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ENGAGING THE ADOLESCENT LEARNER

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Using Video and Film in the Classroom

Welcome to "Engaging the Adolescent Learner"

We are so excited to share with you ideas for engaging adolescent learners. In the coming months, we'll explore a number of different ways that teachers can capture their students' interests through quality teaching. In each case, we'll consider the role of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing in helping students master the content. The examples we use are drawn from middle and high school classrooms that work—places where students learn and achieve.

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Film has been used for decades as a means to connect images with the concepts being taught.

Researchers have described lessons as diverse as teaching polygons to middle school students using the movie *Flatland* as inspiration (Derado, Garner, Edwards, & Garrett, 2010), analyzing primary sources used in documentaries in history (Marcus & Stoddard, 2009), and teaching about postmodernism in art through the movie *The Matrix* (Stewart, 2003). Most educators recognize the value of showing students how their disciplines are realized outside the classroom and welcome the opportunity to inject relevance into their curricula.

Film is often used as a means to motivate reluctant readers by engaging them in visual representations of texts. But too often, feature-length films are allowed to play uninterrupted, inadvertently perpetuating the falsehood that comprehension is a passive experience and that the burden of making something understood lies solely with the author. The lasting image is of a classroom of slack-jawed students sitting in a darkened classroom while the teacher sits quietly in the back. Interjection is seen as interruption, and students remain in the dark, unaware of the cognitive and metacognitive work the teacher did in identifying the educational value of the film in the first place.

Using Film and Video in the Classroom

Effective teachers understand that film demands disruption. Think of film (and video, its contemporary counterpart) as another form of text. No mathematics teacher would hand a student an algebra textbook and say, "Figure it out." English classes are not booklists, with the teacher merely handing out a stack of books to be

read for the year. But when we simply hit "play" and settle back for the next 90 minutes, meaning is left to the student to extract, and the teacher's role is reduced to that of projectionist.

Ironically, the rise of short videos is changing all that. YouTube, CitizenTube (YouTube's news and politics blog), and Google Videos, to name a few, have made video sharing easily available to teachers around the world. Almost daily, educators in any middle or high school can be found using news reports, documentary segments, and hard-to-find film clips from previous decades to infuse into their teaching. These short videos are used to transport students to locations across the world and to demonstrate concepts that cannot otherwise be practically illustrated in the classroom.

As popular media approaches the century mark, the archive of historical events has grown in importance. Original newsreels covering the Lindbergh kidnapping, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech are readily available. Importantly, viewing these video segments, often five minutes in length or less, necessitates active teaching before and after.

Disrupting Video With Discussion

The immediacy of access to worldwide events through video presents us with teachable moments. When news of a devastating earthquake in Japan emerged overnight in March 2011, the Earth Science teacher at our high school used video posted that morning to discuss the tsunami warning that was issued for the west coast of the United States. This was of heightened interest to these students in San Diego, California, who were frightened about the tsunami, forecast to arrive during their first-period class.



The Earth Science teacher reviewed previously taught concepts about earthquakes and tsunamis with his students, providing them a level of reassurance. Because the raw footage of the earthquake was still emerging, he chose not to use video from Japan on this day. Instead, he used videos posted by San Diego residents and television stations to monitor the local waters. Throughout the day, his classes watched the story unfold in their community.

Because the conditions changed throughout the day, the discussions changed as well. In each case, the teacher posted the discussion question on the board to keep the conversations from becoming more tangential.

During first period, students watched background video clips about tsunamis in general and made predictions about the likely effect in San Diego. Second-period students watched this, as well as video of the arrival of the first waves in the harbor. Their discussion questions focused on accurately identifying what had occurred and why. By fourth period, news of the more serious effects of the tsunami at the Santa Cruz, California, harbor had reached the world, and these students watched time-stamped video as the waves arrived throughout the morning. The discussion questions had changed once again, and now the focus was

on trying to identify why the effects were so different in two cities less than 500 miles apart.

The Earth Science teacher's prudent use of video bears highlighting. A danger of using live feed on an emerging event, even one that is not initially a disaster, is the likelihood of sudden shifts in the tone of the discussions. Teachers who turned on the television so their classes could watch the space shuttle Challenger launch in 1986 can attest to the difficulty of managing their own human reactions while being responsible for supporting their students (Wright, Kunkel, Pinon, & Huston, 1989).

Disrupting Video With Writing

We often use short video clips as a tool for writing in our English class, and our colleagues use video clips in their content area classes. A major writing standard for secondary students is the ability to write accurate and concise summaries. In fact, it can be argued that summary writing forms the basis of most academic and technical writing. Students are asked to

- ◆ Write persuasive pieces that require supporting evidence
- ◆ Develop lab reports to describe the results of an experiment

- ◆ Write informational essays on a variety of topics

Each requires the use of a series of summaries linked by rhetorical devices appropriate for the discipline, format, and audience.

We use clips from television programs on topics of interest to the students to write these summaries. For instance, we played a 10-minute segment from the PBS special *Avalanche!* all the way through and discussed the main points (Frey, Fisher, & Hernandez, 2003). We then play it a second time, stopping at three different points so that students could write one sentence describing the main point. After writing a total of three sentences, they revised for a final brief summary of the segment. Short writing exercises like this build stamina and precision as students work toward crafting concise summaries. This technique is easily replicated in any content classroom that uses short videos.

Disrupting Video With Vocabulary

Some videos, especially those that are a bit longer and contain more technical information, don't lend themselves to discussion and writing techniques such as those previously listed. At times, a longer video clip (15–20 minutes or so) may need to be viewed in its entirety before students are ready to work with the ideas presented.

A technique we have used to help students navigate longer video clips is Vocabulary Steppingstones. For instance, we used this technique with students in 10th-grade World History who were studying the factors that brought World War I to a sudden end. Using a video clip from a documentary about the influenza pandemic of 1918, students received an envelope of paper slips containing the words *pandemic*, *influenza*, *strain*, *lethal*, *disseminated*, *population*,



panicked, face masks, exposed, and knowledge.

After reading and discussing the words with their partners, students watched a video clip about the topic. They listened closely for use of the terms, arranging the words silently as they occurred. When the video clip was over, the students retold the main ideas to one another using the order of the vocabulary terms as a means to structure their conversation. The teacher listened in on the conversations as she moved from group to group, providing clarification and correction as needed. As the partners finished, the teacher engaged the class in a whole-group discussion of the content, inviting speculation about this event as a factor in ending the war.

Vocabulary Steppingstones is easily adapted to any content classroom where longer video clips are being used. This instructional routine also encourages students to apply

academic vocabulary orally before they write about the film.

The World History teacher exhibited another trait for effective use of video in the classroom: selection editing. In this case, the original documentary was 60 minutes long. While the documentary was entertaining, the teacher didn't see the value in devoting that much instructional time to the topic. In addition, the documentary contained information on the biological aspects of influenza, as well as prevention and treatment. Instead, she selected a 15-minute segment from the film for use in the class. By editing her selection of materials, she was better able to focus her students on the salient aspects of the video, without distracting them with information unrelated to her teaching purpose.

Using Feature-Length Films in the Classroom

There is a place for longer films and videos, although not necessarily during instructional time. In the same way that an entire book would not be read during class time—we would not try to read Lois Lowry's entire book *The Giver* or Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* in one class period—we don't find it efficient to devote 90 or 120 instructional minutes to watching a film. We think of films as texts and treat them accordingly. As such, we assign these for out-of-class viewing and in-class accountability.

For instance, our high school has a focus on the health sciences, and we co-teach from time to time with the health educator. Her Human Behavior course addresses many of the medical, psychological, and sociological issues related to a variety of physical, cognitive, and mental disabilities and illnesses. As part of her course, we developed an out-of-class assignment using students' literary analysis work from English as a basis.



Students are required to view and write a response to five films of their choice from an extensive list. We send the assignment and the list home to families, with our encouragement that they select and watch films together. Our library stocks many of these films. We provide a wide range of topics and ratings to allow families to select films consistent with their parenting beliefs. While some of the films are R-rated, many carry a G or PG rating. The cover letter we send home can be found in Figure 1, and the film list can be found in Figure 2.

Film in the classroom requires being judicious in the choice of such works. Many districts have policies in place regarding the use of film whose content or language may provoke criticism. While there are many films worthy of discussion in middle and high school classrooms, their subject matter or presentation may cause discomfort for students or families. The cover letter we send families, and the wide range of films we offer as choice, help us to avoid inadvertently causing students or their families concern.

In addition, we do not show any of these films (regardless of rating) in the classroom, because it is not a wise use of instructional time. At the end of the assignment, we have students rotate in small groups for a Film Club discussion of some of the more widely selected films of the semester so that students can talk with fellow viewers. The choices vary from semester to semester, but the conversations about

Video Steppingstones Procedure

1. Provide pairs of students with 10 or 15 vocabulary words that will be used in a video clip, and instruct them to listen for the words as they occur in the narration. (Print these terms on slips of paper and place them in an envelope, which you give to the partners.)
2. As the video clip plays, the partners move the vocabulary terms on the desk so that they are arranged in order of occurrence.
3. When the video clip is done, the partners use the ordered vocabulary as steppingstones to retell the content to one another.

the positive and negative images of those with mental illnesses, physical disabilities, or cognitive disabilities are universal.

Student-Created Videos

At one time not too long ago, film and video was a one-way street, with students in the role of audience. But with the advent of video editing software and inexpensive cameras, laptops, and tablets, all that has changed. Students can now create their own videos to demonstrate their interpretations of the concepts they have learned in the classroom (Guzzetti, Elliott, & Welsch, 2010).

One of our favorite methods for making student videos in English is using the movie trailer feature available on Apple's iMovie '11. This program allows you to use digital photographs and video clips to create an organized digital story. The 11th-grade English teacher at our school uses this software for book trailers. This is a twist on traditional book reports and essays and has grown in



popularity to the point that the *School Library Journal* now has a Trailie Award for the student-made book trailers submitted for nomination (see booktrailermanual.com/annual-slj-trailie).

The ninth-grade Integrated Arts teacher at our school is using video in a different way to foster student-created music. His students are using resources from the In B Flat project (see inbflat.net) to compose original pieces. The project began as a YouTube assignment for musicians: Make a video of yourself playing a single instrument. The only boundaries were that the video had to be two minutes in length and the composition had to be in the key of B flat. The videos were assembled onto a single website, which featured the ability to play up to 20 videos simultaneously. Students orchestrated the videos to make original musical compositions. Some students have begun using Apple's iMovie to create digital storytelling projects, then allowing the visuals to inspire their live renditions of their music.

Videos Are Useful Teaching Tools

The availability of classroom-friendly film and video formats has made it easier than ever to use these in our teaching. There is tremendous value in combining words and images to show students how the content of our disciplines is understood outside school walls. But this easy availability can cloud our judgment about the best ways to use instructional minutes. All resources, including film and video, require active teaching. Materials alone don't teach—teachers teach.

By juxtaposing discussion, writing, and reading with video resources, students are better able to use their content knowledge to understand, analyze, and evaluate them. Students can further apply their knowledge through the creation of their own original works using these digital resources. By disrupting video with active teaching, you provide students with invaluable tools to use the critical thinking skills they need to understand the world.

Book Trailer Project Procedures

1. Working in groups of three to five, students compose a storyboard for a two-minute book trailer describing a book they have read.
2. The group then shoots photographs and videos and uploads them to the computer.
3. Students use software templates, such as the one found in iMovie, to edit and create the titles and text for the book trailer.

Resources

Professional Publications

Blanchard, J.S., & Farstrup, A.E. (2011). Technologies, digital media, and reading instruction. In S.J. Samuels & A.E. Farstrup (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (4th ed., pp. 286–314). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

This chapter offers a research-based commentary on the history of in-school technology use for reading instruction, recent in- and outside-school research relative to reading instruction, and elements for implementation of technology from both in- and outside-school perspectives.

Smilanich, B., & Lafreniere, N. (2010). *Reel teaching = real learning: Motivating reluctant students through film studies*. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(7), 604–606. doi:10.1598/JAAL.53.7.8

This article describes the authors' work in their high school English classrooms as they teach film techniques to analyze the short segments of popular films and equate them to literary devices.

Tate, S. (2011). Media literacy. In D. Lapp & D. Fisher (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (3rd ed., pp. 182–187). New York: Taylor & Francis.

This chapter provides an excellent review of the research on media literacy and includes definitions of various terms related to media literacy as well as reviews of the use of media literacy in the classroom.

Online

Media Education Lab at Temple University: mediaeducationlab.com

This project, housed in Temple's School of Communications and Theater, is dedicated to raising the media literacy skills of K–12 students and their teachers. Resources include videos on copyright law and fair use, lesson plans for teachers, and collaborative projects with PBS, *Newsweek*, and the Independent Film Channel.

ReadWriteThink.org Lesson Plan "Students as Creators: Exploring Multimedia": www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/students-creators-exploring-multimedia-1088.html

This unit consists of 10 lessons to teach middle school students how to analyze and make their own multimedia projects. Students also learn about copyright law and fair use. This project was collaboratively designed by the American Library Association Office for Information Technology Policy and the American Association of School Librarians.



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University and teacher leaders at Health Sciences High and Middle College. They are interested in quality instruction for diverse learners and are coauthors with Diane Lapp of *In a Reading State of Mind: Brain Research, Teacher Modeling, and Comprehension Instruction* (International Reading Association, 2009). You may contact Doug at dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu and Nancy at nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu.



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FIGURE 1. Letter to Families

February 1, 2011

Dear Families of 11th-Grade Students,

During the spring semester, your student will be enrolled in a course entitled Human Behavior for Allied Health. Students enrolled in this class received a copy of the syllabus as part of their health course. The course deals with the role of human behavior on the physical and mental well-being of a person. Part of the course is devoted to mental health, disability, and illness. As part of their class assignments, we are asking students to choose 5 movies from the attached list to watch and write about. These movies portray some aspect of mental illness or disability and provide another way to understand the effects on the person and those around them. Importantly, they also reflect the cultural understandings of different time periods, as well as how a society responds to those who struggle with these issues.

We have compiled a large selection of films from the 1940s through today and have included the film rating (when applicable) for you to see. We are encouraging students to watch films with their families when possible, as we know you value opportunities to talk with them about their learning. It is also a chance for you to share your views and beliefs with your child. We are not assigning specific films, only asking students to choose 5. If you have a film in mind that is not on the list, let us know what it is so that we can review it and create an essay question.

We know that there are many sources where you might obtain videos, including Blockbuster and Netflix. We have a number of these movies available for checkout. (No movies rated R are available through HSHMC, as parent permission is required.)

Students enrolled in Human Behavior will be learning about the importance of communication in mental health, and family discussion is a critical element. We hope that your family will enjoy this assignment.

Sincerely,

FIGURE 2. Film Selections for Human Behavior Course

Film	Literary Analysis	Response Question(s)
Treatment of Mental Illness		
Awakenings (1990; PG-13)	Character	How does the doctor handle his patients' successes and failures?
Girl, Interrupted (1999; R)	Setting	In what ways does this mental institution make illnesses worse? Better?
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975; R)	Setting	In what ways does this mental institution make illnesses worse? Better?
What About Bob? (1991; PG)	Character	Would you characterize the psychiatrist as mentally ill?
Cognitive Disabilities		
Forrest Gump (1994; PG-13)	Symbolism	Why is Forrest portrayed within major historical events? Who do you think Forrest symbolizes?
I Am Sam (2002; PG-13)	Point of View	How do Sam's perceptions of the world influence his behavior?
To Kill a Mockingbird (1962; not rated)	Setting	In what ways does the town's attitude toward Boo isolate him from the rest of the world?
Rainman (1988; R)	Character	How does Raymond use his unique behaviors to create order in his world?
Of Mice and Men (2003; PG-13)	Character	What role does friendship play in the sequence of events in Lenny and George's life?
Secret of the Wild Child (TV)	Character	Is not being able to say anything the same as not having anything to say? What would Genie say if she could?
Charly (1968; PG)	Character	What is the impact on Charley's well-being as he first gains, and then loses, a significant degree of intelligence?
Radio (2004; PG)	Character	Does this film portray a person with a cognitive disability as a fully formed character, or does it oversimplify his character?
Ray (2004; PG-13)	Character	In what ways does Ray's disability enrich his life? Do you think we would have been the person he was if he was not blind?
Hunchback of Notre Dame (NOT THE DISNEY VERSION)	Setting	How does Quasimodo's isolation because of his physical disability affect his life negatively? Positively?
Benny & Joon (1993; PG)	Point of View	When does protection of someone you love become overprotection?
Delusional Disorders		
The Caine Mutiny (1954; not rated)	Questioning the Text	Was the mutiny justified? Were there other ways the officers could have dealt with their captain's mental illness?
Don Juan DeMarco (1995; PG-13)	Character	Is he really Don Juan, or not? Why do you think so?
Grey Gardens (2009; not rated)	Character	How do Big Edie's and Little Edie's mental illnesses help and hinder each other?

(continued)

FIGURE 2. Film Selections for Human Behavior Course (continued)

Film	Literary Analysis	Response Question(s)
Panic Disorders		
The Fear Inside (1992; TV movie)	Responding to Text	What are the affects of Meredith's illness on her life? On the lives of her family?
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders		
As Good As It Gets (1998; R)	Setting	In what ways does Melvin structure his physical environment to make his illness more bearable?
The Aviator (2004; PG)	Responding to Text	What is the fine line between genius and madness? In what ways was Howard both?
The Odd Couple (1968; G)	Character	Is Felix mentally ill? Is Oscar?
Schizophrenia		
A Beautiful Mind (2002; PG-13)	Character	What is the fine line between genius and madness? In what ways was John Nash both?
Fight Club (2002; R)	Character	Why does the narrator seem so drawn to people with physical and mental illnesses? How do these close associations impact his life, negatively or positively?
Psychosis		
The Shining (1980; R)	Setting	Was Jack Torrance mentally ill before he arrived at the hotel? How did the environment contribute to his illness?
Secret Window (2004; R)	Point of View	What are the factors that contribute to John's psychotic behavior? What do you feel are the rational and irrational motives for his revenge?
Posttraumatic Stress Disorders		
The Best Years of Our Lives (1946; not rated)	Character	How did Al, Homer, and Fred handle their return home from war differently? Who do you think was most successful? What helped the character adjust?
Rambo: First Blood (1982; R)	Point of View	How does Rambo's Post-Traumatic Distress cloud his judgment about the world? In what ways does the movie unfairly portray this syndrome?
The Kite Runner (2006; R)	Character	How does guilt and fear shape a person's life?
Up (2009; PG)	Character	Some people suffer PTSD due to profound loss. Carl's sense of loss causes him to escape, but Russell follows. Should treatment include forced engagement with the world, or should people be left to find their own way to reconnect?
The Messenger (2009; R)	Flashback	How do Will's flashbacks to the explosion interfere with his ability in his new assignment as a Casualty Notification officer?

(continued)

FIGURE 2. Film Selections for Human Behavior Course (continued)

Film	Literary Analysis	Response Question(s)
Memory Disorders		
Memento (2000; R)	Flashback and Foreshadowing	How does Leonard use visual reminders to make sense of his life?
The Notebook (2004; PG-13)	Flashback and Foreshadowing	How does the daily story of Noah and Allie keep the old woman's memory alive? Why do you think it helped her?
Death and Life-Threatening Illness		
Mask (1985; PG-13)	Point of View	How does Rocky's understanding of his own mortality influence the choices he makes about how he lives his life?
My Girl (1991; PG)	Point of View	How does Vada's obsession with death make her life more difficult? How does she see the world?
Steel Magnolias (1989; PG)	Character	In what ways does Shelby's illness change the characters around her?
Johnny Got His Gun (1971; R)	Point of View	Joe's severe injuries make him unable to communicate, yet he is aware of everything around him. Why do you believe his communication attempts are disregarded?
127 Hours (2010; R)	Character	How does Aron's entrapment change his viewpoint of himself and his relationships with family and the world?
Body Dismorphic Disorder		
Cyrano de Bergerac (1990; PG or 1950; not rated)	Character	How do you think Cyrano's life would have been if he did not have a facial deformity? Do you think it would have been better, or more ordinary?
Dissociative Disorders		
Three Faces of Eve (1957; not rated)	Point of View	How do Eve's three personalities differ from one another? Do they each have a practical function for Eve?
The Black Swan (2010; R)	Point of View	How does Nina's internal conflict in trying to become both the White Swan and the Black Swan manifest itself in her break with reality?
Insomnia		
The Machinist (2003; R)	Character	In what ways does insomnia contribute to Trevor's mental state? Do you think his insomnia was an illness itself, or a manifestation of something else?