

CRITICALLY GAUGING FILM USE AS A TEACHING AID IN A
HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE CLASS

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Abstract

Critically gauging film use as a teaching aid in a high school literature class

As a teacher of English literature in an over-stimulated media-driven era, motivating the reader to enjoy and engage in literature can seem impossible. Literature teachers have used film adaptations for years in correspondence with required reading to conclude a novel as a reward, fill up extra time in class, or to leave as a substitute plan. The problem with this use of film is that teachers do not often gauge the purpose of films in application to student learning. They also do not hear student perspectives on film use, so they find it difficult to utilize film's true worth appropriately. Too often educators have misused film as a classroom pacifier. Wise educators endeavor to utilize any and all available materials purposefully in order to create an interactive, culturally relevant class time in which students can make memorable and motivational learning connections and experiences. Through the careful use of film, students can gain great insight and increased interest in literature. Film can be a tool, engaging visual learners, igniting the memory centers of the brain through emotional connectivity, and enhancing retention. This study focuses on three classrooms of ninth graders at an affluent private Seattle preparatory school. Perhaps through the strategic, effective use of media as a classroom tool, the over-stimulated student populous can be positively directed in a controlled environment through the same affecting media, and the cause can also finally become the cure.

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Introduction

I have always loved film and literature. I am fascinated by story, somehow changed by each dynamic character that I read about or view on screen. I mentally interact with them, ask why they made certain choices, and empathize when they emote. Each one somehow feels alive to me. I always wanted to *be* Anne of Green Gables. I was certain that the dinosaurs of Jurassic Park *were* going to eat me. And, if I needed a Fairy Godmother or a Good Witch of the North, they were simply a page flip or remote click away. These fictional characters have cultivated my imagination since childhood and have made me both a lover of the written word and a film connoisseur.

I never dreamed that an occupation involving both of these loves of mine could exist until I began teaching high school. I have found my veritable niche teaching literature, and my students definitely share my affinity for film. Perhaps this is because they are inundated by it living in our media-saturated western culture. I use film sparingly, but gratefully as a tool with the hope that it will provide visual understanding of text.

I am employed to teach ninth grade English at Excalibur High School*. Excalibur is a high profile, high cost, Christian preparatory school in the Seattle area. I have three classes with an average of 25 students per class, both genders, ages 13-15. Some have reading disabilities; a few have Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorders (ADHD). Ten have "Plans for Success," similar to Individual Education Plans (IEP's) which delineate the students' specific needs and in-class modification requirements, such as seat placement and test specificities. Excalibur's socioeconomic status is very high; parents pay over ten thousand dollars per year to send their students here. Most students have been attending Excalibur's private program since pre-school, so students and parents often feel a great sense of entitlement and ownership.

** The name of the high school has been changed.*

I am thirty years old and have just finished my first year teaching at Excalibur. I substitute taught for years, but now I have my own set of keys. I did not always plan to teach, but I've loved the challenge and diversity. Notes from every one of my old college literature classes have suddenly become very handy in lesson planning. The work is exhausting, the paper load infinite, but my audience keeps it fresh. Teaching is never boring. Students' needs are numerous and varied. Like sponges, my students are also persistent catalysts both draining and driving me to implement more creativity, excellence, and relevance in lesson planning. Students very quickly lose motivation, so I must reinforce the subject's value while providing interesting and memorable lessons. This is truly a challenge in this distraction-laden, media driven age.

Surfeit distractions and drama reign in the high school environment. My students are just careening out of the pubescent adolescent junior high phase and into the frightening, hormonal and sexually aware mid-to-late teen years. To freshmen, high school seems like a vast ocean, uncharted, confusing, and dangerous. They grow full inches over the weekend, and once the puberty switch goes off in their heads, their interests and motivations rarely include schoolwork.

The freshmen I teach are only fourteen, maybe fifteen, and some of them still sound like little wind up racecars when they talk. They've grown up using computers and watching movies, and sadly many have not learned to communicate effectively without technology. They *speak* in coded abbreviations through texts and Instant Messages. Media is life for most of my students. They have grown up in a consistently media-centered environment which has tended to replace reading in general as a pastime. As the popular music group, Switchfoot, sings, "I don't want to read the book...I'll watch the movie. I'm just like everybody else my age..." (Switchfoot, 1997). As a literature teacher, I have become acutely aware of this general sentiment amongst my students. They would rather sit numbly in front of *any* movie than do anything productive in class. For them it seems that watching other people interact has become simpler than actually risking interactions themselves.

Media and the immediate gratification therein seems to have made students of this era lazier and more satisfied to sit back and wait for the world to change around them. They tussle daily with the fact that I am not going to just give them all of the answers and that I want them to learn to think for themselves. Intellectually, they still struggle with grasping abstract concepts; and, making inferences as they read the novels requires more effort than they are willing to exert.

I cannot deny that my students do deal with real life issues, despite their apparent apathy. They are daily gaining and losing friends, dealing with broken families and often the lack of a father or mother at home. They ponder the timeless questions: Is God real? What is my purpose in life? How do I decide whether and where to shave or not to shave? Where is my homeroom? Should schools have more dances? If so, who will ask me? I may find some of their struggles trite, but I do need to try and assert some empathy. So, as I attempt to understand their struggles, I also do not want to make high school life in all of its complexity any more difficult for them.

I have been asked to teach six novels in a semester; in five of these six, at least one of the main characters dies, so if it's my job to cement the idea that life is hard, my job is nearly finished before I can say "Emily Dickinson." All of these novels contain resonating conflict which often does not resolve, except in death. So, in class we discuss death and pain, sin and grief, guilt and disaster, and then on top of that, I am supposed to give them at least an hour of English homework per night. I imagine that I, the teacher, begin to look more and more like the antagonists we study: raised machete in one hand and a copy of Shakespeare in the other.

I recently asked a colleague how he feels about teaching depressing literature. His response was less than empathetic. With a short, curt laugh he said, "I make my students memorize two phrases at the beginning of each term, 'Life is hard,' and 'Art imitates life.' Deal with it." Walking away I realized that he is probably not the advocate I need if I am going to get permission to teach a happier novel.

So one day, I decide I am tired of watching the faces blur in an exhausted haze, so I succumb to the culture's pressures, appeal to my students' better angels, and let them "watch a

clip.” Somehow, in that moment, I create a sympathetic setting for them that they can relate to and feel safe in. They cheer. Perhaps this idea could be the window that, once opened, allows a breeze of motivation to sweep through. The scene is an odd one from a movie starring Tom Hanks called *Joe Versus the Volcano* (Schwartz, T. & Shanley J.P., 1990), and it just happens to match exactly with an obscure chapter in our text about headhunters. Later I give a test on the book, and every student who saw that film clip answers the question correctly, even remembering the African term “Egwugwu.” I suddenly feel like I have a secret power. I want to try it again, so when teaching the book *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992), I show a clip from a modern film adaptation of *Romeo + Juliet* (Luhrmann, B. & Martinelli, G., 1996) which employs both Shakespearean language and handguns. The atmosphere in the room quickly shifts to excitement. They are sold.

A week later a parent calls to tell me that she overheard a mini-van full of boys on their way to football practice arguing over which side was better – the Montagues or the Capulets! I only show clips throughout the process of teaching this book, and each day students beg for clips. They try to convince me that they need it by telling me that they are “visual learners.” As it turns out, research may prove them right. They may need to process literature in a visual way. I grow more curious as the year progresses. Are movies a waste of time, or is there validity to giving in to this culture’s desire for visual aid and increased use of technology? Perhaps in order to relate to the students’ needs and mine I must open my eyes to relevant teaching methods in a media age. I know that watching young students interact with Shakespeare open-mindedly has been a great gift given as bi-product of utilizing the artistic medium of film.

Some say art imitates life, but I choose to use art to tell life’s stories. Some artists use paint and canvas and some pen and ink to teach others their stories. So, filmmakers emerge as storytellers too. These stories instruct and motivate, speak and emote. Film, like living canvas, applies a clearly imaginative, visual story-link for people to relate to – for my students to relate to.

The academic environment of Excalibur remains charged because all of the students are considered "college bound," encouraged to take more than one advanced placement (AP) class per year, and required to excel in order to meet parent and teacher expectations. Focused students, obviously motivated extrinsically by grades and future goals, dedicate spare time to homework, extra curriculars, and athletics. Students at Excalibur, however, are also regular kids who deal with daily pressures from their peers and families. They like music, sports, movies, and video games like most teens do. And most of the time they are a fabulous group to teach. I chose these students for this study because they are available and reliable and will provide valuable input for my study. I also believe that this age group will provide testable, useful, honest participants.

Understanding my unique audience, and wanting to enhance and motivate their English skills and literature learning, my questions begin to take shape. Does using movie clips and film adaptations of books really help to illustrate settings, characters, plot curves, and other literary concepts and contexts? Would students better understand and relate to the text, remember it, and be able to increase their scores on literature-based tests through the use of movie clips? How do the students really feel about adding media to their class time? Does it become a help or a hindrance? Do the films have to be shown as a whole or can I show clips with the same effect in order to use class time most effectively? Would adding film increase their appreciation of the literature? Would applying the visual media of film actually enhance literature learning? My hope is that my students would not only become engaged in the text but also learn to appreciate and be motivated to read through the careful implementation of film clips into literature curriculum. I would also like to increase their understanding of the text through film helps, and as a result bring clarity in literary analysis, engagement in text, improvement in test scores, and enhanced literature discussions through the use of visual fodder in relevant terms. In lieu of these goals, the question upon which my research is based is simply this: does the use of film aid in the teaching of literature?

In order to become a better educator and to promote motivation within the English high school classroom especially regarding literature learning, I would like to know if there is any benefit to implementing the use of visual media. Through the use of film, will students gain a better understanding of and appreciation for literature in a ninth grade English class? This is a journey. It's a first-year teacher's critical journey into English literature, into the minds of teenagers, into curriculum, into the art of film and its effective use in a literature classroom.

Literature Review

Shakespeare understood man's innate craving to entertain and to be entertained when he said, "All the world's a stage" (Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*, 1951, p. 493). He meant for his writing to be seen. Actors became his written characters, portrayed his intended emotional content visually, and showed his plots in action in front of audiences. Perhaps somewhere in the midst of teaching Shakespeare's famous tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992), I was able to connect his desire to show his writing visually with my students' needs to see this text come to life. Printed material was not easily obtainable in Shakespeare's day; nor is his writing fully comprehensible to students today: the visual, theatrical presentation of his stories becomes the atypical remedy to both of these obstacles.

Today's actors perform before cameras and thus countless audiences. The stories become timeless, their heroes immortal through the avenue of film. Screenplays, like novels, contain the parts of a story; in fact, many are adaptations of famous novels. The basics of literary analysis can be applied to film: plot, sequence, characters, setting, timeframe, social milieu, tone, mood, and point of view. And often literary tools such as foreshadow, flashback, allusion, and irony are included. Film is more than simply dialogue and visual cues, it is, in a sense, story – a book within a different cover. However, the question remains: what is film's connection to and validity within literature.

Century-old discord exists between film and literature which separates readers from watchers of film, literary laborers from the so-called auditorily lethargic. Quoted in Vescio (2001), George Bluestone, writer of *Novels Into Film* says, “the difference between watching a film and reading a novel is the difference between what he calls ‘perceptual knowledge’ and ‘conceptual knowledge’ (Bluestone, 1957)” (p. 572). Philosophers like Bluestone created the term “cognitivism” in order to assert the distinctions between film and literature. The implication of the “cognitivist” theory is that watching films does not require the effort or ability to make inferences or to decode as one does in reading.

Most students seem to read to get to the end of the page or the assigned section. According to reading quiz scores from my teaching year, my students are not engaging with their reading, they believe that reading means getting to the end of the sentences. In order for cognitivist theory to exist in the classroom, students must be thinking about what they are reading.

Many assume that watching films does not require thinking. Theorists who analyzed the distinction between “perceptual” and “conceptual” knowledge made by “cognitivists” as problematic, however, and began to insist on the essential search for meaning through experience. These are not limited to the reader’s minds; the film watcher can share them as well. Vescio articulates the following:

Language is suppose to be a kind of filter through which our experience is made intelligible, but according to Davidson (1974), the idea of such a conceptual scheme is itself unintelligible, since we can only make sense of the idea of different conceptual schemes if we can compare them against the background of a wider scheme that includes them both. (Vescio, 2001, p. 575)

Thus, experiences shape our perceptions. This coincides with Gregory and Parry’s brain research about “parallel processing” (Gregory & Parry, 2005) as well. Despite Davidson’s limited perceptions on language as simply a set of marks and noises, Vescio agrees with Davidson’s

theory, which has been dubbed “radical interpretation.” He implies that perception creates meaning, and therefore films “are just texts written by pens shaped like crude approximations of the human eye and ear” (Vescio, 2001, p. 578).

Another hurdle Vescio discusses in determining the validity of radical interpretation in film theory is the ability to understand and interpret metaphor. His belief is that movies are essentially moving metaphor. Davidson says, “A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture” (as cited in Vescio, 2001, p. 577). I agree that in a sense “we read films” personally, individually interpreting the metaphors.

Kafka speaks to this independence of interpretation in his discussion of the upcoming film version of the classic novel *Paradise Lost*. He takes Vescio’s impression a step further saying “film theorists have long connected the [film] mediums’ meanings and methods with narcissism [...] that experience is later echoed when we lovingly absorb glamorized screen versions of ourselves” (Kafka, 2006, p. 3). The hopeful outcome of Vescio’s study is to help others determine film as an art form. Art, which can be interpreted, felt, and learned.

To allow my study solid footing in arts-based research, I too must argue for film’s legitimacy as an autonomous yet literarily connected art form. Field (2005) calls writing for film “the art of visual storytelling” (Field, 2005). He says the following in his book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*:

Movies are a combination of art and science; the technological revolution has literally changed the way we *see* movies and therefore, by necessity, has changed the way we *write* movies. But no matter what changes are made in the execution of the material, the nature of the screenplay is the same as it has always been: a screenplay is a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure. (Field, 2005, p. 2)

Van Wert defines film in view of the screenplay when he says, "like any hybrid form, it retains the characteristics of its parents (in this case, literature and film) without necessarily retaining their form [...] the screenplay is synonymous with literature, and the resultant film is seen as an extension of literature" (Van Wert, 1974). Wills calls controversial writer/director Oliver Stone a modern day Dostoyevsky for his ability to characterize paradoxes in vile characters' searches for truth, love, forgiveness, and religion. He says, "Great novels are now being written with the camera – at least when Stone is behind the camera" (Wills, 1997, p. 101). In Van Wert's review of Winston's book *The Screenplay as Literature*, he offers the following:

Most assuredly, this apparent conflict between the visual and narrative elements of film is one of the more crucial problems that cinema must resolve if it is to continue to develop along literary and artistic lines. Our survey of the screenplay in the contemporary cinema and some of the more recent advances in film as an art was meant to show that cinema, and especially the screenplay from which it is usually derived, have equaled (if not in some cases surpassed) the subtleties and complexities that we usually associate with outstanding literature –all of which might very well support the thesis that cinema is, indeed, a recent extension of literature. (Van Wert, 1974, p. 2)

Sadly, even today, film is still often seen as frivolous entertainment rather than an implicit art form. In their book entitled simply *Movies*, Naughton and Smith relay the following:

At a time when most movies were aimed at working-class audiences, films d'art were a conscious attempt to raise the tone. Adapted from the classics of page and stage, pompous melodramas such as *Queen Elizabeth* (1912) gave cinema social respectability and intellectual credibility. (Naughton & Smith, 2003, p. 13)

It was perhaps its connection to historical literature that gave film its initial credibility as an art form.

Literature teachers essentially also teach art. The film clips that I show in class are usually adaptations of novels. I give disclaimers about films as they tend to deviate from text, and

I present film from the angle of the readers that create it. I tell my students that they must be like filmmakers creating visual images in their minds as they read. Just as the reader must read for more than mere comprehension, so the viewer must make decisions and inferences as he or she watches films. Film stories, though not in book form, must also in a sense be read.

Film adaptations of novels can be incredible teaching tools. I believe that as the industries of education and filmmaking become more aware of each other, they will become more involved in the marriage of the two minds. Walt Disney began forming his legacy through children's book adaptations. Since then, adaptations have become commonplace. Today children around the world are being inspired to read and watch *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis, 1956) and the *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997) series. The filmmaking industry benefits financially, and educators gain motivated readers.

Despite the moneymaking angle of the industry in Hollywood and the fact that some film adaptations of famous books haven't been as popular as others, filmmakers remain undaunted. Horn responds in his article for Newsweek, "No matter how famous or obscure the book, the same rule applies: the loveliest prose guarantees not one movie ticket sold. It's all in translation" (Horn, 2001, p. 52). He goes on to say, "Indeed, the screenwriter often must commit the literary equivalent of burning the village to save it" (Horn, 2001, p. 52). Butler (1995) agrees:

The richer the book, the harder it is to make it into a movie of depth. But dedicated filmmakers keep trying, and much as we might like to think differently, when they succeed, they capture not only the magic of a powerful story but an audience who might otherwise never have fallen under its spell. (Butler, 1995, p. 310)

Butler also states, "Though the power of a particular story on the page is what initially attracts a filmmaker, no producer or director wants to be a mere go-between as the story moves from one medium to another. Film has its own language [...]" (Butler, 1995, p. 308). The screenwriters and directors interpret the texts.

The viewpoints in adaptations differ from author to director. The screenwriter first must become intimately acquainted with the novel in order to represent it as accurately as possible. This could be one reason why an entire category of the Academy Awards is based on best-adapted screenplay. Often for the sake of time, stories must be condensed, eliminating what faithful book lovers would consider essential lines, characters, plot movements, and more. Screenwriters go between the author's original ideas and the director's creative vision in order to write a corresponding script. The finished product of film gives the director's view of the story. Directors, like authors, are not without biases, so film is presented with the bias of the filmmaker. It is not a critique of an author's work, rather, it is an adaptation. Butler discusses the book to film paradigm when he says, "Even though it may be based on adapted material, a film is considered to belong to its maker in the same way that a book belongs to its author" (Butler, 1995, p. 306).

Producers and filmmakers are consistently recalling classics to life. Lindsay Doran, producer of the timeless motion picture based on the popular Jane Austen book *Sense and Sensibility*, writes in the introduction for the screenplay written by actor / author Emma Thompson, "Emma [Thompson] took the role of screen writer seriously from the beginning. She not only knew how to think in Jane Austen's language, but she understood the rhythms of good scene writing and how to convey a sense of setting" (Doran, 1995, p. 14). Thompson considered herself as much ingénue as professional in this her debut screenwriting project (Thompson, 1995).

Naremore (2005) contemplates the "unfaithfulness" of adaptations, or deviations from text to film script in his review of Robert Stam's book *A Companion to Literature and Film*. He discusses "literary adaptation not as a quest for the ideal transformation of great novels into great films, but as an ongoing, multi-voiced process of telling and retelling, in which certain texts keep returning to us in altered, re-mediated forms, some of which are more interesting than others" (Naremore, 2005, p. 76). Though most screenwriters attempt to maintain the purity of the novel, time constraints, detail, and budget make exact representations impossible.

Peter Jackson, in his ambitious undertaking of Tolkein's epic trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, P., 2001-2003), took great care to maintain the author's meaning and purpose as well as the integrity of the written format, dialogue, plot, and setting. Tolkein himself felt that his books were unfilmable, but after 7 years of scriptwriting and 4 years of filming Jackson's film remains one of the closest adaptations to date. Jackson, pondering deviations and compression of text in the creation of the second film adaptation says, "There was no way that we could put all of *The Two Towers* [book] into the *The Two Towers* [film]" (Jackson, P., 2003). Author of the book *The Visual Companions*, Jude Fisher, interviewed in the Appendices of the final film says of Jackson's work, "So what Peter has done in the movie version is to iron out the timelines and to bring all of the action together chronologically" (Jackson, P., 2003). Jackson later shares, "one of the dreams is that if [Tolkein] were in the position to see these films that he would be happy with what we've added, changed, and simplified. (Jackson, P., 2003). Colson (2005) acknowledges Jackson's fine effort and states that, "great books have a greater chance of becoming great films when the producers choose to be faithful to the text" (Colson, 2005, p. 227).

I wonder, as Jackson did, what these and other authors like Tolkein would say about the films that have been adapted from their books. Initially I assume that authors would be flattered by the prospect of seeing their stories on the screen. Butler (1995) had the opportunity to interview a number of popular children's book authors who have had this privilege. In his article he relays the following conversation:

And Kathrine Paterson says, 'Children have told me that what they like about the book *Bridge to Terabithia* is that you know what Jess is thinking,' she says. 'And you can't see that in the film. So children can then understand what books can do that movies can't. I think that means they'll go on and read more books rather than depending totally on films for their entertainment. (Butler, 1995, p. 310)

He goes on to say the following:

(The House of) Dies Drear, the film, makes frequent appearances in classrooms around the country, and Hamilton often hears from young people. "They like the book much better," she says. "Which I think is great. Teachers use the book, and then they watch the movie. So they get the basic idea of the book and the writing, and a movie never does as much as a book can do. A film cannot convey a novel of that complexity. There's no way. And the children come to that conclusion as well. (Butler, 1995, p. 310)

One of my tasks as a high school English teacher is to try to foster a love for or at least an enjoyment of literature and learning in my students. Since engagement in reading is a concern, most educators must seek out motivation strategies to implement in their teaching that will engage and encourage students to read. Wilson and Casey (2007) recognize that students in the US are reading fewer novels. They wonder if it is because of the media-driven age we live in, and they feel that helping students regain their motivation for reading is key to academic success for adolescents. Consequentially, they emphasize the need for educators to familiarize themselves with and provide the connective tissue between reading and life experiences, thereby becoming competitive motivators. "In an age where multi-media, such as video games and computer generated games, are consuming the lives of young adults, students are reading fewer novels and engaging less in recreational reading activities" (Wilson & Casey, 2007, p. 40). We need to familiarize ourselves with what students do outside the classroom, so we can better help them inside (Wilson & Casey, 2007).

My students are no exception. They love video games, movies, and technology in general. Few have said that they read for enjoyment, and I agree that "reading skills are essential for academic success" (Wilson & Casey, 2007, p. 40). Teachers must model a love for aesthetic reading if they want their students to love it as well. I have often wondered if my students are merely mirroring my enthusiasm, even for film. The challenge to motivate remains. The age gap between students and teachers causes a disconnect and disassociation between likes and dislikes. Teachers do not need to become students, quite the opposite; they need to understand the current

world of their students and create a connection between the two cultures. Educators must seek to understand their students in what Armstrong (2003) calls “students in a millennial – media driven age” (Armstrong, 2003, p. 161). He records the affects of television on a small Canadian community during a rise in technology. He records “It should hardly be surprising that today's media-fed children, growing up on MTV, video games, the Internet, and violent television, should have also developed short attention spans” (Armstrong, 2003, p. 161). Later, he discusses these technology-infused social trends within culture and the onset of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), and he expresses his disappointment with the trends when he says the following:

These two events [the rise of technologies and the demise of play] should be looked at in relation to each other, for as children spend more time watching television, playing video games, surfing on the Internet, manipulating toys run by computer chips, and engaging in other technologically based activities, there is less time available for them to engage in non-adult-supervised open-ended play situations. (Armstrong, 2003, p. 162)

Wyatt and Hauenstein (2008) reflect on the purposeful implementation of digital media as they researched the possibility of improving health in children through digital stories:

Stories in all of their many forms, including books, plays, skits, movies, poems, and songs, appeal to individuals of all ages but especially the young. Children are easily engaged in stories, and today's generation of children, the millennium generation, demands interactive, multimedia-rich environments. (Wyatt & Hauenstein, 2008, abstract)

There is an evident connection between the increase in visual stimulus through the augmentation of available media and technology and the obvious increase in visual learning preferences in students. Perhaps this connection, once recognized, may benefit the classroom teacher's development of a new understanding of learning styles and differences as well as technology. Field says, “It's clear that a whole new computer-savvy generation, who grew up with interactive

software, digital storytelling, and editing applications sees things in a more visual way and is thus able to express it in a more cinematic style” (Field, 2005, p. 7).

In 1895, French inventors “Auguste and Louis Lumiere had a few fragments of film shot in order to prove that their camera/projector, the ‘cinematographe,’ worked. They had not ‘written’ or ‘directed’ their fragments. They attempted no story” (Thompson, 2001, p. 10). But what they did do, was usher in a new era of storytelling, of creation, of art. Before 1971 and the invention of the VCR, classic slide projectors and reel-to-reel brought classrooms clicking into the visual era. The first VCR’s, like any new invention, were costly and unfamiliar pieces of equipment, so teachers took their time implementing their use. Even though the 70’s had already come and gone, I remember watching my 8th grade history teacher pull the projection screen down and wind the long film tape into the projector, flip the switch, and voilà! Our class would half-sleep to the loud hum of the antiquated projector as Lorne Green’s voice wafted and scratched from the small slots along the projector’s body and we watched these and other documentary-style films like *Donner Pass* (Simmons, J. & Conway, J., 1978). Eventually that same year, Mrs. Moore opted to use the school’s portable TV and VCR to show movies. I used to think that history curriculum consisted mostly of movies. Now, almost 20 years later, film has become a daily, purposeful tool in almost all subject-area classrooms. Every class has at least a TV, VCR, and DVD player in it. Many schools are also opting for the state-of-the-art Active Boards with projectors, sound systems, document cameras, and automatic Internet connection. These are incredible tools for learning and yet another step in this cycle of industry.

In the book *In Case You Teach English*, seasoned English teachers Johannessen and McCann (2002) collaborated in case study research to present guidelines based on concerns from teachers in their formative years. The chapter entitled *The Perils of Technology* does not discourage the use of technology but praises it for its profound influence in the classroom. In their discussion, they believe that “the history of technology in American education has somewhat of a checkered past” (p. 55). They use the term “reformers” saying:

They have latched onto technological advances as the solution to the ills of American education. For example, many reformers believed, as is true today with regard to computer technology, that television, and then video technology, were going to eliminate the need for teachers and classrooms. (Johannessen & McCann, 2002, p. 55)

(I wonder if my 8th grade history teacher was hoping to implement this belief by becoming the first willing test subject.) Even as they claim the falsity of these predictions, these professional educators admit to some fear on this account. As a classroom teacher, I do not fear the onslaught of a technological takeover. I do, however, see the conflict that they bring up later in the chapter between parents and teachers over the use of technology. I could perhaps lump myself into the group of “reformers” who choose to use technology as a teaching aid, but in an effort to prevent battle scars on either side I try to maintain communication with parents through emails and permission slips as well as administrative permission to use film clips and other technology in my classroom.

Parents sadly do contribute to the negative affects of technology by allowing their children to watch too much television at early developmental stages. Burns’ study states the following:

When children watch TV prior to age six, they are doing the opposite of what their brains are required by nature to be doing –that is, become actively engaged with the real world in a hands-on, interactive way. For most children, this problem is compounded by their lack of experience and knowledge to interpret what they see on the screen. [...] Thus, it appears that television may, in fact, stunt the neural basis for learning, especially in young children. (as cited in Gregory & Parry, 2005, p. 29-30)

In the same way, adults who have no prior experience with certain information have difficulty storing the information cognitively, so those who do have a wide range of experiences can problem-solve, connect, and recall more efficiently. So, while brain research remains adamant that experience is key to learning, so it also insists “the brain seems to learn best when it is

allowed to use its potential for parallel processing” (Gregory & Parry, 2005, p. 29). This parallel processing is the brain’s ability to take in the unbelievable amount of simultaneous information that it is able to store, process, and use to make decisions. “The brain’s search for meaning is innate. The search for meaning occurs through ‘patterning.’ Emotions are critical to patterning” (Caine, 1994, p.13). Sousa (2006) believes that “one way to increase processing time is through motivation, which is essentially an emotional response (Sousa, 2006, p. 65). And though television does not promote beneficial intellectual growth, it does however provide sensory input that evokes emotion. “We need to be aware of the ways in which emotions focus our attention and the role they play in the formation, retention, and retrieval of memories” (Gregory & Parry, 2005, p. 31).

Television, with all of its pixels and light rays, provides sensory input for the eyes and ears. The visual stimuli hits the occipital lobe and the auditory stimuli the temporal lobe. The temporal lobe is also responsible for memory and language. Gregory and Parry continue:

The cortex is the seat of higher-order thinking, but it relies on its connections with the emotional brain for a number of vital functions in the learning process. These functions are concerned with the engagement of emotions, the focusing of attention, and the formation of memories [...] strategies that engage the emotions are such powerful learning tools. (Gregory & Parry, 2005, p. 12)

Is television forming non-lasting, abstract viewpoints and therefore a level of passivity towards active learning? Perhaps. Or, I believe that, if used selectively, it could provide visual stimulus, emotional impact, and necessary motivation. These characteristics can be effective tools within the classroom setting.

I find that one of my main reasons for using technology of any kind in the classroom is for the simple purpose of motivating students. Motivation is a reward system. Intrinsic motivation occurs when students go home and reward themselves by watching a show that they enjoy, and extrinsic motivation occurs when students in the classroom “get to watch a movie.”

They feel that they've done something right or that they are getting away with something when they get to relax and watch a film clip. I think that one of the greatest tools that teachers can learn to use is this ability to make students believe that they are "getting to" rather than being forced to do that which is obligatory. Even when I hand out note-taking sheets and ask for specific information from the clips, if I choose the films carefully and treat them as incentive the students will see the film as a reward.

I have said to my students on different occasions in the classroom, "If we finish our list of tasks for this class time, we may be able to watch the corresponding clip." They often cheer. Perhaps this response is an affect of the environment of Excalibur High School with all of its highly academically focused students who are motivated extrinsically by grades and who dedicate most of their extra time to homework and athletics. Even so, they are still students. Higher standards or pressures from home to achieve do not magically create motivated learners. It could be the use of positive terminology. Either way, providing something that students enjoy motivates them. The greater challenge will be choosing appropriately in order motivate students to read.

A multitude of influences are involved in the lack of motivation for readers including gender gaps, social labeling and relationships, lack of preferred reading materials, and literacy-poor parenting. Educators today try as many motivators as possible to create a positive and motivated classroom environment. The aforementioned modeling of aesthetic reading, making lessons relevant, and using technology are some of the forms of motivation that I personally have been applying in my own classroom. Students respond well when their individual needs are being met.

My goal to best utilize film as a classroom tool was most likely birthed with my own fascination in film and only increased as I began to recognize the new attitude of delight, stillness, and attentiveness in my students as they watch films. Invariably, students will say that they enjoy television and movies. Something is innately enjoyable about film, so showing clips becomes

somewhat of an extrinsic motivator. But, the implementation of film must be handled carefully and strategically.

Films must be previewed and weighed in view of the ratings, the school's preset standards (if existent), and with the protection of students in mind since a film's content could be questionable. We, as teachers, must wisely make ourselves aware of the present-day cultural worldview of our students. Beware films that allow inappropriate material which would be unsuitable for classroom use. Colson comments extensively on film's cultural relevance as well as its influence on youth in his book *Lies That Go Unchallenged*. He says, "For better or for worse, movies are a part of our culture" (Colson, 2005, p. 223). As film viewers and readers, Colson reminds us, "It takes more than intelligence to be a good reader – it also takes discernment, humility, and a willingness to listen to other people, beginning with the author. Without those qualities, reading can be downright dangerous" (Colson, 2005, p. 223). The same principles apply to watching films.

In order to remain culturally aware, teachers should take the advice of Freire who addresses the issues of cultural relevance in the classroom in his book, *Teachers as Cultural Workers* (1998). He says, "In truth, we are neither only what we inherit nor only what we acquire but, instead, stem from the dynamic relationship between what we inherit and what we acquire" (Freire, 1998, p. 69). He further offers the following opinions:

Let's think a little about the learners' cultural identity and about the respect that we owe it in our educational practice [...] Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it. (Freire, 1998, p. 71, 72)

I, too, believe that film can provide a positive cultural connection by providing relevance and an opportunity to engage in subject matter if used carefully. Film is an example of an ever-changing

art. New films, like music, change with the waves of cultural fads. What students love one day will not be “in” the next, and will not necessarily be classroom appropriate. Visual arts used within the realm of teaching must be chosen with care, specificity, and purpose.

Arts integration is an essential part of classroom learning, and this should not be a daunting task for the classroom teacher since art comes in such a prolific variety of forms and can be effectively integrated into any subject or curriculum. “Numerous research studies show that well-designed arts experiences produce positive academic and social effects as well as assist in the development of critical academic skills, basic and advanced literacy, and numeracy” (Sousa, 2006, p. 217). Sousa goes on to discuss arts development and cognitive growth in the young brain:

Although the arts are often thought of as separate subjects, like chemistry or algebra, they really are a collection of skills and thought processes that transcend all areas of human engagement. When taught well, the arts develop cognitive competencies that benefit learners in every aspect of their education and prepare them for the demands of the 21st Century. (Sousa, 2006, p. 215)

Gregory and Parry would agree with Sousa. They articulate the impact of creative lessons when they say, “The most favorable learning activities to activate neural networks are those that are complex, engage a variety of the senses, and are perceived by the learner as being novel, emotionally engaging, relevant, and useful” (Gregory & Parry, 2005, p. 31). The arts also benefit learning styles, become an outlet for students to express emotions, help students deal with issues and difficulties, and provide purpose for students individually often giving them reasons to stay in school. The learning environment can be revolutionized through the integration of art. Entire school cultures can be changed. Schools are quite obviously influenced by culture, and teachers, too, must adopt an intuitive understanding of student culture in order to make a lasting impact in the classroom.

Admittedly, I wish that all of my students possessed vibrant imaginations with which to individually visualize all aspects of story, to understand metaphor, and to make inferences as they read, but this ability is untrained and often overlooked in the home and therefore difficult to foster within the classroom. Students have difficulty visualizing the settings, understanding the verbiage, and relating to the unfamiliar cultures. Most students say that what they appreciate most about the film clips that I use is that they “provide a visual view of the story,” “put the literature in motion,” “show the emotion” behind the lines, and “give tone and show character actions in a more realistic way” (from student responses to handout *English 9 Evaluation of Literature and Film*, See Appendix A). I present film, not as a replacement but as a tool that if used correctly can aid in the better understanding of literature. When teaching Shakespeare to my ninth graders, I use the metaphor of “drowning in Shakespeare,” and I tell them that film is only one of the many “floatation devices” that I will offer them when they are “in peril.” Film should be seen as a tool to encourage young readers, never as a go-to for tired teachers. Perhaps with a better understanding of film, teachers can find new, more relevant, student-centered terminology with which to teach and pass on a love for learning.

Method

I initially thought that I would make two of my three ninth grade English classes test groups in which I would employ the use of movie clips and film adaptations based on the novels we were reading in class. The third class would then have been the control group which would not see the movies at all and would have supplementary curriculum and activities, perhaps even a performance angle. I quickly changed my mind when I met the three classes. Each group was an entity of its own with different dynamics and personalities. Each group responded differently to me and became something of a novelty to discover. Choosing one as a control would have been difficult – apples to oranges in a sense – and the nature of the curriculum and the needs of my new sets of students caused a metamorphosis in the research. So I decided that individual

responses to surveys, specific film days, and discussions focused on the topic of literature to film would be a more beneficial database for my study. Now, instead of watching for changes between the already different groups of students who shuffled into each class, I was able to analyze similarities and relationships within the groups. These relationships became more profound to my study than I believe the former would have been. In the same way that each student came in with a different mind set, home-life, learning style, skill-set, enjoyment of English, and learning motivation, so I had to believe that in seeking out similarities, I would find more valuable, lasting research. My study took on more of an arts-based research focus, as well as what could be construed as a personal case study with myself as both docent and subject.

I taught these three English classes in the recent spring semester beginning in January of 2008. I integrated film selectively into the classroom as it correlated with the literature, led discussions, journaled observations, made formal and informal inquiries in the form of surveys and worksheets not inconsistent with my curriculum and standards.

Most film clips that I chose were adaptations of the novels that I was teaching, and a few were odd but useful clips from original films. All clips were used to help students relate to and understand the context, characters, history, themes, and ideas surrounding the text. If I wondered about any questionable content in the films or film clips I went to my department head before showing them so she could approve them. I taught specific days dedicated to book-to-film type comparisons. In the end-of-book exams I included test questions related specifically to the film clips based on the readings. I led class discussions on the deviations from the literature which are commonly accepted in film. For this discussion I chose examples from classic literature and their adapted films. We spent three concentrated days studying and discussing aspects of film and literature. They had homework, and I gave a final evaluation / survey based on the specific books and films we studied in class this semester. My hope through these methods was to offer student perspectives and opinions on the use of film in a literature classroom, discussions on deviations from text to screen, and analysis on 10 film adaptations of specific novels. I came to some

conclusions about how students felt about film in the classroom as well as the relevance and usefulness of applying film as a teaching tool.

In my classroom this year, I made it my goal to provide an atmosphere which cultivated motivation and recall. It began with excellent literature. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959), Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1992), John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* (1959), and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1958) are the four novels that I taught using film clips as teaching helps. Additional book-to-film study novels that I chose were *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen, *Oliver Twist* (1839) by Charles Dickens, and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1846) by Alexandre Dumas.

After reading the certain set of novels that I was asked to teach, I originally watched the corresponding films, depending upon availability, in order to gain a better personal understanding of the texts and to prepare for those students who I knew would try to get away with just watching the movie instead of reading. I found in my own viewing of films a wealth of new understanding. As a teacher, obviously I wanted to share this understanding with my students. I still feared that without a greater initial understanding of the text that the films would confuse my students, so I decided to implement film clips at selective times in our reading discussions. This was not a daily event. Depending on the books and films, I probably showed a three to ten minute clip once or twice a week. These provided discussion fodder, momentum for the books, and motivation for students who hoped that they might get to see more of the film in the future.

Things Fall Apart (Achebe, 1959) was the first novel that I was asked to teach this year. The setting of the book, almost a character in itself, is Africa in the late 1800's, perhaps the early 1900's, during the onslaught of British colonization. In this book, the main character, called Okonkwo, deals with his inner demons of personal versus tribal beliefs as well as his own failures. This book, if made into a film, would be far too gruesome to show in a classroom. I chose, instead, to show clips from two modern films at key discussion points in the book.

My first attempt to motivate my young readers through film came in the form of an odd film called *Joe Versus the Volcano* (Schwartz, T. & Shanley, J.P., 1990) starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. In a key scene in the book, the main character dons a ritual African tribal mask and plays one of the feared governing tribal heads known as an “egwugwu.” I played a strangely similar scene in the film in an attempt to provide my students with a memorable visual aid. I asked a reflective question on the test at the end of the book, and surprisingly all of the students who saw the clip answered the question about the scene in the book correctly. This first attempt was an encouraging one and it gave me the desire to find other films to aid in the teaching of literature.

My next choice was also a lesser-known film entitled *The Four Feathers* (Jaffe, S., Katz, M., Feldsher, P. & Kapur, S., 2002) starring the late Heath Ledger. Since Ledger died this year, students watched this clip with greater appreciation and attentiveness. On the final evaluation at the end of the semester, some students commented that this film clip was the one they enjoyed the most “because Heath Ledger was in it.” This film was based on a fictional novel of the same title written in the late 1800’s about the British colonization in Africa. This film shows the story from the British perspective, whereas Achebe’s book shows only the African perspective. I showed a short clip in which British officers parade into a village to water their camels and are attacked by a single armed African man. The troop of soldiers goes after the man and eventually halts him. A main character in the film calls to him loudly in English to put his gun down. The African man slowly calculates his move, then raises his gun and is shot. The children of the village run out yelling and throwing stones at the British officers. The next scene of the film shows the officer who killed the African man being awarded a medal of bravery. This scene introduced many important themes and purposes within Achebe’s book which are difficult to explain to young readers. In this way, they saw new aspects, were given discussion fodder, and gained new perspectives into the novel.

The teaching of the next novel, *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1595), required the use of many visual aids. I change the format of the room for each book, but for this play I divided the room in half and made one side Montague and the other Capulet. I referred to the students by these surnames and gave each side a prevalent color (red for Juliet Capulet, the other blue for Romeo Montague). Despite my attempts at theatricals, students still struggled with this their first introduction to Shakespearean prose and poetry. I asked my department head for ideas (and for sympathy). She had some ideas, and one was to show clips of the newer version of the adaptation and to send a permission slip home first, since the movie does contain some questionable scenes. I borrowed the film, previewed it and decided to take her advice. Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (Luhrmann, B. & Martinelli, G., 1996) shows an excellent version of the Prologue to the play, so I started with that clip. We read the prologue through a number of times as a class, then I taught through the meanings of the new terms within this 14 line introductory sonnet. I then showed the Luhrmann version. I heard "Ohh's" and "Woah's" and "Look at that!" as the fast-paced color-splashed montage showed a 2-minute version of what would be Shakespeare's "two hours traffic" (Shakespeare, 1951, p. 7) on stage. I also showed the prologue of the staged version performed on Shakespeare's own Stratford stage in the UK and starring Megan Follows (Campbell, N., 1993), unfortunately to a less-than-impressed audience.

The next day I showed the first scene of the Luhrmann film, which is Act 1, Scene 1, in the play. It deviates in its interpretation by modernizing a staged sword fight into a souped-up gunfight at a gas station. The affect of turning a 14 year old boy's mind from thinking, "This is a chick book, so Shakespeare must have been a femme boy" to "Woah, cool. So there's swords in this?" could be the key to inspiring and motivating even ninth grade male students to read a classic romantic tragedy written over 500 years ago in a language form known as Shakespearean.

I attempted to show a clip from *West Side Story* (Wise, R. & Robbins, J., 1961), but it was slow moving and a musical: two strikes. I went back to the newest adaptation and was amazed at the symbolism, even in the costuming. For instance, a favorite Romeo line from the

play begins, "Speak again bright angel" (Shakespeare, 1992, p. 71), and Juliet wears an angel costume at the Capulet masked ball. Romeo wears a suit of armor to the party, and earlier the character known as "Nurse" had said to Juliet, "Go, girl, seek happy *nights* to happy days" (Shakespeare, 1992, p. 41). Not a bad pun. Luhrmann adds much connectivity in his adaptation to the benefit of his reading audience.

I offered metaphoric "floatation devices" to students who claimed to be "drowning in Shakespeare." I compared to modernized re-writes to kiddie pools, Spark Notes to inflatable pool toys, our class text with explanations as a life jacket, and films as boats (some are more like yachts). I told them that the goal is to learn how to swim and survive in the "waters" of Shakespearean language, so any device that doesn't actually get them in the water is not allowing them to learn what they must. Films, therefore, become less helpful to learning how to read Shakespeare, but they can teach them to appreciate its beauty and see what they could not see when they were worried about drowning.

The film adaptation of *A Separate Peace* (Knowles, 1959) deviates a great deal, but the casting of the two main characters and the boy's school setting is spot on. Students relate well to the characters, and one reason for the detail and exactness of the setting in *A Separate Peace* (Yates, P., 2004) was that Showtime was allowed to film at the author's own boy's school as portrayed in his book: Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. The film also has an excellent scene showing a World War II recruitment video which helps students relate to and better understand the context of the war and the draft. Eventually and more frequently students would come and request specific clips from film adaptations that corresponded to favorite sections that they had read.

One scene mid-way through the book *A Separate Peace* (Knowles, 1959) shows a once gentle-spirited young boy going through traumatic post-boot camp experiences. He leaves the army with a scattered mind only to confront the main character at a moment of climactic tension. This was perhaps the most requested scene, but unfortunately the film deviates and doesn't show

the same scene at all. My students were vocally upset when I told them this, but I was so encouraged to see their growing interaction with text. They wanted to better understand the characters. They wanted to see how filmmakers took certain sections of books and made them into films. This curiosity and excitement kept them reading and gave them motivation necessary to finish the book.

The deviations from the book to the film were a distraction; many students missed the same question on the final exam because they did not recognize the deviation of text within the film. Test question #54 asked the students to decide if one of the main characters liked to dress up as Hitler to make fun of him. This scene was in the movie, but not in the book. Though the deviation was discussed and emphasized in class, many students seemed to recall more easily what they'd seen and answered the question incorrectly. Also, because of the deviations and brief sections with inappropriate language, this film should only be shown in clips.

I found other films helpful in the teaching of this book. Opening scenes from *Dead Poet's Society* (Witt, P., Thomas, T., & Weir, P., 1989) offer a beautiful initial glance into life in an all-boys boarding school. The movies *Emperor's Club* (Abraham, M., Bruce, L. & Hoffman, M., 2002) and *Remember the Titans* (Bruckheimer, J., Oman, C. & Yakin, B., 2000) show excellent examples of the use of framed narrative. *Remember the Titans* (2000) also shows racial aggression in the south in the same timeframe as *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 1958), so it can be a transitional film between the two books if necessary. I even used parts of this film in a finale activity at the end of the book *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 1958). Students find this film accessible and fun.

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1958) portrays a hard working black family living in the city of Chicago in the 50's that deals with the deferment of dreams, racial prejudice, and moral dilemmas. Sidney Poitier starred in this 1961 film version of Hansberry's play (Petrie, D. & Rose, P., 1961). The film is black and white, and unfortunately if students see anything filmed in black and white they consider it too old for them to appreciate or to relate to. This

movie version is also quite long, and takes place, like a stage play, almost entirely in one room: strikes two & three. The acting is phenomenal, however, and if shown in specific clips to produce an emotional response, such as moments of climactic rage and tension, the students will see actors playing out the scenes that they are too embarrassed to read with any enthusiasm in class. I introduced the clips with an upbeat attitude and a quick disclaimer that expressed the fact that I too recognized that it was old and “overacted” in parts. Then I emphasized that it was worthwhile to see.

I do not correct papers or get distracted by the other things that I could be busying myself with while showing a clip. Sometimes I even stand holding the remote like I am going to stop it at any point. If I see them zoning out, I will say something attention-getting like, “Oh, this is it,” or, “We’re almost there.” If they totally zone out, I will fast forward or stop the clips short and explain the rest. This helps them see that I show the clips purposefully.

I wanted to make an impact on my students by helping them emotionally interact with the *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 1958) text, so during the introduction of the novel I discussed the meaning of the phrase “it makes your blood boil.” They discussed the phrase and I showed them a clip from the original film version of *A Raisin in the Sun* (Petrie, D. & Rose, P., 1961) in which a white man offers to pay the family to reconsider moving into his all-white neighborhood. They watched with interest trying to figure out how the soft-spoken little white man could make anyone angry (played by John Fiedler who also provides the voice of the Disney character “Piglet”). I think some of them wondered at first how I could get anything deep and meaningful out of a black and white movie, but they caught on as the scene progressed. The timid character begins to explain his point and using “us” and “them” terminology and the students got it. They fidgeted in their seats and when I hit stop on the DVD player, hands shot into the air.

The only full movie that I showed to my students was the remake of *A Raisin in the Sun* (Combs, S.P.D., Zadan, C., Meron, N. & Leon, K., 2008) that came out this year. Sean P. Diddy Combs produced and starred in this film version. I read newspaper clippings about the release,

discussed Combs' views, and showed the film over a period of a few days. They had a long-term writing assignment due that they were allowed to work on during the film if they wished. The film deviates very little and gives insights into fresh settings in vivid color that even a live stage production could not provide. And, since the film was originally made for television, it did not contain questionable material that I would not be allowed to show in my classroom. Students appreciated this film.

I decided to explore more book-to-film selections for three days in a row. [See Appendix B for my teaching journals over these three days]. I called the first day Jane Austen day, and I discussed her novels, gave an introductory glance at her biographical information, and handed out a selection of her novel *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813). I read the selection aloud to the class while they read along. Then I showed clips from two film adaptations of the book beginning with the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) version *Pride and Prejudice* (Birtswistle, S., Wearing, M. & Langton, S., 1995) and ending with the most recent version starring Keira Knightly, *Pride & Prejudice* (Bevan, T., Fellner, E., Webster, P. & Wright, J., 2005). After reading the selection and viewing the film clips, each class worked in small groups on a worksheet which I titled "A Day with Jane." They analyzed the narrative perspective, the characters, the conflict, Austen's voice and tone, and finished with a metacognitive glance at their day with Jane Austen.

I switched the formats of reading and viewing around in my three classes, but ended up with the same responses. I let them take the worksheet home to finish it. The next day we discussed and finished the worksheet as a class. Then I gave them a writing prompt with the question: "How does watching clips from movies affect your understanding of the literature you read. Explain." There was a mix of thoughtful responses which I appreciated greatly. [To read the students' responses, refer to Appendix C].

I had visited the school library and collected quality examples of book-to-film classics and placed them on my desk for students to peruse as they came into class. After showing them

the piles, I reminded them again of my “floatation device” metaphor. I led a discussion on why film adaptations of novels are not a replacement, but a helpful tool for readers.

The last day of the Book-to-Film lessons went quickly and well as we focused on what it takes to make a film based on a classic novel and discussed in-depth the impact of deviations from text to film. They took notes as they watched the Appendices to the *Lord of the Rings the Return of the King* (Jackson, P., 2003). They then read and discussed positive and negative aspects of deviations in two classic novels and their corresponding films: the scene from *Oliver Twist* (Dickens, 1839) and Walt Disney’s *Oliver Twist* (Baldecchi, J. & Bill, T., 1997) in which the young orphan asks for “more” gruel, then prison escape scenes in *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Dumas, 1846) and the recent adaptation *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Barber, G., Birbaum, R., Glickman, J. & Reynolds, K., 2002).

Data Analysis

“I think we should have English like this more often. More movies!” (student exclamation during film and literature days, May 9, 2008). The responses I received during the three book-to-film days provided a great deal of the feedback and results from this study. The worksheet on the first day discussed Jane Austen’s novel *Pride & Prejudice* (Austen, 1813).

In response to the question, “Did the two film(s) help you understand [Austen’s] literature, 95% of the students said that the films helped them understand the text. 55% of those students mentioned that it helped them visualize the story. One student said that the film “helped me connect the words and the images.” Three students commented that the films removed confusion about the setting. Seven said that they benefited from seeing the emotion of the actors; one wrote, “It showed how the tension was affecting the character’s feelings.” Fifteen students made comments about how the films helped them understand the “language” and the time in history, or “what it was like back then.” One specifically appreciated that the story was condensed for the films, making it “easier to focus on what was going on.”

In a comparison of the two *Pride & Prejudice* films (Birtswistle, S., Wearing, M. & Langton, S., 1995; & Bevan, T., Fellner, E., Webster, P. & Wright, J., 2005), students felt that both had vital information from the book, that both showed the background of the time, setting, and characters well, and that both were very accurate. When asked to choose which of the two films was truer to the novel, 69% said that the 6-hour-long British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) version (Birtswistle, S., Wearing, M. & Langton, S., 1995) was the more accurate of the two.

One student who had read the book and seen both versions said, "I like it. I just do, [...]" The first one (BBC) uses the lines more directly and is the same setting, but I have seen both and I honestly prefer the newer version." She continued and wrote a whole page about what else she appreciated about each version, which one she preferred, and why. Of the two film versions, a majority preferred the newer film because it seemed more realistic but said that the BBC version stayed truer to the novel. One student said, "The BBC version used basically every one of the lines in the book, whereas the newest version just picked and chose the lines they used." Another said of the BBC version, "It was like they used the book as the script."

Some enlightening answers came from students in response to the question of main idea in Jane Austen's novel excerpt. Many students seemed to gain an understanding of the influence of finance in relationship decisions in Austen's day as well as dilemmas between upper and lower classes. Some of my favorite answers from this handout were in response to the question of what they had learned that day. Many said that movies can be very helpful in understanding texts and can give readers new perspectives. One student said that she learned "how visuals help link with the story so you can imagine it in your mind." One student commented on deviations from the text when he said, "Movies sometimes help you understand but sometimes they are wrong." Another said that she learned "that movies do not replace books." Yet another girl commented that what she had learned was "a new word: thither. Jane Austen has a huge vocabulary."

On the next worksheet, students analyzed deviations from the novel *Oliver Twist* (Dickens, 1839) to the Disney adaptation *Oliver Twist* (Baldecchi, J. & Bill, T., 1997). 100% of the students recognized a deviation from book-to-film, and 60% noted more than one deviation. Most students felt that filmmakers make the decision to deviate for a number of reasons: in order to make the film more interesting for the audience, to add suspense, to bend to time constraints, and to show originality. One female student made the following comment about deviations,

I think that when movies are really different from their books, like *Bridge to Terabithia* then it gets more confusing. I think that when the film and book follow the same storyline then they are easy to relate to but when they aren't the same it is hard to understand them. (from student writing prompt responses, May 2008, Appendix C)

Another student offered a positive comment about deviations. She said, "Like most movies, they are not the same as the book and sometimes I like that because it gives it a different perspective. I love films that show the difference between characters, voice analysis, and settings of the book (from student responses to writing prompt, May 2008, Appendix C). Like this student, another commented that filmmakers deviate "to add zest to the film." Another added that deviations from text are decided upon in order "to make it more reasonable and to make story more fluent. Also, it's more entertaining."

Some students felt that appropriate reasons for deviating from the text would be "when [the text] is slow or boring," "when it's not really [an] important part of the novel / story but the part that can increase the 'hook' of the scene," or "if the producer of the movie wants to get a point across that was not made in the book." Other students said that deviations are necessary to "make a scene more exciting," "to shorten a scene," to give clarity, "to make [a character's] thoughts visible," "to remove unneeded details," "to improve sequencing," "to create suspense," or even to "remove inappropriate parts –when there is something naughty in it."

100% agreed that watching a film clip helps, even if it deviates. They felt that film clips in general make the text easier to understand by removing distractions "like big words" and

“superfluous details” so readers can see what characters are experiencing and grasp the main ideas of the text.

Students were asked to describe movies as visual aids to literature by selecting the best term from a list of 4 (2 negative, 2 positive). Of the 61 students who finished the survey, 3 chose *distracting*, and 2 chose *confusing*, while 34 chose *beneficial*, and 22 chose the term *helpful*.

On the final evaluation survey entitled “English 9 Evaluation of literature and film,” students were first asked to rank order the six novels from this semester in order of quality and enjoyment; then they were to do the same with eight specific film clips, ranking them in order based on how well they helped the student understand the literature.

Of the 40 students who completed the survey, 21 felt that Baz Luhrmann’s version of *Romeo + Juliet* (Luhrmann, B. & Martinelli, G., 1996) helped them the most. *Joe Versus the Volcano* (Schwartz, T. & Shanley, J.P., 1990) was voted the least helpful of the clips. Specifically in regards to clips used in teaching the book *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992), 75% of the students felt that the most modern version was also the most helpful in aiding the understanding of the literature. Very few appreciated the stage version at all; in fact 59% felt that this version was the least helpful of the three films used. Only 8% said that the classic 1968 version of *Romeo and Juliet* by Zeffirelli (Brabourne, J., Goodwin, R., Havelock-Allen, A. & Zeffirelli, F., 1968) was helpful. The general sentiment that I recall from the classes toward this film adaptation was that it was laughable – a comedy rather than the tragedy that it was meant to be.

Students were then asked to decide which film clip deviated most from the text, which film stayed closest to the text, and which film clip they enjoyed the most. Ironically, Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* (Luhrmann, B. & Martinelli, G., 1996) film version was not only dubbed the film which deviated the most from the text, it was also given the title of film which stayed closest to the text. And shockingly this 1996 film was also named the most enjoyable of all of the film clips. One student surprisingly wrote, “I loved the creative symbolism and filming.” Four students

commented about the actor Leonardo DiCaprio. One said, "Leo's hot, and both Romeo and Juliet are gorgeous!" Since this film was made over a decade ago, and DiCaprio is now an intense 33 year old who is not presently topping the teen pop icon status charts, I was once again surprised at this reaction. They also thought the film was "funny" and "good," and they loved the "action." Students felt that they could relate to the people in the more modern films. They enjoyed them, and perhaps because of this fact, the modern films helped them to "better understand the literature."

Regarding *A Raisin in the Sun* (Petrie, D. & Rose, P., 1961) and it's modern-day (Combs, S.P.D., Zadan, C., Meron, N. & Leon, K., 2008) counterpart, 74% of students ranked the modern version over the original. This tells me once again that students preferred modern films. Comments made about the newer version were that they appreciated the modern actors such as P. Diddy, they enjoyed the setting, and they found the story to be uplifting and enlightening as it taught about the "hard times faced by black people."

The survey included a few other questions. The first of which asked which "subjects work best with subject-related films." The overwhelming response was "English." The next most highly noted was "History." I also asked whether whole movies or clips work better, and to this their responses were basically divided. 56% said "whole," and 44% said "clips."

My final question required a yes or no answer and an explanation. My question was: Do movies help you learn? Why or why not? Only one student said "No." The reasons why the rest of the students felt that movies helped them learn were varied but perceptive. Many students called themselves "visual people" who need to see things and feel that they learn better when they do. They said that movies help them see and understand how things play out in a manageable timeframe, show the context, putting the literature into motion and clearly portraying how it would look. Movies give a mental picture of the setting and characters, as well as the actions and emotions in the scenes giving readers new understanding of the text, even to those who would not consider themselves "book-oriented." A few commented on the holistic benefit of films, as they

can give the big picture in condensed time. Many students also suggested that movies keep their attention because they simply “like them. They’re awesome!”

The enjoyment of the films makes a difference for students. My students definitely preferred modern films. Perhaps the prowess and popularity of the modern actors had some effect; some students commented specifically on the final evaluation that they appreciated some films because they liked the specific actors like P.Diddy, Leonardo DiCaprio, and the late Heath Ledger. Some teachers would rather not show movies that students have already seen. I find that familiarity and new connections to previous learning can be beneficial to students. Newer films will also automatically gain more attention and respect from a young audience than antiquated films (twenty or more years old). A safe bet would probably be to choose films made during the years that my students have been alive.

Conclusion

Overall, my data seems to suggest that students truly do find films both “helpful” and “beneficial” to the understanding of text, especially the more modern films that they find enjoyable. Settings, times, event sequences, emotional conflicts, and more can be made evident through visual imagery in film. Many films are shot on location to make adaptations more accurate.

Films can deviate and alter the students’ understandings of text. Filmmakers create from their personal perceptions of text and take liberties with literature feeling the freedom to change and maneuver for the sake of the show. Readers should be taught to recognize deviations from text. Many come to see these changes as positive or necessary since filmmakers tell the stories uniquely as they see them. Deviations can add confusion to an already complicated text, but if discussed and addressed in class, even deviations can provide new perspectives and insights.

Aside from deviations, teachers should be aware that films also can and often do contain objectionable material such as language, violence, sex and nudity. Teachers trying to be “cool” or

“edgy” versus relevant and contemporary ending up proving their ignorance and begin mocking or becoming a mockery to the very students that they are trying to reach. Ravi Zacharias (2008) says that what is seen with the eye has become more powerful than the spoken word to the world. We must be careful about what we show because we do, in a sense, wield a powerful tool with film. Teachers should be aware that ratings are given for a reason and that films should always be previewed before showing them to a class. Film must be used appropriately and considered a teaching tool. Teachers can remind students to read films as they would books, making inferences, asking questions, and searching for the meanings conveyed by directors and writers.

I have decided that no matter the subject, films selected should never be a fall-back or a teaching replacement. They are not the answer for lazy teachers. Film clips are usually more beneficial than whole films. Teachers could be tempted to show too many clips, or clips that are too long. Clips should be kept to minimum lengths, only showing the very necessary parts. A 5 minute clip can be too long if the scene is slow, but sometimes, to give perspective, the clip will have to be longer. Clips should grab the attention of the viewers and set them up to jump back into the text or into quality discussion. They can also create suspense or excitement about the scenes in the text. The reason why most people remember the swimming pool scene best in *The Great Gatsby* (Merrick, D. & Clayton, J., 1974) is because it is the film’s most climactic moment. Since clips catch attention, teachers should show scenes that will make students want to know what happens in the book. They should leave students at a memorable moment in connection with the text thereby helping students make an emotional connection *with* the text. One student from my first semester came up to me in the lunch line later in the year and said, “I miss your movies. Do you remember that time you let Peter * and I come in during lunch and finish that scene?” (from conversation, April 18, 2008). Studies prove that people remember best when they’ve made emotional connections. They want to enjoy what they are doing. Students rarely

* *The student’s name has been changed for his protection.*

appreciate what they do not enjoy, especially if they feel it has somehow wasted their time. One of our tasks as educators is to help students enjoy learning.

My desire to find best teaching practices and to make my literature lessons as meaningful and memorable as possible led me through studies in individual intelligences (Gardner, 1983), in brain research, in emotional intelligence, in the motivation of learners, and more. I had to understand my own motivations, analyze the reactions of my students, and gauge critically my use of any and every teaching tool. I see film as a tool which, if used appropriately, can engage students in meaningful, lasting ways in the classroom.

Field offers a viewpoint from novelist Joseph Conrad which I adopt in my teaching of literature. He says, "My task...is to make you hear, to make you feel—and, above all, to make you see. That is all, and it is everything" (Field, 2005, from the *to the reader* page). Through this study, I have seen students interact with text in a fresh way as they applied the visual interpretations of film directors' adaptations of classic literature. They decoded film as they do literature when asked to. They responded both positively and negatively to deviations from text to film. Students were motivated extrinsically and intrinsically by film because they enjoy it, and they expressed their excitement when they made connections through film. They were encouraged to see relevance and meaning in the literature they read as they connected it visually to the emotions of the characters. I saw the power of film to motivate students and to help them understand literature.

Students respect filmmakers. Film, the ever-changing art, respects fad over tradition, remains popular, essentially teaches people who to become. To students, there is romance in the idea of Hollywood fame. Through their responses I learned the importance of adapting culturally relevant visuals into lessons. This allows them to relate to the text, cultivate positive emotions toward it, and in so doing, develop lasting recall of the information. My hope would be that teachers could use this research to benefit future curriculum and its implementation in order to improve class time, and help motivate student learners and readers.

Filmmakers should find this research validating. They act as visionaries, consistently recalling classics to life as those who allow the written word to take shape by breathing new visual life into literature. Classic literature and film often share billing as they continue to interact positively and produce appreciation and awareness of one another. So too, the filmmaker and the teacher. Perhaps filmmakers could be the catalyst for helping students in this media-stunted, automated western environment to use their rarely-greased imaginations. As they recreate and promote classic literature they help students appreciate it, helping students take steps toward understanding the abstract concepts within already difficult texts by giving them the tools to visualize the reading for themselves. Eventually readers will also learn to make inferences of their own. Filmmakers lead the way, not paving the path of laziness, but engineering new courses for the imagination.

It is, perhaps, the marriage of literature and film which has brightened classroom teaching for me. Literature comes to life on the screen, giving a face to favorite characters, and speed to story. Each lends to the enjoyment of the other. Details lost in film adaptations of books are refreshed as I turn the pages and once again walk the trails to Mordor or follow that familiar yellow brick road. Now my students and I will walk these paths together combining required, but beautiful readings of text with the magic and illumination of film.

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Appendix A

This is a copy of the evaluation that I handed out to students at the end of the semester.

ENGLISH 9

Evaluation of literature and film

Put the books that you read in this class in order of quality and enjoyment by numbering them – 1 being the best

- _____ *Things Fall Apart*
- _____ *Romeo and Juliet*
- _____ *The House on Mango Street*
- _____ *A Separate Peace*
- _____ *A Raisin in the Sun*
- _____ *Night*

Please do the same with the following film clips – placing them in order based on how well they helped you to understand the literature.

- _____ *Joe Vs. the Volcano (TFA – starring Tom Hanks)*
- _____ *The Four Feathers (TFA – starring Heath Ledger)*
- _____ *Romeo & Juliet – (1996 by Baz Luhrmann)*
- _____ *Romeo & Juliet – 1968 by Franco Zeffirelli*
- _____ *Romeo & Juliet – staged version starring Megan Follows*
- _____ *A Separate Peace – showtime films*
- _____ *A Raisin in the Sun – (1961 – starring Sidney Poitier)*
- _____ *A Raisin in the Sun – (2007 – starring P.Diddy)*

Which film deviated the most from the literature? _____

Which one stayed the closest to the text? _____

Which one did you enjoy the most? Why? _____

Do you know of any films that would help teach literature? _____

What subject works best with subject-related movies? _____

Which works better, whole movies or clips? _____

Do movies help you learn? _____ (yes or no). *Why?* _____

Appendix B

Anecdotal Notes: The Teacher's Reflective Journals from three "Book-to-Film" days

5.7.08

PREPARATION for film days

The Plan – A Day with Jane Austen, studying *Pride & Prejudice* in Book and Film

IMPLEMENTATION

BLOCK 1

Students enter: the unexpected. They see "A Day with Jane Austen" written on the white board and immediately start whining. "What is this? Who is that? We're not going to watch this are we?" I ignore these morning outbursts from my usually tired and a bit sarcastic students. I turn on the soundtrack to the most recent movie version of *Pride & Prejudice*. I begin with the daily business of the classroom, (despite my new understanding of Primacy Recency), and begin with a devotional.

Next, I introduce Jane Austen, give the about the author, discuss her era and the social climate for relationships which was money-driven over marrying for love. I offer the fact that most writers begin by "Writing what they know," and so Jane Austen wrote of her own time, setting, characters, and social/cultural issues.

I introduce the first clip, give a quick nod toward the characters they would meet in the clip, and pushed play on the clip of the BBC version of *Pride & Prejudice* starring Colin Firth. I show the scene in the film in which Elizabeth Bennett visits Charlotte and Mr. Collins, then Rosings Park with Lady Catherine DeBurg. I then fast forwarded to show the scenes of awkwardness between Mr. Darcy and Lizzy Bennett through his proposal.

I hand out the text excerpt, chapters 8-12, and begin reading with flair, rapidity, and voice inflection. The students read along, although many for whatever reasons – not enough sleep, too much sugar, ADHD, or disinterest – begin wandering off. They loose interest faster than I've seen in a while. I wonder if it's Austen's use of the word "thither." We get through chapter 8 only, and I realize that I lost their interest long ago. I want to impart appreciation for the literature, and I only seem to be succeeding in putting them to sleep. I then read chapter 11 aloud. In this chapter, they saw the same proposal scene.

I introduce the next clip from the newest version of the film, starring Keira Knightly. The students were watching with full interest during this version. The scenes run quickly with few pauses, lovely music, beautiful scenes and excellent filmmaking.

BLOCK 2

Again students were verbally anti – Jane Austen upon entering the room.

Introduction – about the author, political commentary, social injustices, classal / financial status levels, women's voices being heard, our picture of that time period – the language, settings, characters, etc. all products of Jane Austen's writings. Influential.

Film clip – Rosings Park BBC

Reading – ch.8

Middle of reading – lost control of class. Boys talking, being rude & sarcastic, aiming fingers at head like a gun (nonverbally saying – shoot me, end it quickly). I chewed them out – saying I am so disappointed that they could not stop talking, and be respectful of the literature and the teacher. It's not difficult to listen to literature and watch film clips on it, but they were treating it like torture! One student complained about the temperature in the room loudly as I started the clip, – after my rant about maturity – so I walked over to his desk and reminded him that he needs to solve his own problems and choose appropriate timing to talk. He did not get it at all, and I was ultimately SO frustrated. I walked next door to calm down told the teacher that I wondered if I should ever teach what I like because it bothers me more when they do not respect

it. And I really like *Pride & Prejudice*. She wisely told me that I should teach what I like, and that students can be immature. I took a moment to calm down. When I walked back in, the class knew that I was serious, so they were quiet. I was sad that this day had gone like this and glad that lunch was next so I'd have a moment to think and to re-assess.

So, the discussion in this class was mostly one-sided and ultimately disappointing.

BLOCK 3

"I *smell* a movie! Don't I? [I nod]. I *do* smell a movie!" – Marshall asks singingly everyday. He loves movies. He always hopes that he'll walk in any I'll say "Yes, Marshall, you do *smell* a movie."

My LONG introduction including all of the above Austen commentary and then some also contained 3 reasons why you should respect Austen's writing and appreciate it: longevity (test of time, novels now classics), AP testing (buzz words at Kings – we do not WASL, but do we ever praise AP tests and *Pride & Prejudice* is on the AP book list and has been used on final exams ten or more times), and finally, to the gentlemen I said that being able to converse on subjects "Jane Austen" or take bragging rights for at least having seen some means making "points" with girls.

Proposal clip - BBC

Proposal reading – ch.11

Proposal clip – focus films

Discussion

It was not until I saw the students' responses that I realized that our "Day with Jane" had not been a wasted day at all. Sometimes the more vocal students do not make up the majority. It just feels like they do. I was encouraged after reading their thoughtful notes about Jane Austen's writing and the film adaptations.

5.8.08

PREPARATION

The Plan – Show quality Book-to-film examples; Floatation device reminder (why films are not a replacement, but a helpful tool); Discuss and finish "Day with Jane" worksheet; Book to Film writing prompt

BLOCKS 1, 2, & 3

Before the students arrived I had visited the school library and collected as many quality examples of book-to-film classics as I could and placed them carefully all over my desk. As students came into class they looked over the piles and commented. As class began, I read off many of the titles and offered opinions and film options. I reminded them about my "floatation device" metaphor and led a discussion on why film adaptations of novels are not a replacement, but a helpful tool for readers.

We discussed and finished the "Day with Jane" worksheet and I collected them. They seemed to have a great deal of trouble deciphering Austen's meaning through her antiquated speech. They felt that Austen read like Shakespeare, but was more "girly" and therefore less enjoyable. There were a few girls who were either reading Austen currently or had previously read a novel or watched a film adaptation that they loved. They stayed quiet that day, though, because loving Jane Austen was not cool according to popular consensus. Of the two film versions, they liked the newer one but said that the BBC version stayed truer to the novel.

I gave them their writing prompt assignment. This being a Thursday, they were used to Thursdays being "writing days." The directions on this writing prompt began "*Explain how watching clips from movies affects your understanding of the literature you read (setting, characters, dialogue, etc.).*" I loved the responses I received from these students. I found them to be very insightful!

5.9.08

PREPARATION

Deviations – positives and negatives; the director as reader; the screenwriter as storyteller
Creating and recreating; Asking questions; Hopeful responses from students:

The Plan – Book to Film writing prompt Show the *Lord of the Rings* – *Appendices* & students take notes, Read page from Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, watch scene from Disney film version, and discuss deviations; watch and read selection from Dumas' novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* and watch corresponding film clip from 2002 film.

BLOCKS 1, 2, & 3

I was able to follow my lesson plan today because we had a great deal to cover. Today the students seemed prepared and even excited to take part in the book-to-film lesson. I started out with the *Appendices* disk in the *Lord of the Rings* insanely extended DVD (*Return of the King*). They watched intently despite the length (25 min). Their note sheet asked them to write down film notes and seven impressive facts as they watched. They did a good job with this.

Next we read the page from Dickens' *Oliver Twist* aloud and they worked in groups on the worksheet which asked them to give the context of the scene, tell how the film deviates from the text, infer the film maker's purpose in deviating, tell when (if ever) they think that it's inappropriate to deviate from the text for filming, and decide if a film clip that deviates is still helpful or not. They did really well with this worksheet and offered insightful responses.

Finally we watched a clip of the 2002 film *The Count of Monte Cristo* starring Jim Caviezel. They loved it. They were fascinated by the scene in the prison with the old man who became his teacher, mentor, and friend, and who eventually saved his life. They read the same scene from the book with anticipation and interest. If I had not run out of time I would have loved to have tested their knowledge of the text. Instead I had to be pleased with the few days of book-to-film time that we had.

Appendix C

These students wrote journals (typed as written) in response to the following writing prompt: *Do films help or hinder literature learning?*

*I think that watching films with books can be positive in my understanding of the book. When I watch a movie that has the same theme, or is the same as the book I am reading it helps me understand it when we watched the film of Pride and Prejudice I understood it better than just reading the book because they were the same. Since they followed the same storyline it was easier to understand the location and time period of the book. – Dennis **

Watching clips from movies can help you understand literature sometimes. It helps you get a picture on how a certain character looks, sounds, and what their facial expressions look like. It can also give you an idea of what the setting looks like. You have to be careful to choose whether you want to read the book before you watch the movie or not because some movies are nothing like the book and ruin everything for you. Movies should just be helpers for you. Reading the whole book first is always a good idea. – Margaret

I think that watching the movie clips help me to better understand a book's literature; if the writing confuses me the movie clips quite often help me to understand what is going on in the book as long as the book somewhat follows the story line. I think it would better help me to watch a little more (before and after) of the clip to help me better grasp the setting to figure out her exactly we are at in the book. But overall the movie clips can put it into an easier version of the book. In a way it simplifies the book's complex words into short "to-the-point" scenes, and offers another perspective other than the book's. So, I believe the movie clips are more helpful than hurtful. – Martha

Mostly, watching clips help me understand the book. It is enjoyable to see it acted out. It depends on how close it is to the book. When they leave things out or add to it it is just...dumb. Sometimes I don't like watching the movie because it is too boring, it is really different from the book. I don't want to mess up the setting in my head. But it is kinda nice to just watch instead of read at the moment. It is really frustrating when the movie is different than the book. It is annoying especially if they leave out a part from the book that you really wanted to see. It is annoying when the characters look different from what you imagined. But overall, I'd have to say they're pretty cool, fun, and good to watch a movie based on a book. – Beth

I believe that I should read a book before ever watching a movie. I personally can benefit from watching a movie just to get a clearer picture on how others (not myself) portray how they think certain characters relate to the issues in the story. Sometimes when I don't understand half the book, a movie can show me visually what's happening instead of trying to paint a mental picture. – Jo

I really believe that watching movie clips helps with the understanding of literature. Sometimes it is really hard to understand the mood, setting and interaction between characters. So, by watching movie clips, you can truly understand what is going on. An example of this would be when we read Romeo and Juliet. Because it was written as a play, it was often very hard to get a feel for the setting as well as grasp what they were saying. So when we watched

**The names of all students have been changed for anonymity.*

different version of that book, I really began to understand how characters felt and what their surroundings were. Watching movie clips really helps me to understand literature and I am glad that I have the opportunity to do so. – Meg

Reading a book and watching a film does help for me because it gives a visual aspect and you can hear the characters voice. For me, I like people to read aloud to me and that's exactly what a movie does. Like most movies, they are not the same as the book and sometimes I like that because it gives it a different perspective. I love films that show the difference between characters, voice analysis, and settings of the book. I think the whole movie should be shown not only because it's fun to watch but to understand the whole storyline in a way that you can see the similarities in the book and in the movie and see if the characters have different attitudes and ways of thinking. Showing us the film and movie dose make a huge impact because it broadens our outlook on the storyline. – Amy

I like movies much better because I'm not a big reader because I don't like reading at all. As long as the movie isn't too much different than the book and you get all the major important ideas then it's ok. If I see a movie I ten tot understand it better etn if I were to read the book myself because I na't get information out of books very easily unless its out hwere it is easily recognizable. – George

I think when it comes to books vs. film adaptations I would prefer the book just because in general they're usually better. Although I think the film adaptations give you a great vision of time and can show a story someone's telling rather than just hearing it. I would have to say that when it comes to a classic novel turning into a movie with vocabulary beyond my mind I would probably watch "war and peace" first before attempting the novel, just like with Lord of the Rings. I would have to say that after reading "Memoirs of a Geisha" and then watching the film, it was the closest and most precise film adaptation of a novel. I loved both. – Doris

When I watch the movie of the book it helps me put faces to names. It helps me picture how they would walk talk and act. Also movies sometimes help with family relations, so in other words, it clears up whom is who's dad, brother, sister, etc. it also helps when you are trying to understand the layout of a building or town. It can show you really how close the farm is to the market, or how far away the house is from the bicycle shop. – Connie

I think movie can be good and bad. They can be good because they can help you with some of the things like, setting, what people looked like, what clothes they wore, and the time period. They can also be good as a review for a test. Movies can be very bad though. If the movie deviates from the novel, it makes the movie bad and if you are watching it instead of the book you will do bad (on the test). Also films don't go into such detail, so it is harder to get info. An example of a bad movie to novel was Eragon. The book was great, but the movie left out a lot. An example of a good book to film is Pride and Prejudice. I think we should watch a lot more movies in class. – Cary

I think watching the whole film would help me understand the novel better, wpecially if the film has the same theme or even a book to film movie with the same title, setting, plot, characters...etc. It would help me understand it better because there is something that can let me visualize what is really happening (I am a visual person) and also it would make me have more interest in reading the book. I my opinion, I think reading is boring and it is a little hard for me to concentrate but by showing a clip or even the whole movie it would make things more fun and less boring. – Edith

I think watching the clips helps a lot. It gives a visualization of what's going on. Also at times someones expression can be hard to understand but with actors they can show you the tone of the scene also it gives a lot better understanding of how everything fits together and how the scene flows. For books based on older times it really give a show of how things were beyond a couple of describing sentences. - Shane

I think watching clips from movies affects my understanding, they helps. Like classical literatures, there are many words that I cannot understand so movie helps me to understand their dialogue. Also by visual affect, I can see what they are wearing, too. But the negative part I sometimes, movies make book shorter so there aren't many details, also they are trying to entertain rather showing book so they sometimes exaggerate or change some parts. For me, I get confused on test because watching movie is more memorable than reading a book. But they definately helps to understand overall story and characteristic of main characters. Also, by watching movies. I can know more about setin by watching props. Movie affects people who wants to know just overall story, positively but not to students who will have test based on book. - Kate

It really helps me figure out what is going on in the novel. It helps me picture the setting and how they are acting when they are talking and it helps me understand the text much better. Watching the movie clips helps me picture the tone of the novel and how its all supposed to be happening when I watch the film I don't have to pay as much attention to the words (which I don't understand anyway) because I can see the actors put the words into action and act out the feelings that they have instead of trying to understand everything just from the text. - Jack

I think that all of the books that we have read and being able tot watch a movie about that subject has really helped. Some reasons why are because it helps you get a better understanding for their culture. And culture can really define the location a what they do. Another is that it makes it A LOT easier to understand they character more in how they look and what cloths they wore. For example like Leper with his yellow teeth and dirty and gross cloths. - Sawyer
(Leper is a character from A Separate Peace who goes crazy, and interestingly enough, the yellow teeth and gross clothing was only in the movie; it was a deviation from the text.)

I love watching movies, but I don't enjoy reading. Movies help to understand and visualize the story. On the down side, movies have a tendency to not be exactly the same as the book. Movies are okay to use as a learning aid though. You should watch the movie after reading. Movies help you to understand the culture, and setting in a story. Movies are very helpful when you are reading a book that involves very verbose and hard to understand literature. - Hurley

It helps me extremely. I know what's going on in the scene because you can see it all happening instead of imagining it. It shows your where the scene is and what its like in that area which helps you picture the book later on you know what character is speaking in the movie and which ones are in the scene interacting. I didn't really understand Romeo and Juliet very well when we first started it, but after watching the movie I had an idea of what was going on and it was way easier to understand . I feel like I understand better when the character himself says the words then when you just read them all because it's the same person. - Benson

Watching clips from movies helps me to understand the literature much better. I get to see "visualized" characters, buildings and all the materials. I also hear the voices of each character and other sounds such as water flowing sound, raining sound or bird sounds. When I

only read a book, it is hard to get the concept of the book fully because I don't know what the setting would look like or the characters' appearance. It is also hard use my imagination since I haven't been everywhere in the world at any time period. I don't know what it looks like in a pyramid. I haven't seen any picture inside of pyramids. If I heard what it looks like without visualized materials, I would be still confused. However, with the aid of video clips, I can fully understand any description or literature because it provides me the visualized materials. – Ferris

It helps me to understand the story better because the movies actually show me the scenes and what is going on. It shows better pictures and concepts of specific things. But sometimes the books are better because the books show the hidden meanings and they have so many details of the story. Even sometimes the movie edits "some" parts of the book and make it very short. If I have to read the book, I would read the book first and then watch the movie because the movie could lack some important points even though it shows better concepts. – Rachel

In the book and movie Holes you get a complete idea of what the movie and book means to you. When I read the book Holes I was completely in suspense the whole time. Then the book at the end took a complete turn that I was not expecting at all to happen. Then I sat down and watched the movie and it followed the book for the most part, but I lost a little of the suspense because the movie was kind of predictable. I liked both the book and the movie and thought that I understood the author's message. – Peter

Romeo and Juliet is a very legit book, but when put into film you can see very many differences. The lines from the book into the film were spot on perfect, but the setting, and also the day in age in which they said it, like in a carnival or car just seemed a little strange to my eyes. I must stay though watch the film of Romeo and Juliet gave me in the imagery of the book in a new perspective and let me see the emotion I could only imagine in the book. – Saul

When I watch a clip from a movie and read the book the movie helps me to understand what is happening in the books, and the surroundings and how the characters act and more their emotions. When you read a book it may say something that I think is maybe said lightheartedly but when you see the movie it is actually said with passion and emotion. Seeing a movie also helps me see and remember the setting better. It helps me create a better picture of the scene in my head. However sometimes when you read a book then see the movie and the movie is disappointing and it misleads me because when I take a test it's on the book not the movie but sometimes remember the movie but can't remember the book. – Annie

Some films help and some films just make you more confused sometimes. Those films don't follow the book and sometimes even have different characters. I really like the Lord of the Rings series and thought they were really well made and follow the book very well. They did an amazing job with the war scenes and made it look realistic. The only part that did not make me happy was when Frodo and Golum fought on the way up the mountain and into the volcano and let the ring fall out of his hand, it was too fake for me. But other wise I think this was really really well done. – Joe Jr.

Watching clips from movies about books can help or hurt your understanding of the book. I feel that replacing movies with books for an assignment is a shame because you never replace a book if your supposed to read a book. Sometimes a movie can be misleading as in Eragon or Flicka however the movies are fantastic they do not follow the story at all. Books to film should be watched for entertainment and not to be watched in place for reading. Nothing can replace the true literature. – Meg

Watching movie clips hurts me sometimes. It helps me understand the characters and their emotions. I can understand where the scene is taking place. If I really like the book I usually won't like the movie as much. For example The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants was a fantastic book but the movie took out whole characters. I still like the movie but not as much as I hoped to. But sometimes movies can be exactly like the book. Some of my favorites books have been put into movies like Holes, A Wrinkle in Time, The Sisterhood and Narnia. I am very excited to see Prince Caspian and I am planning on reading the book very soon. – Rosie

I re-read Narnia before I saw the movie. It helped me because I saw the book acted out, and in parts of the book where there was no dialogue, it helped having a visual in the movie. The creatures and setting were like I imagined them, and that helped a fair amount. Comparing the book Bridge to Terabithia to the movie went well. I thought that the movie was pretty close to how I remembered the book. – Walter

The movie clips improve my understanding of the literature. When I read part of the text and then watch the corresponding movie clip the characters seem to come to life more than before. I can understand the dialogue more when I see it acted out by the characters visually. Movie clips can improve my understanding of the dialogue. However, movie clips shouldn't be shown with wild abandon. The teacher must choose a clip that is appropriate and best describes or represents the section of literature the class just read. With guidelines the movie- book combination work out very well, helping the class to understand the literature better. – Kathleen

By watching movies one can help their understanding of a book, but also hurt their understanding. A movie can help the understanding by showing the setting of the book and what life was like, and it can also show why they are talking in a certain scene. A movie can also hurt our understanding because usually movies aren't exactly like the book. It wouldn't be a wise decision to watch the movie before that without reading the book because they could switch all the scenes around. These were some reasons on why watching movies can help you or hurt you. – Kelly

Reading a book then watching the book converted to film is very helpful to me and I think it's a good idea to read the book then watch the movie because I don't comprehend what I read well. If the book is well written and the movie is bad then I won't see the movie. I wouldn't watch the movie then try and take a test on the novel the next day because the authors voice is different. – Marvin

I almost always have read the book first or find out afterwards that there is a book and then go read it (if I like the movie, or sometimes if I get that feeling where its like, okay, good plot but it doesn't seem quite right, exactly, or something like that). So sometimes if I saw the movie first that affects how I see the characters and stuff, like what they look like in my mind, but I don't get it confused, really. I almost always end up hating a movie made from a book I really liked, because it's just so disappointing, and visually small changes have been made, which annoy me, or big changes which infuriate me. I thought they did a pretty good job with Narnia, the only thing that I didn't like was that Aslan was nowhere near as cool as I the books. But that 's expecting a lot. – Bambi

Watching clips from movies can affect your understanding literature you read. Many movies can be totally different than the book. They may not have the author's voice, the setting of the scenes, and also the dialogues of the book may be different than the movie. If it were Romeo and Juliet or a play it could help you visualize it because the movies use the same script and words as the book. Movies can give you an idea of the book and help you understand and not be

too overwhelmed. Most cases the movie is not the same as the book also you should not skip reading the book and only watch the movie. Movies can affect your understanding of the book and distort the thought you have on the book you are reading. – Susan

To see a movie made from a book you are currently reading is very helpful. Picturing a situation or scene from book is sometimes difficult. Watching a movie of the book can let you see a visual of scenes and situation. You're able to see how things could really play out. Movies cannot substitute books however, because movies often are changed slightly or completely from a book to make the movie more interesting or able to fit in a certain time frame. If you watch a movie in place of a book, you will not comprehend the full understanding of the book. – Lucy

When I read a book I create a visual picture in my head, and I create the characters and backgrounds as I think they would be. But when I see a film, it is a different person's ideas and pictures being showed how they saw it in their heads, so the movie is never as good as the book because it isn't what I originally thought it was. But if the movie is made right it can help explain how people were feeling, where they were, and what their expressions were. – Edmond

When you read a book you really understand what feeling and emotions the author is trying to convey to you. When they make a book into a movie, although they rarely capture the book, when they do get the true essence of the book on film it allows the viewer to see what's going on, not just imagine, like in Lord of the Rings, the movie really shows the landscape and setting of the book, it shows the viewer to be a part of the story. In the movies you can see a character's emotions so well it makes the women cry. A piece of literature is the best way to see a story but a good movie is nice to. – Luke

I understand now that the movie is the visual style of reading the book. The directors followed the book with extreme precision that the reader could experience authentic feelings. – Evan

Watching clips from movies gives you either a better or worse picture of the actual novel. The setting may be the same. Most of the time, the characters are the same. But, in most movies, the dialogue of the book changes in the movie. Sometimes part of the plot even changes. I believe that you should read the book before you watch the movie. This gives you a better understanding of the author's words and his or her dialogue. – Kirk

Watching a movie with the book can help you understand the scenes and characters better. But if the movie scenes are false it's difficult to remove that interpretation from your mind when reading the literature. This could affect you on a test or quiz. Watching the movie and reading the story could confuse you. It may help if the movie stays close to what the book says. You also miss the voice of the author when you concentrate your understanding on the movie; you miss the real book. But, then reader can understand the setting, and characters in a new fresh way. I think it is best to watch the movie after completing the book so your views of the story are based on the book instead of the movie. It is good sometimes to have both. – Rory.

Watching clips from movies affects your understanding of the literature you read can take away all of what you think of the real story. If you were to watch the movie of a story instead of a novel, you aren't going to have the whole setting of it and then when you read the book, there would be two different versions. This is because in the movie, they can't do as much detail because then book expresses it all. Watching the setting would be two versions, the characters wouldn't be the same, and you will miss out on the whole dialogue. If you read the book first and then watch it on video you would have a better understanding and get all the details. Then when you watch it, you can see what difference it makes. – Lorelai

Movies are great, but can really screw you up in some circumstances. Take The Lord of the Rings for example. The movie has produced beautifully and it's a great thriller for families, but how true is it to the book? The books are almost written in a King James sort of way, with a wiccraft-like twist. Not to mention no comedy. If ever anyone were to write an essay or take a test on one of The Lord of the Rings books, they would for shure not want to watch the movie. They'd probably end up with a C or a B- . by all means, watch the movie, but make shure you read it to. – Richard

Watching clips from movies helps me because I am someone who understand books better when I can hear the different voices and see what they are doing. I have a hard time imagining the setting and movies help me to make a visual. So once I see a clip I can picture the hallways or the field or wherever the setting is. Movie clips also help my imagination to wander. They make me think of places or characters in ways I wouldn't have imagined. They also help me with tests if the book and movie are somewhat the same or have the same event happening. For example when we were reading Things Fall Apart I wasn't able to see a picture of the "egwugwu" and I didn't know what they looked like. When we watched Joe Vs the Volcano I had a mental picture and I could remember what an egwugwu was. It helped me for the test. All together movies help me way more than they hinder me. – Emily

Watching clips form movies affects my understanding of the literature we read by helping me grasp the characters more. Movies give me a fresh idea of what's going on, and gives me good pictures of what the characters look like; which is always s a plus! I believe that since I am more of a visual learner; clips can help me focus more on the main idea of the story, because often times I find myself getting lost in the details. I prefer to only watch the movie that is of the same book, unless they are only remotely different I have to say that if I watch a different story, I get off track and rather confused and getting the movies and books can mixed up. – Karen

Watching movies helps me because you can see how the character acts and their facial expression which can't be shown in the book. The words they say can also be shown better in the movie because the persons attitude and emotions are shown. A book can tell more than the movie can show and can also be a lot longer than a movie. A movie shows what and how the scene is happening, while a book tells you what each character is thinking. Watching a movie is more helpful to me than the book can be personally.– Harold

Film assists me in understanding literature because it allows for easier visual affirmation of what the characters' emotions are because facial expressions are visible. Furthermore, film gives a dimension to stories that literature, even in all its beauty and grandeur, can't provide; the human element. Actors can portray literary characters and breathe a certain life and understanding into them that often a reader can't quite do, or at least not to as large a scale. Overall, film is an excellent alongside guide for literature. – Gene

A lot of times when I'm reading a book and then see the movie it sometimes gives me a better understanding of the book because it can show me what the characters might have looked like or what they sound like. Also if I am reading a part that doesn't really seem clear to me or I don't really know what someone's reaction would really be. I could watch the movie/ movie clip and have a n easier time understanding the book instead of trying to play it all out in my head. Some books I think they should make movies for like "Things Fall Apart" and the book "Ender's Game," which we read last year in the 8th grade. – Finny

Watching film clips helps me understand the setting, characters, dialogue. I am more of a visual learner. I learn better from seeing things. Watching film clips helps me get a better understanding of what is going on and also to get a feel of what the story is like. I can also see what the characters are like, and see where the story is taking place. I like to see things rather than read words. – Sydney

For me, watching clips both helps and distracts me from learning the novels. Films help me to understand the feeling or emotional expression of the characters, and to picture the setting / background looks of the place where the story takes place. It also condenses the novel – version of the story so that I can stay focused for couple hours and already have good idea what the book is about. but on the other hand, films can distract me from learning the novel. For instance, if the author is very verbose, like Jane Austen, it's very hard for me to catch the vocabularies / words that characters say in British accent. Once I lose focus, trying to figure out what he/she said in the movie, it's very hard for me to go back and focus on the movie. In addition, films cut out superfluous parts of the book to make it short and simple, which can be vital parts of the novel where author wants to illustrate some points. Overall, it both helps and distracts me from learning. – Sean

Watching clips from movie help understand of the literature because it shows many details. It helps readers visually understand and it show character's emotion very well. When readers read a book, they need to imagine the background, and other character's looking. However, sometimes, readers misunderstand the description and movie clips can help them understand correctly. Also, movie clips are visual. You can remember the story or a scene from a book better an longer when you watch movie. Lastly, when you watch movie clips, you can feel the character's feeling directly. You can be excited when the characters are excited. You can be sad when you see the actor cries. You can understand the character's feeling and emotions. In conclusion, watching movie clips help you have a idea, emotion, and backgrounds of the book. – Guy

I think watching clips from movies helps me understand the book better. It only helps though when you watch the movie of the book not some random movie. When watch the movie that goes with the book, I see how the characters are. I also see the setting so I don't have to make up all these things in my head. Sometimes it might get confusing because the movie might skip a couple chapters so sometimes it doesn't make sense. – Jimmie

I think that watching the movies help to understand the book a lot. Though I think you can't just show one clip or a short bit of the movie because it won't help at all. It might be able to understand the setting a little from a clip but not a lot. We need to watch a little bit more of the film. I don't think watching a clip will help learning more about the characters at all but watching the whole movie will help a lot. The dialog I think is different either way because of time restraints so I would say that watching the film (more than 10 minutes) will help us understand the book a lot better. – Chad

It depends on how accurate the film is in relation to the book. If the film is inaccurate, then I sometimes get confused between what happens in the book and what happens during the film. If the film is accurate, however, it helps me to visualize what is happening in the book and to have a better understanding of it. To see how accurate a movie is or to fully understand the context, I must preview the entire film; or I will be confused about the context of the book. This is what is required to fully understand literature. – Zach

Watching clips from movies doesn't help me understand the literature at all. It makes it easier to imaging what the characters look like, but it doesn't help me understand what 's going on in the story. Sometimes movie clips distract me or make me confused as to what happened in the book or what happened in the movie. Movies also sometimes switch the order of things that happened in the book. They leave out a lot of important details because they have a time limit. – Fae

I think watching movie clips is a good way to understand what is going on in the book for instance you can get an idea of what the place they were at looked like also you can get a better understanding of what the characters might have looked like or sounded like. Also you can see what kind of vibe the author was trying to convey through his/her writing. clips o f movies can also be fun to watch because you can pick out he differences between the book and the movies. They are also more fu because you can get a different perspective o the story through watching the clips. – April

By watching film clips from movies that go along with the book I'm reading helps me in so many ways. It helps me understand the book more. It helps me retain information better. I am more of a visual learning but somewhat of an auditory learner. – Milly

Watching movies with books helps me understand the reading a lot better. It gives me a picture of what 's going on in the book. I need to visually see things for reading to fully understand what's going on. I like to see the different characters and setting and the other things in the book. It doesn't really affect my testing because I can remember if I saw / heard it, or if I just read it. It's a good idea to show movie clips that have to do with the books. Obviously, though the movie has to be related to whatever the book is talking about. – Dorkas

Watching clips from movies allows people to have a visual understanding of what is going on in the book. Movie clips can help people remember what is going on and what happened. They allow you to see another persons view on how the characters act and what they look like. Film clips allow you to have a better understanding of the setting of the book. You are able to see things that may be hard to see when you simply read the book. I stories that use verbose language, seeing what is going on will allow you to connect your own words to the authors. It is a way to reinforce what you have read. They can , however, press the directors opinions on you. Over all film clips are very helpful. – Mary Anne

Watching clips from movies helps me understand a book better if the movie is based on the book. When watching clips from the movies it helps me to visualize things in the book. It helps to visualize how the character in the book might look like, how the characters in the book might talk, and how certain events in the book would look like they actually happened. The movies would help understand what the place where the book took place in would look like. It would also help me understand what people were like in the time period of the book. – Harvey

Movies can help people who are visual learners to understand the books more. – Elizabeth

I am a very visual learner and most of the time, movies can really help. Although, because books can get a little boring, the director would re-do parts of the book. That's why I read Bridge to Terabithia before ever watching the movie. I still love movies. – Sabrina

I think that when movies are really different from their books, like Bridge to Terebithia then it gets more confusing. I think that when the film and book follow the same storyline then they are easy to relate to but when they aren't the same it is hard to understand them. – Gidget

Like most movies, they are not the same as the book and sometimes I like that because it gives it a different perspective. I love films that show the difference between characters, voice analysis, and settings of the book. – Jeff