). The following is a summary of the research these authors have conducted and the results of their analyses.

## *Movies Contain Language that is Natural and Contextual*

Foreign language students often study with textbooks and materials created by language teachers that include conversations for listening and speaking practice. These are quite valuable resources, but students often travel abroad and are dismayed by the difference between the language used in textbooks and the actual living language they confront. The speed, vocabulary, pronunciation, and accents used by native speakers can be quite different from that of the language presented in textbooks, and language learners can find it quite difficult to communicate with native speakers (Kaiser, 2011).

Merely watching movies in the foreign language will not solve this problem, although it will at least provide some indication of what learners can expect when talking with native speakers. In addition to watching the movie, the language used in the movie can be studied. In particular, colloquial expressions are often found in movies. Listening abilities can also be improved by watching a movie repeatedly until easily understood, especially if subtitles are used (Ismaili, 2013; Luo, 2004).

### ***Movies Provide a Context for Learning about L2 Culture***

Textbooks can provide information on the L2 culture that might work well with simple rules related to customs such as bathing, dining, and so forth. However, to learn about the values of a culture, it is better to experience the culture directly and deduce from these experiences the values people in the culture tend to hold as important. Although movies cannot provide the direct experience of travel abroad, they can provide valuable indirect experience. (Kaiser, 2011; Ruusunen, 2011).

### ***Movies can Increase Motivation***

For many students in Japan and other countries as well, studying a language in school is required or often done because high test scores will help the student enter a university or get a job. This extrinsic motivation is a good start, but if students can interact with people from the L2 country, the intrinsic motivation to study the language will often increase. Because travel abroad can be difficult due to cost or time restraints, watching movies about the target culture can be a good way to stimulate interest in the L2 country and its people (Zhang, 2013). In addition, studies have shown that students find movie watching in class to be interesting and to enhance their motivation to study (Goctu, 2017; Ismaili, 2008; Kabooha, 2016; Ruusunen, 2011).

### ***Movies Stimulate Thought and Discussion***

Movies contain themes and messages the movie-maker has included to stimulate viewers to think about how characters' personalities interact within the situations they find themselves in and the choices they make. Movies can be a motivator to communicate with others to share and compare understanding of the movie and its characters. Movies, like novels and recorded music, have the power to touch people deeply, and stimulate thought about the world we live in and our role in it (Barrata & Jones, 2008).

### **Commonly Used Tasks for Increasing the Benefits of Watching Movies**

The perception of movies in class as only providing entertainment creates resistance to their use. If the teacher elects to merely show a movie during class and have students discuss it afterwards, the benefits to students will be limited. This is why it is important for teachers to do more than just show the movie in class. Three methods often taught in EFL/

ESL training programs for maximizing the potential benefits are:

1. Pause the movie at key points and ask students to discuss what will happen next in the movie. This simple task has the added benefit of keeping students engaged, as sleepiness can occur when one watches a long stretch of movie.
2. Ask students to do close listening practice with a gap-fill (cloze activity) for a small section of the movie. The teacher can then also have students act out this section of the movie for speaking/listening practice.
3. Create discussion questions that will be used before or after watching a particular section of the movie.

These three common approaches to making movie viewing more valuable to students are quite useful; however, the second and third activities can be especially time consuming for the teacher. Although these approaches are helpful and increase pedagogical value, it is important for teachers to employ strategies to help students gain greater benefit from the movie watching experience. In the following section, an argument will be made for the use of a movie journal to achieve this that will take no more preparation once the format has been decided on and copies have been distributed to students.

### **The Movie Journal—Description**

The basic approach to be discussed here is to watch a movie with students over a series of classes. After watching a section of the movie in class, students will think about and then write answers to some general questions in the movie journal about what they have just seen and then discuss their answers. Each teacher can create movie journal questions according to one's own interests. The following movie journal format was developed by the author and is successful in encouraging students to think more deeply about the movie they are watching and can lead to more interesting and productive discussions (Bray, 2012).

The movie journal format described here contains the following five questions for students to answer. The teacher can put these questions on a B4 sheet (See Appendix), and pass them out to students as a booklet when beginning to watch the film.

1. **Summary**—What happened in this section of the movie?
2. **Reaction**—What is your reaction or opinion about this section of the movie?

3. **Prediction**—What do you think will happen next in the movie?
4. **Culture**—What did you notice about culture in this section of the movie?
5. **Language**—What words or expressions do you want to remember from this section of the movie?

### The Movie Journal—How to Use it

The movie journal is easy to use once the teacher has established a routine. After watching a section of the movie in class, students answer the five questions in the journal and then discuss the movie in small groups while using the journal. If time is short, the movie journal can also be assigned as homework, and during the next class before watching the movie, students can discuss the movie journal questions in groups to help refresh their memories and stimulate thinking about what will happen next. There are other decisions the teacher will have to make about using the movie journal in class:

#### 1. How Much of the Movie Will You Show in One Class?

The recommended approach is to watch a movie section by section over six to ten classes. That translates to watching a new 15 to 20 minute section of the movie with Japanese subtitles in each class. However, first the teacher can show the section watched in the previous class again with English subtitles. This means there will be about 30 to 40 minutes of movie watching time per class. More time than this watching a movie can make students sleepy.

#### 2. Will You Show the Movie With Subtitles?

The movie section can be shown once with Japanese subtitles and then again with the original English subtitles. Including a showing of the movie with no subtitles might also be beneficial if time and student level permits.

#### 3. What Will You Do Before Watching the Movie?

Before watching the movie, you can have students do language development work. For example, the movie journal described here asks students to write a summary, a reaction or opinion, a prediction and about culture. Many students will need help with the language patterns and vocabulary used when answering these five questions in the movie journal. In addition, it is important to teach students movie-related terminology such as, plot, scene, movie trailer, and so forth.

#### 4. How Will You Manage the Discussions?

After students have thought about the movie and written in the movie journal, you can have them make groups of three or four students and take turns sharing their summaries, reactions, predictions, culture points, and language they learned. Teachers should encourage students to speak freely and try to remember what they have written rather than to read their answers. If time permits, ask students to discuss the movie again with a new group but without looking at the movie journal as much as possible.

#### 5. What Movie Will You Use?

Obviously, care must be taken to show students a movie that is appropriate for their age level and interests. You can select a few movies beforehand that you think will work well with your students and show students the movie trailers, letting them vote on what movie they want to watch. Over the years, the author has had great success with the movie “*Bruce Almighty*”. Students have also enjoyed the movies “*Groundhog Day*”, “*The Producers*”, “*The School of Rock*,” and “*Hairspray*.”

#### 6. What Will the Students Do When You Finish the Movie?

When you have finished watching the movie, you can ask students to write a movie review. Tell them that a good movie review should include a summary of the action and themes, a description of the characters, a favorite scene, the movie’s message, a one to five star rating, and a recommendation to see the movie or skip it. Once students are familiar with writing a movie review, it is easy to ask them to watch a different movie on their own that they have not seen before that they choose from a list of movies the teacher recommends. Then you can have them write a movie review and do an oral movie review to a small group or to the whole class on the movie they have seen. This is a good way to finish up the term and can be used in addition to or in lieu of a final exam. Students’ writing in both the movie journal and the movie review can be assessed for the English used as well as the depth of thought about the characters, their culture, and the messages and underlying themes of the movie.

### Conclusion

Watching movies with students in a foreign language classroom is often thought of as being more for entertainment rather than educational purposes. However, teachers have wanted to take advantage of the natural language used in the authentic

linguistic, pragmatic and cultural contexts found in movies, and have developed tasks to help students benefit more from the movie watching experience. Building on experiences with these tasks and previous research, the movie journal was developed as a way to increase student benefits from watching movies in class.

In this paper, some of the more commonly used approaches to optimizing benefits to students have been reviewed, and a new approach using a movie journal has been described. One benefit of the use of a movie journal is that there is little preparation time necessary and it fits quite easily into a teacher's busy schedule. In combination with other activities or used alone, using a movie journal is an easy and effective way to increase the benefits to students of movie watching in the classroom.

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## Appendix

### Movie Journal

1. Summary—What happened in this section of the movie?
2. Reaction—What is your reaction or opinion about this section of the movie?
3. Prediction—What do you think will happen next in the movie?
4. Culture—What did you notice about culture in this section of the movie?
5. Language—What words or expressions do you want to remember from this section of the movie?

Write these words in sentences below