Using Movies in the Classroom

We use movies in class for many reasons:
- Good listening ability is a skill that makes all other learning easier.
- Movies are inherently high interest.
- Movies provide practice for discrete and global listening.
- Working with movies allows students to read materials (summaries) that are above level because they are already familiar with the content.
- Movies provide opportunities to learn new words in context with a strong association.
- Movies provide opportunities to learn to use visuals and context clues to understand spoken English.
- Movies provide opportunities to expand cultural fluency.
- Movies provide opportunities to hear a lot of language in a controlled setting.
- Using movies encourages active rather than passive learning.
- Movies easily generate writing and discussion topics.
- Movies provide opportunities to learn to identify character, plot, setting, conflict, and resolution in a story.

What to Do with Movies

As you are working with the movie, it’s important to interact with the students to check comprehension and to keep them actively involved in the process. The teacher is providing a lot of meaningful input, helping them through the dialogue, and working with the more abstract elements of the story, like character motivation and themes.
If the class includes low-level students, the meaningful input will need to be based on what is visible on the screen. With higher-level students, the teacher can explore themes and character motivation to a higher degree. We have tried to provide a variety of exercises in both easy and challenging versions.

After you have spent the quarter working with the movie, it is fun to show it in its entirety, without stopping on the last day of class, with popcorn! Students can experience their progress.

LISTENING
- Establish early in the session the student’s ability to comprehend question forms. Ask a series of questions using a particular “W” form in the context. Who is sitting? Who is standing? Who is reading? – all these asked about a single frame. The next day review “Who” and begin “where” questions. In a short time, the students will understand the question forms.
- Students listen for global or discrete information. Students can hold up T/F cards. Or have students use hand signals. Thumbs up means yes. Thumbs down means no. Thumb to the side means I don’t understand the question. Hand shaped in a C means I understand the question, but I don’t know the answer.
- Students listen to questions teacher poses about what is on the screen at a particular moment. Students answer with yes/no cards, or write one-word answers to WH questions on wipe-off slates.
- Divide students into groups NOUNS VERBS ADJECTIVES PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES. They listen and watch and try to list words or phrases for their category. Individual students report to their group. Groups report back to the class.
- Record summaries of the movie that students can listen to at home.

LISTENING & SPEAKING
- Show dialogue without sound. Students speculate (write?) what characters might be saying. Then give half the students part A. They listen for part B. Give other half of students the opposite. Play scene. Pair students up to check their work.
- Choose a key phrase from some dialogue. Show segment. Pass out cards. Who said it? What is it about? Why did the person say it? What does it mean? Why is it important? Show segment again. Students answer the question on their card.
• Pose spin-off discussion questions to the class, and let students discuss in small groups.

**READING**
• Put closed caption setting on and let students hear and read.
• Prepare a long detailed summary of the movie. Use complex sentences, idioms, and new words since by the time they read it, they are familiar with the content. (Write it in the present and they can change parts of it to the past for extra practice.)
• Make an easier version of the summary with simple sentences for lower level students. **Note: You might want to distribute the summary in pieces so it covers material you have already worked with in class.**
• Make a cloze with a shorter summary of the movie's themes.
• Provide reading material on related themes.
• Create key vocabulary picture sheets for low level students
• Create vocabulary suitcases for high-level students.
• Create exercises at two different levels where students choose a vocabulary word to complete a sentence.
• Scramble individual sentences from the summaries
• Order sentence strips that summarize the movie. (A more challenging way to do this is to cut the strips, line by line, from a paragraph of text without reformatting the paragraph into separate sentences.)

**LISTENING & WRITING**
• Prepare Who/What/When/Where/Why worksheets for a scene. Students in groups watch/discuss/write
• Show scene of a conversation without sound. Class speculates about what characters might be saying. Then give half the students part A. They listen for part B. Give other half of students the opposite. Play scene. Pair students up to check their work.
• Give students a list of new vocabulary words. Dictate sentences with a word missing. Students choose the missing word from the list.
• Give students a clicker dictation. Read a sentence based on the movie, and replace a common word, or sight word, with a click. Students have to write the missing word.

**SPEAKING**
• With the sound off, play a scene from a previous class. Let students talk their way through a scene describing what is happening.
Hand out key words on index cards to groups. The goal is to explain the significance of the word to classmates in the context of the movie.

In small groups, have students recount the events of the film so far. You can pretend you have forgotten and they have to refresh your memory. Or explain it to a student who was absent or just joining the class.

Stop the film at a critical moment and have students predict what will happen next.

Bring in or make props and have groups of students act out or embellish scenes.

Students can prepare oral presentations based on the content of the film.

Use stills from the movie to practice ordering, summarizing, or describing.

Teacher provides a variety of questions or have higher-level students write them. Divide high and low speakers. Each group makes two lines, facing each other. Everyone gets a question to ask her partner. Lines rotate.

**READING WRITING SPEAKING LISTENING**

Prepare introductory summary of the movie in 4-5 sentences. One way to do this is with messenger/scribe dictation. Pair off students. The messenger comes to the front table and reads a sentence (or more) (or less) of the summary, goes back to his partner (the scribe). Messenger dictates to scribe. Messenger can return to my table as often as necessary, but cannot touch scribe’s pen. Also, messenger cannot stand at the table and shout out the sentences while looking at them.

**WRITING**

Summarize a chunk (or one page of detailed summary worth) of movie with about 10-15 sentences capturing the main action. Prepare scrambled sentences for pairs of students. They order the words correctly, then write the correct sentence on an erasable card. When all sentences have been transposed on the cards, the students figure out the order of the sentences.

An easier version of this: Write a series of simple sentences summarizing a scene. Write each word of a sentence on a separate card. Hand out the cards. Read the sentence. Let students look at their card and see if they are part of the sentence. Eventually, just hand out the word cards to a particular sentence and have the students try to order themselves without hearing the sentence first.

Students write questions about the movie for each other.

Give students the answer and have them create the question.
• Groups of students can write their own summaries of the previous day’s scenes.
• Divide the class into three groups. The first group writes yes/no questions. The second group writes content questions. The third group writes a summary of the segment of the day. Rotate the groups.
• Students can describe a scene in the movie from the point of view of a minor character.
• Students change the tense of the written summaries.
• Students answer thought questions in blue books.
• Distribute a picture of a scene illustrating many key vocabulary words. Pass out index cards with individual words on them. Put the picture on the overhead. Students check their cards to see where it fits on the picture. The next class, try it again without the cards.
• Make a graffiti board where students can comment on their favorite scenes or characters.
• Create a large poster chart of characters and spaces for adjectives describing them. As the movie progresses, students can add adjectives to the chart. (We have laminated a set of pictures of all the main characters to facilitate this exercise.)