



Global Issue Films in English Language Teaching

by Tom Fast (Okayama Gakugeikan High School, Japan)



An On-line Global Issues Film Course

Cinema is referred to as the literature of our time, but does film have a place in the EFL classroom? Students love to watch movies but teachers often have trouble justifying their use. With this in mind, I enrolled in an online course “Going to the Movies: Global Issues in Film” offered by the Seattle-based Heritage Institute. While intended for US high school social studies teachers, I decided to participate from an EFL perspective, gain knowledge on global issues and explore applications for my classes in Japan.

The course provided many online resources for films on global issue themes as well as links to projects both in and outside the classroom. From the list provided, I was required to select 8 films, review them and consider how I might put them to use. For my final assignment, I had to prepare a teaching unit based on one film I’d chosen. I selected my films using the following criteria:

- First, with a few exceptions, I wanted to show my students films they wouldn’t normally find on their own in the local video store.
- Second, I wanted to focus on documentaries, as they are often entertaining and overlooked.
- Third, I decided to concentrate on content and not limit myself to films that were in “easy” English or that lacked subtitles. In fact I chose two films that weren’t in English at all.

The eight films that I selected to focus on were:

1. **Pray the Devil Back to Hell:** A documentary on the Christian-Muslim women’s peace movement in Liberia under the Charles Taylor dictatorship.
2. **Babies:** A film on the 1st year of life of four babies in Namibia, Japan, the US and Mongolia.
3. **Food Inc:** A documentary about the horrors behind the large-scale food industry in the US.
4. **Slumdog Millionaire:** An Academy Award-winning drama about two brothers and the paths they choose to escape the slums of India.
5. **Waltz with Bashir:** An animated docudrama about a former soldier with amnesia who tries to recall his involvement in the war in Beirut.
6. **Darwin’s Nightmare:** A documentary about the horrors that occur in Tanzania after a non-native fish is introduced to Lake Victoria.
7. **The Owl and the Sparrow:** A film set in Saigon about the relationship between a run-away girl, a flight attendant and a zoo keeper.

8. **Hotel Rwanda:** A true story of one man’s attempt to save as many people as possible during the genocide in Rwanda in the 1990’s.

What Worked and What Didn’t

In this course, I enjoyed eight informative and entertaining films. I found that some had themes that coincided with what I was trying to teach. Of the films I chose, most would not be appropriate for my students. They were either too graphic (*Waltz with Bashir*), too slow (*Owl and the Sparrow*), too difficult in terms of English (*Food Inc.*) or required a lot of background knowledge. The films I decided to use in my teaching were:

1. Babies

International Understanding is a new class for our school’s 2nd and 3rd year college-bound students. It’s designed to fulfill our commitment to the *UNESCO Associated Schools Network*, which we joined last fall. I teach each class once a week for *General Studies (Sogo Gakushu)*. While the course is taught in English, ELT is not the only focus. Rather, the course is content driven, and the aim is to help students to understand themselves and others in a global context. According to UNESCO’s *Principles on Intercultural Education*, once understanding is achieved, students will be able to contribute to the community, both local and global. The film *Babies* is an ideal illustration of how we’re all different, yet have the same basic needs. It also demonstrates how material wealth doesn’t necessarily correlate with happiness.

Many English teachers employ films for listening comprehension. *Babies* however has no dialogue, only the sounds of the babies themselves learning to communicate. This made it easy for my students to follow, but impossible to use as a listening tool. Instead I used it to practice writing and speaking. Students were provided with worksheets and encouraged to take notes and write answers to follow-up questions in English. Post-viewing survey activities and discussions were conducted to improve speaking skills. According to the evaluations of the 300 students who saw the film, 90% enjoyed it and remarked on its clear portrayal of how children are raised outside Japan.

2. Slumdog Millionaire

Next term, I plan to develop the theme of how others live via the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. This film inspires a variety of different ELT opportunities

beginning in the pre-viewing stages. I plan to begin with a lesson on UNICEF's *Miniature Earth* (available on YouTube) so my students can see how their lives compare to those of the main characters. I'll include a lesson on the Taj Mahal and information on Indian culture. There will be listening tasks during the quiz show scenes. The film will also expose students to Indian English and remind them that there are other valid forms of the language in existence besides British and American. For post-viewing, they'll have a chance to reflect via written and oral assignments on choices that they would make if forced to grow up on the streets on their own: for example, *how to get food* or *how to find shelter*.

3. Darwin's Nightmare

This film was viewed by my highest level students in our 3rd year English Course who were preparing for the annual Kansai High School *Model United Nations*. They spent 10 months studying abroad in 2nd year, so their ability is high, but the poorly recorded Tanzanian English was too difficult to understand without subtitles. Still the film was a horrifying depiction of what they were studying: *Food Security*. While watching, we took notes on food issues, then had a fruitful discussion on the problems observed and possible solutions - in English. More importantly, the problems of food security came to life in a way they haven't forgotten and that no text could have conveyed.

Honorable Mentions

Films that I may use in the future include:

- *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*: A perfect film for any Peace Studies curriculum. The English is surprisingly slow and clear in parts.
- *Hotel Rwanda* really puts the viewer in the shoes of the protagonist, trying to do his best to survive amidst complete chaos.

Two films that were past favorites of my students:

- *War Dance* powerfully documents the lives of former Ugandan child soldiers who receive therapy through a traditional dance competition.
- *Mad Hot Ballroom* is a documentary about the educational benefits of a ballroom dance program for New York City fifth graders

What I learned

While many teachers choose films to watch based on a target skill, language or grammar point, this often leads to an awkward lesson due to the need to repeat scenes versus the amount of time it takes to watch a feature length film. For me, a more natural approach is to select films that compliment a content-driven syllabus. If the film is appropriate for students to watch, English skill

activities can almost always be incorporated.

1. Some film scenes can be turned into listening exercises or reading lessons if you have a script. I'd caution teachers not to overdo it, or to save exercises for after the film. Disrupting the flow of a film can aggravate students, causing them to lose interest in a film they might otherwise enjoy.
2. While a film may not be compatible with students' English ability, learning can still take place in pre and post-viewing, with comprehension questions, discussions, acting, listening, etc.
3. Using the resources provided by this course, any number of post-viewing projects could be carried out in the classroom or the community. However, opportunities listed were intended for US teachers and may not be feasible in Japan.
4. Japanese students can often relate better to foreign films if they have a young protagonist.
5. The occasional, well-chosen film inserted into the syllabus can provide a break from monotony. Films can provide a window into a new reality for students and encourage them to think critically about the world's problems and think creatively about possible solutions.

Conclusion

The principles of *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) can be applied when using films in the ELT classroom, especially Coyle's 4Cs: *Content, Communication, Cognition* and *Culture*. If we can find films that:

- 1) have valuable global issues content
- 2) can facilitate English practice (not just while watching but in pre- and post-viewing as well)
- 3) encourage students to think critically and creatively, using their cognitive skills
- 4) provide cultural understanding

then, there's no reason not to use films in EFL classes, especially those with a global issues focus.

References:

- UNESCO (2010) *UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education*, 31-36.
- Coyle, D. (2007). "Content and Language Integrated Learning: Motivating Learners and Teachers" in *The CLIL Teacher's Toolkit: a classroom guide*. UK: University of Nottingham.
- UNICEF's Miniature Earth <www.youtube.com>

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Going to the Movies: Global Issues on Film

Instructors: Mike Seymour & Julie Bora
<www.hol.edu/view_course.cfm?cid=2004>

Course Description

There is an incredible variety of documentary and commercial films that can wake up your students and empower discussions of global, environmental, social justice and cultural issues. Films such as *An Inconvenient Truth*, *The 11th Hour*, *The Corporation*, *Affluenza* and *The End of Suburbia* document the unsustainable course we are on and the dramatic changes for a new society already underway. Many of these films are available at low cost from Netflix, in DVD stores and for free trial and purchase from sources such as *The Video Project*. In this online course, you will choose eight videos to view and summarize, then write a plan on how you'll use any of these in your teaching situation.

Learning Outcomes

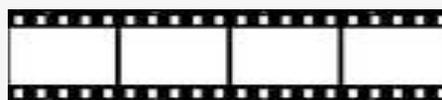
In the course, participants will develop:

- a broader understanding of global issues
- greater skill in how to use videos for teaching purposes and to promote student thinking

Good Sources for Global Issue Films

- The Video Project <www.video-project.com>
- Bill Bigelow <www.rethinkingschools.org/publication/rg/RGResource02.shtml>

Sample Films on Global Issue Themes



Environment, Food, Sustainability

- Affluenza
- An Inconvenient Truth
- Oil on Ice
- Super Size Me
- The 11th Hour
- The Corporation
- The End of Suburbia
- The Future of Food
- The Real Dirt on Farmer John
- Who Killed the Electric Car?

Social Justice

- Africans in America
- Blood Diamond
- Bowling for Columbine
- Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee
- Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room
- Scottsboro: An American Tragedy
- Wounded Heart: Pine Ridge & the Sioux
- Zeitgeist the Movie: Freedom to Fascism
- When the Levees Broke
- Four Little Girls
- Hacking Democracy
- The Fog of War
- Hotel Rwanda
- Paper Clips
- War Dance



Global Education Stories by Robin Richardson

Stories to Make You Think - Reprinted for Classroom Use



Robin Richardson is a key figure in the field of global education. He has been a teacher, a trainer and a multicultural education advisor. He now works as an education consultant with *Insted*. He was director of the 1970s UK *World Studies* project and author of the classic *World Studies* set of activity books (Nelson, 1977). This pioneering global ed series consisted of the following 4 titles:

- *World in Conflict* [war & peace]
- *Fighting for Freedom* [human rights]
- *Progress and Poverty* [development]
- *Caring for the Planet* [environment]

These included a set of dynamic global education stories designed to promote critical thinking, discussion skills and awareness of global issues related to peace, conflict and human rights. Although long out of print, used copies of these classic books can still be purchased on-line.

Robin has kindly granted permission for these stories to be reprinted here for use by language teachers in Japan and elsewhere. The first story, *The Factory*, appears on the next page. Further stories will be printed in subsequent issues. Try these out in your classes and see how they work!

Other Books by Robin Richardson

- *Islamophobia: Challenges, issues and action*. (Ed.) Trentham Books, 2004.
- *Fortunes and Fables: Education for Hope in Troubled Times*. Trentham Books, 1996.
- *Daring to be a Teacher*. Trentham Books, 1990.
- *Learning for Change in World Society*. (Ed.) One World Trust, 1976.

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<www.insted.co.uk>