Kieran Donaghy

WRITER • SPEAKER • TRAINER

Short and Sweet

Using Short Films to Promote Creativity and Communication

We are now living in the age of the moving image. The advent of the digital revolution and the Internet, the proliferation of mobile devices, which allow us to easily and proficiently capture moving images; the introduction of inexpensive, accessible and user-friendly editing tools; and the emergence of distribution sites such as YouTube and Vimeo, have changed the way moving images relate to society, education and language learning forever. One very interesting development from all these technological advances has been the renaissance of the short film. Shorts films have traditionally been treated as the poor cousins to feature films at film festivals, but the ability to create and screen shorts easily and cheaply has spawned hundreds of dedicated film festivals throughout the world. However, the biggest demand for shorts comes from the Internet where their brevity makes them ideally suited. Internet users want short, sharp bursts of entertainment they can watch at work, at home or, increasingly, on the move on their mobile devices. The Internet is an increasingly popular alternative for short film-makers who can't afford to distribute their films on DVD. Film-makers can post their films online without spending a penny and reach thousands of viewers. The renaissance of short films is likely to continue for quite some time as newer, easier and cheaper ways of creating, distributing and watching short films continue to develop.

The rise of the short film can be exploited in language teaching. Showing an entire feature film may lead to cognitive overload and is often not possible given timetable constraints. In contrast, a short film can be shown in its entirety easily within one class and they can have a great dramatic impact than feature films which often lose their impact by being viewed over a number of sessions. As most short films are under 10 minutes long (many are less than 5 minutes long) they can be shown several times in a single class and students are able to acquire detailed familiarity with the film which is important in enabling students to critically engage with the material on a meaningful level. As most short films can be watched several times a different focus or activity can be used for each viewing which may help to develop integrated skills (Chan and Herrero, 2010).

kierandonaghy.com   **kieran@kierandonaghy.com**

Another reason why short films are particularly useful to exploit in a single lesson is that they offer a complete narrative in a short space of time, which captures and holds learners' attention quickly. Students love stories and short films tell innovative and creative stories. Short films are not necessarily governed by the same conventions as feature length films. Short filmmakers, because they are normally independent and not tied to big film studios, often have greater scope for innovation and creativity which leads to more imaginative forms and narrative structures. These departures from more familiar forms and narrative structures very often provoke stronger responses from students, than the more traditional narratives of feature length films.

Another characteristic of many modern short films which can be exploited in language teaching is that they are silent or quasi silent. These short films with little or no dialogue can be used for different language levels as the stories they tell are accessible and easy to understand (Chan and Herrero, 2010). They also give students the opportunities to supply the language by creating their own written or spoken dialogues.

Most short films focus on a single idea or make a single statement which make them excellent prompts for oral communication. Many short films deal with contemporary subjects and issues such as bullying, racism, sexism, consumerism, and human rights which are very relevant to the lives of students who are perfectly capable of dealing with these subjects. Short films which deal with these contemporary issues are excellent beginning points for engaging student in a wide range of conversational activity such as pairwork, group work, discussions, debates and roleplays stimulating an active engagement with language. Short films are excellent prompts for writing activities such as writing an alternative ending, writing a prequel or a sequel, or writing from the perspective of one of the characters, which students find engaging and motivating. Because of their accessibility, brevity, innovation, and creativity short films are the perfect vehicle for using moving images in the language learning classroom and for promoting both written and oral communication.

References

Chan, Deborah and Herrero, Carmen (2010). Using Film to Teach Languages, Manchester, Cornerhouse.

kierandonaghy.com   **kieran@kierandonaghy.com**

Links

Film English lessons

The Adventures of a Cardboard Box - http://film-english.com/2011/11/04/the-adventures-of-a-cardboard-box/

What is Being Creative? - http://film-english.com/2011/11/04/the-adventures-of-a-cardboard-box/

Obvious to you. Amazing to others - http://film-english.com/2016/02/15/obvious-to-you-amazing-to-others/

Manifesto - http://film-english.com/2011/12/11/manifesto/

Move, Learn, Eat - http://film-english.com/2011/10/12/move-learn-eat/

Your Secret - http://film-english.com/2011/09/07/your-secret/

Lost Property - http://film-english.com/2016/01/04/lost-property/

The Reader - http://film-english.com/2015/02/18/the-reader/

The Notebook - http://film-english.com/2015/02/13/the-notebook/

Moments - http://film-english.com/2013/03/04/moments-2/

Paperman - http://film-english.com/2013/01/31/paperman/

Short Films

Vimeo Staff Picks – https://vimeo.com/channels/staffpicks

Future Shorts - www.youtube.com/futureshorts

Short of the Week - www.shortoftheweek.com

kierandonaghy.com   **kieran@kierandonaghy.com**

Creativity

What is creativity? - http://www.creativityatwork.com/2014/02/17/what-is-creativity/

Can creativity be taught? - http://www.creativityatwork.com/2012/03/23/can-creativity-be-taught/

Maximizing your creative thinker talent - http://www.creativityatwork.com/2014/08/22/great-entrepreneurs-creative-thinkers/

Seven habits of highly creative people - http://www.creativityatwork.com/2012/03/06/seven-habits-of-highly-creative-people/

Creativity in ELT

The C Group - http://thecreativitygroup.weebly.com/

Creativity in the English language classroom - https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/F004_ELT_Creativity_FINAL_v2%20WEB.pdf

Creativity in language teaching - http://www.professorjackrichards.com/wp-content/uploads/Creativity-in-Language-Teaching.pdf

Let creativity into the language classroom - http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/mar/13/creativity-in-language-classroom