A SHORT IS WORTH A THOUSAND FILMS!

by **Maria Palmira Massi**

Facultad de Lenguas, Universidad Nacional del Comahue,

Argentina

mpmassi @ fibertel.com.ar

and **Bettiana Andrea Blázquez**

Facultad de Lenguas, Universidad Nacional del Comahue,

Argentina

- bettianablazquez @ hotmail.com

Abstract

The importance of visual input in the contemporary ELT classroom is such that it is commonplace to use audiovisual elements provided by pictures, films, clips and the like. The power of images is unquestionable, and as the old saying goes, an image is worth a thousand words. Following this line of reasoning, the objective of this article is to discuss the potential of one particular type of audiovisual material – live action shorts – in the ELT context.

In the first section, reference to previous work is made. Then, the article explores the main features of live action shorts. In the second part possible uses are discussed and a descriptive framework is sketched so that it can be used systematically as a tool for analysis and language exploitation. The overall idea is to focus on shorts not as a complement or decoration but as the starting point of ELT lessons.

Keywords: audiovisual input – live-action shorts – materials design

Introduction

The present globalised world offers a myriad of images which convey as much meaning as verbal messages. In view of this supremacy of visual input, Goldstein (2008) and Keddie (2009), among others, promote the relevance of developing visual literacy in the ELT setting by urging teachers to use images rather than words to move people. While exploring the relationship between words and images, Keddie (2009, p. 7) claims that "whereas a text supplies the language explicitly, an image implies it and thus creates a void to be filled". He concludes that images are so commanding and potent that they provide meanings in a clear and straightforward way.

In a similar fashion, Sherman (2003, p. 13) emphasizes the role of exposure to audiovisual media in the language classroom, as she considers it "an entry ticket to the English Speaking World". This view is reinforced by Lowe (2007) when he states that audiovisual texts are optimum sources for learners to consolidate and expand vocabulary and grammar, get an insight into new cultures, recognise different accents and improve their pronunciation.

An interesting audiovisual format is that of shorts, which can be defined as films that last between thirty seconds and fifteen minutes. They are particularly attractive as they combine both images and sounds. In the digital age, this genre has become accessible thanks to the development of technological resources (DVDs, Blue-rays and the like) and, particularly, the Internet. Many websites host a vast array of short films for free, and the following ones offer not only quality but also a wide variety of styles: *BBC Film Network, Culture Unplugged, Future Shorts, Short of the Week and The Smalls* among others (URLs and other repositories are listed in the reference section at the end of the article). These websites encourage the submission of short films from both professional and amateur filmmakers so that their work can be shared by fans and critics. Likewise, directors can get their shorts seen by a large audience by means of the well-known free-distribution platform *YouTube*. This video-sharing website allows users to upload and view movie clips, TV clips, as well as amateur content such as short original videos. These sites and resources provide an insight into the versatility and the ease of access to the genre, which was beyond reach years ago.

Some exploratory work in this area (Massi & Blázquez, 2008) has focused on the use of DVDs' extra features such as previews, deleted scenes and shorts, to mention a few. Massi and Blázquez (2010) have analysed the distinctive characteristics of *animated shorts* and their potential in the ELT setting. In this article, the emphasis is placed on another type of mini-movies: live-action shorts.

Shorts: categories, main features and types

As stated above, shorts –or short subjects– are self-contained mini-films. This format has various sub-categories: *animated shorts, documentaries* and *live-action shorts*. The first type refers to hand-drawn or computer generated films that develop stories. They are

often an extra feature on a film's DVD. In most cases a short accompanies a full-length film featuring some of its characters, while on other occasions, the short that has been included as a bonus on a DVD is not related to the feature film itself. To take an example, the film *Monsters' Inc* is accompanied by a short called *Mike's New Car* performed by its main characters. However, the film *Toy Story 3* contains a short *Day & Night*, whose main character does not play a part in the feature film.

The second category, documentary, presents facts and opinions about single topics. The people in documentaries are not actors as the main objective is to "document" reality, thus interviews and images with voice-over narration are often included. This category is shorter than feature films, but generally longer than animated shorts.

The last type, live-action shorts, offers a series of events that tell a story performed by actors and actresses. This article focuses on this type, which, as stated above, can easily be accessed on the Internet. The most interesting aspect of these shorts is that they comply with all the requirements of a narrative piece (orientation – complication – resolution) in such a short time that the possibilities for exposure and multiple layers of analysis and exploitation in the ELT context are virtually unlimited.

Live-action shorts have several distinctive features that distinguish them from full-length films**.** One aspect to point out is that they deal with themes that trigger a central message which often makes reference to social matters or reflections on the human condition. Due to their brevity, these short audiovisual texts have an enormous potential to arouse emotions by presenting a unique perspective on a given topic in a very economical way. For instance, watching *Out Time is Up* may lead the viewer to mull over existential issues related to people´s everyday problems and obstacles in life; likewise, *The Black Hole* may trigger reflection on controversial contemporary themes such as the subtle power of desire and greed.

Another point to consider is that, because of their length, logic and time are not as relevant in the storyline as in other formats, such as a feature film or a documentary. Though short films tell a story, have conflict at their heart and the characters have to make choices, there is much more freedom to capture the sequence of events through an original combination of image, script, music and sound effects. A common denominator

of live action films is the originality of camera-work and technical skills to tell a story and convey a meaning in a very short period of time.

Certainly, the digital age offers new exciting opportunities for this genre. This is clearly evident in *New Boy*, a story that captures a child´s feelings during his first day at a new school. By means of flashbacks, the director recreates the boy´s previous school experience to trigger a dramatic effect on the viewer. In *Wrong Side of the Bed*, the use of split-camera work facilitates the division of the screen in two parts, which allows the viewer to perceive simultaneous images that depict different events performed by the same person.

Finally, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of live-action shorts: those that provide a set of visual elements and linguistic input, and those that offer a rich display of visual images and have no verbal support. The former present a narrative piece in which the characters interact verbally throughout the story. The audience perceives visual elements and hears language, usually accompanied by background music and sound effects (*Our Time is Up* and *New Boy* belong to this categorisation). By contrast, the latter offer a sequence of events sometimes accompanied by background music, visual and sound effects. However, there is no verbal linguistic input at all (as in *The Black Hole* and *Wrong Side of the Bed*). It is interesting to point out that these sample audiovisual texts have varied length, so they offer a wide range of options depending on the time available.

Using live-action shorts in the ELT setting
These short films, and similar ones, can be exploited in different ways in the ELT classroom with the following purposes in mind:

- to introduce a topic or issue, for example, bullying at school, ambitions, bad and good luck, life and values, accepting one's identity, etc.,
- to illustrate a particular language function in context, for instance, expressing feelings and emotions, describing people and places, giving opinions or advice, etc.,
- to consolidate a set of grammar structures, such as conditional forms, passives, reported speech, narrative tenses, etc.,

- to develop a lexical domain or semantic field, e.g. education, greed, psychology, jobs and work routines, etc.,

- to provide exposure to distinct suprasegmental features such as phonological processes, stress and intonation,

- to supply content material for students to get information on a particular topic,

- to generate opinion on a controversial issue,

- to round off a unit of work.

Because of the wealth of visual information they provide, these text types contribute to the development of learning strategies such as predicting or guessing from the context by analysing facial expressions, music, sound effects among other features. In addition, cognitive strategies like note-taking for the reconstruction of events as well as compensation strategies such as using linguistic and non-linguistic clues can be fostered (Oxford, 1990; Mendelsohn & Rubin, 1995; Chamot, 1995).

The possibilities that live-action shorts offer are endless as long as the teacher analyses the clips and, on the basis of sound pedagogical principles, makes the necessary adjustments to specific language teaching situations. If, for instance, the objective is to provide wide exposure to phonological features, accents and intonation patterns, particular language functions, grammar points or lexical domains, or reinforce the listening skill, then the most appropriate choice would be visual texts *with* linguistic input. By contrast, when the overall aim is to provide training in image decoding and interpretation or promote students' verbal output to further develop their productive skills, visual texts *without* linguistic support might become the best option. Which of these two types of live-action shorts will benefit students the most? Each of them may serve different purposes depending on course objectives. It is advisable to alternate so that students can develop flexibility and adaptability to different options.

The advantages of using live-action shorts as language learning resources are many. Because of the clarity, simplicity and economy of story-telling, live-action shorts can serve as the starting point of a lesson focused on the development of receptive and productive skills. The fact that a short is based on a single event and that every element is relevant allows teachers to offer several viewings of the material, each time with a different purpose in mind. The visual images provide situations with real

language used in context, thus phonological features and intonation patterns can be analysed and discussed. This, in turn, will contribute to the development of the learners' pragmatic awareness of the conventions and uses of particular discourse communities. Likewise, these audiovisual texts are useful to raise the learners' awareness of the role of body language, gestures, facial expressions and other paralinguistic features in communicating different attitudes and emotions (Sweeting, 2009). As live-action shorts are highly adaptable audiovisual texts that rely heavily on the story told by the images, they are invaluable tools for retrieving, revising and reactivating different aspects of the target language. Additionally, the subjective process of interpretation may turn out to be profitable to generate opinions and take a stand.

Framework for lesson planning

The following framework is based on the concept of *task*, defined as an activity in which the learner uses the target language for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome (Willis and Willis, 2007). A large body of evidence suggests that learning occurs in stages (Oxford, 1990; Mendelsohn and Rubin, 1995; Chamot, 1995; Brinton, 2001; Morley, 2001 and Herbert 2004). On this basis, the three-phase framework for exploiting audiovisual material in EFL consists of the following steps: pre, while and post-viewing.

The pre-viewing phase has two main functions: 1. to stimulate the learners' interest in the material they are about to view, 2. to activate prior schemata that will pave the way to understanding and analysis. Some pre-viewing tasks involve answering warm-up questions to introduce a scene, predicting about characters or settings, creating a purpose for viewing or identifying specific lexical domains. The main objective of this stage is to generate expectations for viewing the text by means of a clear pre-set task.

The while-viewing phase has the main objective of focusing the learners' attention on the whole text or its specific parts, for example, by taking down skeletal notes on the main events or creating an outline of the storyline, jotting down some words related to a specific lexical field, identifying organizational relationships and the like. This stage serves the purpose of guiding the viewing of the different parts of the

audiovisual text to aid *perception and comprehension*. The tasks in this stage should be kept to a minimum as the learners are actively involved in the viewing process.

In the post-viewing phase, the learners' attention is guided to meaning and form-focused *production* tasks that combine integrated skills. Depending on the objectives of the lesson, this stage may focus on the *analysis and interpretation* of the story. Before the learners produce their own texts, it is necessary to make sure that interpretation processes have developed smoothly and that the linguistic input has been internalized. Afterwards, they can focus on different areas (lexis, syntax, phonology, discourse) with the objective of noticing and reinforcing particular uses in context (form-focused tasks). Then, it is advisable to delve into the main conflicts in the story and the characters' reactions. Finally, it is important to proceed to an exploration of the learners' own perceptions of the issues at stake, their own experiences, and the like, with a view to raising their critical skills (meaning-focused tasks).

In order to exemplify the pedagogical purposes outlined above and this framework, four lesson plans that use this type of audiovisual texts as the starting point are presented. Lesson plans 1 and 3 are based on live-action shorts that have linguistic input –*Our Time is Up* and *New Boy*– whereas Lesson plans 2 and 4 focus on shorts that do not have linguistic support –*The Black Hole* and *Wrong Side of the Bed*. The tasks are suitable for intermediate and upper-intermediate levels, and have originally been designed for learners who are studying to become teachers and translators of English at Facultad de Lenguas, Universidad Nacional del Comahue, Argentina. Needless to say, the lesson plans, which have been attached to the article as an appendix, are expected to serve as springboards for adaptation and adjustment to other EFL/ESL teaching-learning contexts.

Conclusion

Live-action shorts provide a wide array of opportunities for language analysis and skills practice. Both types –with and without linguistic input– have the potential to stimulate the development of the students' senses, especially visual and auditory ones. Images, sound effects and music, as well as verbal messages, convey meanings that need to be

decoded and interpreted by means of specific training in the classroom. A live-action short offers a story in a nutshell and its exploitation in the ELT setting can be as productive as watching a full-length film. It is hoped that further research on the potential of the media described here will contribute to raising students' awareness of the many options available to them, and encourage them to take an active role in their own learning.

References

Brinton, D. (2001). The use of media in language teaching. In M. Celce-Murcia (ed.). *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (pp. 459-476). Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Chamot, A. U. (1995). Learning strategies and listening comprehension. In D. J. Mendelsohn and J. Rubin (eds.). *A Guide for the Teaching of Second Language Listening* (pp. 179-212). Singapore: Dominie Press, Inc.

Goldstein, B. (2008). *Working with Images*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Herbert, M. (2004). The use of DVD in foreign language learning: Strategies used by learners for meaning-focused and form-focused tasks. Retrieved from http://www.cs.tcd.ie/courses/csll/herbertm.

Keddie, J. (2009). *Images*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lowe, M. (2007). Films in English language teaching. *IH Journal*, 23, 16-19.

Massi, M. P. and B. Blázquez. (2008). Exploiting DVDs' extra features: An added bonus in the EFL class. *Humanising Language Teaching* 4. Retrieved from http://www.hltmag.co.uk/aug08/mart03.htm

Massi, M. P. and B. Blázquez. (2010). The shorter the better: Using shorts in ELT. *Modern English Teacher*, 19/2, 36-42.

Mendelsohn, D. J. and J. Rubin (eds.). (1995). *A Guide for the Teaching of Second Language Listening*. Singapore: Dominie Press, Inc.

Morley, J. (2001). Aural comprehension instruction: Principles and practices. In M. Celce-Murcia (ed.) *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (pp. 69-86). Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Oxford, R. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Sherman, J. (2003). *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sweeting, A. (2009). *Language through Film*. Sydney: Phoenix Education Pty.

Willis, D. and J. Willis. (2007). *Doing Task-Based Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Internet Sources

Australian Short Films http://www.australianshortfilms.com/films.html

BBC Film Network http://www.bbc.co.uk/filmnetwork/

BritFilms http://www.britfilms.com/

Culture Unplugged http://www.cultureunplugged.com/

Future Shorts http://www.futureshorts.com/

Newgrounds http://www.newgrounds.com/

Shorts HD The Short Movie Channel http://www.shorts.tv/

Short of the Week http://www.shortoftheweek.com/category/style/live-action/

The Smalls http://www.thesmalls.com/

Appendix

Lesson Plan 1

Our Time is Up (2006)

Running time: 14:23

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vso9iPIpeu8

> Dr. Stern is a therapist who pays little attention to his patients. When he learns he has six weeks to live, he takes a more drastic approach in solving his patients' neuroses with dramatic impacts on their lives.

Topic: People, their feelings and emotions

Level: Upper-intermediate

Aim: To provide suitable contexts for practice and consolidation of the English language

Objectives:

o To integrate the following functions:

- Describing people

- Talking about feelings and emotions

- Discussing hypothetical situations

o To practise the following learning strategies:

- Making predictions

- Viewing for main ideas

- Developing observational skills

o To activate and learn new vocabulary related to a specific word domain

Materials: live-action short and worksheets

Time:

- Pre-viewing: 5 minutes

- While-viewing: 15 minutes

- Post-viewing: 30 minutes

- Follow-up tasks: 30 minutes

Pre-viewing task

The words below are related to the live-action short you are going to watch. Read them and make predictions about the plot of *Our Time is Up*. Then team up in pairs to compare your guesses.
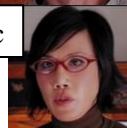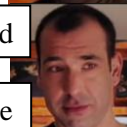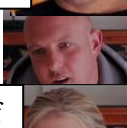
While-viewing task

While you watch the short, match the patients with their corresponding problems. Then write numbers in the squares on the right to signal the order in which they appear for the first time.

a. a man with a turtle phobia

b. a classically closeted homosexual

c. a compulsive ass grabber

d. an Asian hypochondriac

e. a middle-aged man who's afraid of the dark

f. a thin, attractive and bulimic model who's convinced she's obese

g. a man who loves his wife despite the fact that she throws plates at his head

h. a playboy who goes out with a different girl every night and can't find love

Post-viewing tasks

(1). Dr. Stern goes through a marked and drastic alteration of behavior when he learns he is about to die. The adjectives below characterise the old and new Dr. Stern. Classify them in the chart below. Be ready to account for your choices.

insensitive   warm   neat   meticulous   honest   scheduled   carefree
rude   challenging   engaging   self-important   detached   easy-going   untidy

Old Dr. Stern	New Dr. Stern

(2). Discuss the following questions in small groups.

a. What does Dr. Stern mean when he uses the phrases "in due time" and "right now" throughout the short?

b. How does he spend his time at the beginning and at the end of the story?

c. Why does his new therapy method work better than his old passive approach? What does it consist of?

d. In what way are the following ideas related to this short?

- *Life is too short to have any regrets once our Time is Up.*
- *Every second matters and life can be your greatest ally or your implacable foe.*
- *What may be done at any time will be done at no time.*
- *Don't count every hour in the day, make every hour in the day count.*

(3). The story and YOU

a. What would you do if you were in Dr Stern's shoes when he got to know that he had six weeks to live?

b. What's your view on psychotherapy? Is it useful or unnecessary?

c. This short forces us to re-evaluate our own lives. Do you make the most of your life? If so, in what ways?

Follow-up tasks

a.   Write about Dr. Stern's life story from the gardener's point of view. Develop a text of approximately 280-300 words.

b. If you could turn into one of the characters of the short, who would you like to be? Explain the reasons for your choice in a short paragraph.

Lesson Plan 2

The Black Hole (2008)

Running time: 2:49

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5_Msrdg3Hk

A tired office worker accidentally photocopies a black hole. He discovers that with this magic piece of paper, he can do amazing things. His curiosity becomes his downfall when he starts experimenting with "the black hole".

Topic: Reconstructing stories

Level: Intermediate

Aim: To provide suitable contexts for practice and consolidation of the English language

Objectives:

o To revise and consolidate the following grammar points:

- Past tenses

- Connectors used in narrative texts

- Conditionals

o To practise the following learning strategies:

- Anticipating content

- Viewing for main ideas

- Developing observational skills

- Summarising

Materials: live-action short and worksheets

Time:

- Pre-viewing: 10 minutes

- While-viewing: 15 minutes

- Post-viewing: 30 minutes

- Follow-up tasks: 30 minutes

Pre-viewing tasks

(1). Look at the picture above and read the short text below. Find answers to the following questions:

- *What is a black hole?*

- *Why is it "black"?*
- *Who coined the term?*
- *Is there evidence to support the theories related to black holes?*

A black hole is a celestial object, formed when a star collapses from its own gravity. A black hole has such a strong pull of gravity that not even light can escape from it. Some scientists theorise that rotating black holes which contain billions of dead stars lie at the centers of galaxies. Around a black hole there is a mathematically defined surface called an event horizon that marks the point of no return. It is called "black" because it absorbs all the light that hits the horizon, reflecting nothing, just like a perfect black body in thermodynamics.

The idea of black holes was first theorised in the late eighteenth century by English geologist John Mitchell and French astronomer Pierre Simon Laplace. In 1969 Princeton physicist John Wheeler coined the term black hole. There is growing consensus that supermassive black holes exist in the centers of most galaxies. In particular, there is strong evidence of a black hole of more than 4 million solar masses at the center of our Milky Way.
Source: Wikipedia

---

(2). Now make predictions on the content of the short film you are about to watch.

- *The short may be about…*
- *The short film could probably discuss…*
- *The film will certainly deal with…*

While-viewing task

Choose the right option from the chart below:

|	
Place where the action develops	*studio – office – night-club – disco – museum*
Characteristics of the place	*nice atmosphere – boring and dull – sinister – appealing*
Main character´s appearance	*handsome – sleepy – tired – happy*
Main themes	*monotony – ambition – hunger – work*

Post-viewing   *tasks*

(1). In pairs, reconstruct the storyline of the short you have just watched. First, work out an outline with main ideas. Then, take some minutes to practise the text for a short oral presentation. Use words and expressions from the word cloud below:
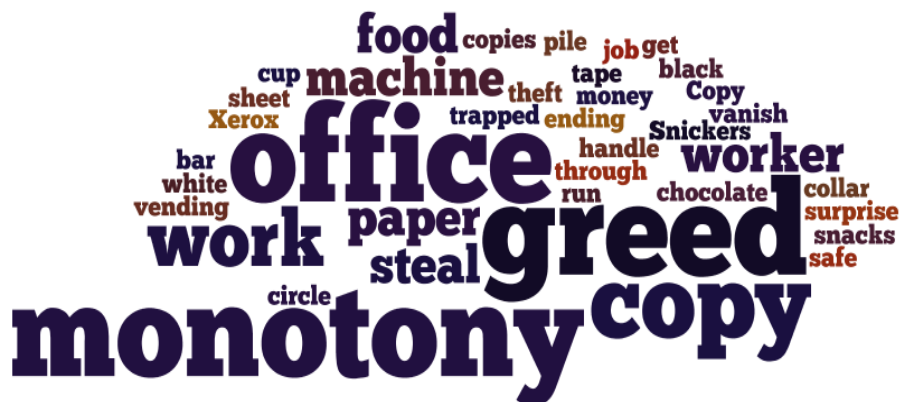
(2). Discuss the following topics and explain the connections with *The Black Hole*.

- Temptation to push the limits
- The use and abuse of power
- No one wants to steal until there is a chance to do so!
- We are all able to do bad things… All we need is an opportunity
- Greed is the worst of the seven deadly sins!

(3). The story and YOU

   a. How would you   cope with a monotonous

and tedious work routine?

b. If you could become invisible, what would you like to do?

c. What would you do if you were in a morally questionable situation as the main character?

Follow-up tasks

Choose ONE of the following tasks for homework.

a. Select one of the main issues from the list above and develop it in an argumentative piece. Write approximately 280-300 words. Provide a suitable title.

b. Write an evaluation of the short in the format of a critic's article.

Lesson Plan 3

New Boy

Running time: 11:31

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdeioVndUhs

> Joseph is a nine-year-old African boy who has fled a war-torn nation and is experiencing his first day of school in Ireland. He suffers the natural difficulties of an outsider fitting in while he remembers his school days in Africa.

Topic: Generating opinion on a controversial issue

Level: Upper-intermediate

Aims: To provide suitable contexts for practice and consolidation of the English language

Objectives:

o To practise the following learning strategies:

- Making predictions

- Viewing for main ideas

- Developing observational skills

o To activate and learn new vocabulary related to a specific word domain

o To integrate the following functions:

- Describing people

- Talking about feelings and emotions

- Discussing hypothetical situations

Materials: live-action short and worksheets

Time:

- Pre-viewing: 10 minutes

- While-viewing: 15 minutes

- Post-viewing: 30 minutes

- Follow-up tasks: 30 minutes

Pre-viewing task

We are going to watch a short film called *New Boy*. In pairs, predict which of the following topics it may deal with.

- The value of friendship

- Different types of education

- Individualism versus teamwork

- Facing changes in life
- Bullying
- Family ties
- Childhood experiences
- Racism
- Cultural crash
- Difficulties of being an outsider

While-viewing task

(1)   As you watch, identify the main characters of the short. *Who are they?* Match the names with their corresponding pictures.
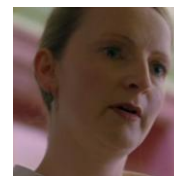
| Teacher | Hazel | Joseph | Christian Kelly | Seth Quinn |

(2)   Read the parts of the script below and organise them in chronological order.

Girl: Miss, Seth Quinn threw my book out of the window.

Seth Quinn: Did not.

Girl: Did so!

Teacher: Seth Quinn, go down and get that book!

Christian Kelly: Hey, do they know what Christmas is?

Teacher: Christian Kelly!

Christian: What?

Teacher: Are you annoying Joseph?

Christian Kelly: No

Teacher: Is he Joseph? Sure he isn't. Sit down straight so that I can see you Christian Kelly.

Hazel: He was poking Joseph´s back, miss.

Christian Kelly: Shut up

Hazel: He was!

Everybody: Fight, Fight! Hit him, Hit him!

Girl: Come on Kelly!

Boy: Go on… punch him!

Girl: Are you going to fight or what?

☐   **Christian Kelly:** "Specy" fancies you! You're dead!

☐   **Christian Kelly:** Hey, you hungry? You want that? It's a good one!

Boy: Kelly's got snot on his finger!

Christian Kelly: Oh my finger! Let go!

☐   **Teacher:** We have a new boy with us today.

Boy: So what?

Teacher: Now, now. Everybody this is Joseph. Say, "Hello".

Boy: He should sit beside Pamela!

Girl: No, he shouldn't!

Teacher: Hands in the air! Oh, not you Joseph! You're fine! Just go and sit over there.

☐   **Christian Kelly:** You're definitely dead!

> ***Post-viewing tasks***

(1). Reconstruct Joseph's experience. Use at least 5 of the words below.

(2). Discuss the following groups.

sharing indifference stranger change secrets laugh uncomfortable move acceptance

questions in small

a. What does bullying consist of?

b. Why are children bullied?

c. Is bullying a big problem in our country? If so, provide examples.

d. What steps should teachers, parents and kids follow to stop bullying?

(3). The story and YOU

a. Have you ever been bullied? If so, share your experience.

b. Have you ever been a bully? What were the reasons why you behaved in this way?

c. What would you do if you were bullied?

Choose ONE of the following tasks for homework.

a. You are Joseph. Write a 250-280 word letter to your granny who lives in Africa. In it compare and contrast your first day of school in Ireland and your previous experience back in your hometown.

b. Write a short proposal suggesting a course of action for educators to deal with bullying at school.

Lesson Plan 4

Wrong side of the Bed

Running time: 1:31

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR_PzFZgsHU

A man suffers an unlucky day when he gets up on the wrong side of the bed. A split screen shows him carrying out the same tasks: the man on the 'wrong' side has misfortune, whereas the one on the 'right' has good luck.

Topic: Working on suprasegmental features

Level: Intermediate

Aims: To provide suitable contexts for practice and consolidation of the English language

Objectives:

o To focus on a phonological aspect:

  • Putting prominence into practice

o To employ the following learning strategies:

  • Viewing for details

  • Developing observational skills

o To activate and learn new vocabulary related to a specific word domain

o To integrate the following functions:

  • Talking about everyday actions

  • Comparing and contrasting information

Materials: live-action short and worksheets

Time:

  • Pre-viewing: 10 minutes

  • While-viewing: 2-3 minutes

  • Post-viewing: 30 minutes

  • Follow-up tasks: 30 minutes

Pre-viewing tasks

Focus on Meaning: Think of six activities that you carry out from the time you wake up to the time you get to university.

1. ……………………………

2.   ………………………
3.   ………………………
4.   ………………………
5.   ………………………
6.   ………………………

Focus on Phonology: Share your routine with a partner. Place prominence on new information and unstress old information. Don't forget to add emphasis on certain words and contrast information to convey your message more effectively. A sample exchange between partners might be the following:

You: *i usually have some TOAST for BREAKFAST.*
Your partner: *i DON'T have some toast for breakfast. i have BISCUITS.*

While-viewing task

Work in pairs. You are going to watch a short in which the screen is divided into two parts. On both sides the character carries out the same tasks. One of you will concentrate on the man on the left side of the screen while your partner will pay attention to the one on the right. Fill in the gaps.

Concentrate on the man on the LEFT:

His glasses [1]………… broken.
He [2]…………….. fall down while getting dressed.
He [3]………………… the curtains successfully.
He [4]…………….. some delicious [5]………………..
When washing his hands, the water [6]…………… spray all over him. He wears a [7]……………. He [8]…………….. his apple since [9]……………. has stolen it. He [10]…………… his apple to the other side of the screen. He's [11]…………….. onto the other side by the other character. Then, a woman [12]…………… him to stand up.

Concentrate on the man on the RIGHT:

His glasses [1]…………...broken.
He [2]……………….... down while getting dressed.
He [3]……………… open the curtains successfully. He pulls the curtains off the pole. He [4]………….. have delicious [5]…………., since they get burnt. When washing his hands, the water [6]……….. all over him. He [7]…………. wears a [8]………….., but it gets caught by the door. He [9]…………... eat his apple because [10]……………. has stolen it. He's [11]……….. by an apple and accidentally crosses onto the other side. Then, a woman [12]……….…… him on his face.

Post-viewing tasks

(1). Share your information with your partner so that he/she can complete the other man's information. Don't forget to place prominence appropriately!

(2). Discuss the following questions with your partner.

    a. What does the director mean by using a split screen?

    b. Why is this short called *Wrong Side of the Bed*?

    c. Are misfortune and destiny related to the message of this clip? If so, in what sense?

(3). The story and YOU

    a. Who do you feel identified with: the man on the left side of the screen or the one on the right?

    b. Do you believe in luck or fate? Why?

    c. Have you ever had a lucky day? Share your experience.

    d. Have you ever had an unlucky day? Share your experience.

Follow-up tasks

a. Concentrate on one picture while your partner pays attention to a similar one with several differences. Face your partner without showing your picture to your classmate. Then, exchange information to determine the differences. Put prominence into practice!

It was a lovely day for a picnic

It was a lovely night for a picnic

How many differences can you spot?

© Jan Pieńkowski 2000

http://www.janpienkowski.com/fun-and-games/spotthedifference/index.htm

b. Talk about your personal life. Compare and contrast one day of your life as a child and one day in your present life.

c. Write about a day in the life of the man on the right or the man on the left. Develop a short article of approximately 250 words.