

# ENGLISH THROUGH FILM

## USING FILM IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

To my parents, both of them film buffs

The author would like to thank Daan Duez for the illustrations, Katherine Opello and Charlotte Peters for proofreading the manuscript and Philippe Neyt and Marc Van De Walle for their precious advice about concept and lay-out.

# English through Film

Using Film in the Language Classroom

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Acco Leuven / Den Haag

*First print:* 2016

*Published by*

Uitgeverij Acco, Blijde Inkomststraat 22, 3000 Leuven, België

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*Cover design:* [www.frisco-ontwerpbureau.be](http://www.frisco-ontwerpbureau.be)

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SPECIFIC FILM ACTIVITIES	FILMS	DURATION (excl. debate)	STUDENT LEVEL (and higher)	SKILL PRACTISED (apart from LC)
At the Oscars	<i>Forrest Gump</i>	20 mins	B1	SP
Best-loved Film Scenes	<i>Erin Brockovich</i>	30 mins	B1	SP/WR
Between the Lines	<i>21 Grams</i>	20 mins	B2	SP/WR
Do You Remember?	<i>In the Name of the Father</i>	20 mins	B1	SP/WR
Dubbed	<i>Sex, Lies and Videotape</i>	30 mins	B1	WR
Fan Mail	<i>American Beauty</i>	30 mins	B1	WR
Film Quiz	<i>Seven</i>	30 mins	B1	WR/SP
Film Quotes	<i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	15 mins	B2	RC/SP
	<i>Apocalypse Now</i>			
	<i>Pulp Fiction</i>			
	<i>Taxi Driver</i>			
Film Reviews Compared	<i>Pi</i>	40 mins	B2	RC/SP
Interview the Film Director	<i>East is East</i>	30 mins	B2	RC/SP
Light and Dark	<i>Paths of Glory</i>	15 mins	B1	SP
Literary Analysis	<i>The Crying Game</i>	30 mins	B1	SP/WR
Make a Film Presentation	<i>Ali</i>	25 mins	B2	SP
Movie Posters	<i>Babel</i>	20 mins	B1	SP
	<i>Requiem for a Dream</i>			
	<i>Cast Away</i>			
Movie Trailers	<i>Rabbit-Proof Fence</i>	30 mins	B1	SP
	<i>The Blair Witch Project</i>			
	<i>The Emerald Forest</i>			

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SPECIFIC FILM ACTIVITIES	FILMS	DURATION (excl. debate)	STUDENT LEVEL (and higher)	SKILL PRACTISED (apart from LC)
Musical Score	<i>2001, A Space Odyssey</i>	30 mins	B1	SP
	<i>Easy Rider</i>			
	<i>Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai</i>			
Perspective	<i>Proof</i>	15 mins	B1	SP/WR
Press Conference	<i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i>	20 mins	B1	SP
Role-playing Famous Scenes and Writing a Screenplay	<i>Dead Man Walking</i>	30 mins	B2	SP/WR
Witness	<i>Crash</i>	20 mins	B1	WR/SP
Write a Film Review	<i>Dirty Pretty Things</i>	60 mins	B2	RC/WR



# Introduction

We are all influenced by film. Our cultural stereotypes are often, consciously or unconsciously, coloured by the movies we have seen, and the characters who are featured can become our significant others. Our lives are dominated by audio-visual messages, with boundaries between reality and fiction constantly being blurred. Language is contextualized through the flow of a film’s images, making each other mutually accessible. Add up those data and the question whether English can be taught and learned through film becomes relevant.

Starting from about twenty film activities based on roughly thirty movies, this book offers English language teachers at secondary schools and higher-education institutions the opportunity to use film as a starting point for improving the spoken English skills (SP) of their students. But, as will be noticed, other skills will also be addressed, practised and improved, such as listening comprehension (LC), reading (RC) and writing (WR).

For each movie or set of movies, one specific activity is proposed. The idea is that teachers do the activity on the film or set of films as it is presented in the book. However, they can also try out the same activity on another film discussed. Depending on their level, the students can also be asked to organize the same activity in connection with yet another movie in *English through Film*, or apply one of the other activities proposed in the book to the same film. Even another film not featured in the book can be dealt with.

These multiple options are made clear in the table below:

<b>Teacher</b>	Activity 1 Film 1	Activity 1 Film 2	Activity not in book Film 3
<b>Student</b>	Activity 1 Film 4	Activity 2 Film 1	Activity 3 Film not in book

Next, for each movie presented, debating questions have been added about cinematographic issues (lighting, style, camera angle, editing, musical score) as well as topics linked to the, often controversial, themes. Answers to many of the debating questions have been provided on the website ([www.uitgeverijacco.be/englishthroughfilm](http://www.uitgeverijacco.be/englishthroughfilm)). Students who have seen the entire film and not only the suggested sequence will have an easier time answering some of these questions, but the teacher needn't cover all of them. They may decide only to deal with the items related (in-) directly with the suggested sequence.

Then, for each title, a film fact sheet has been provided with general information about its year of release, director, cast and trivia, which the teacher and students can look at and discuss as a starting point.

Finally, there is a short film terminology glossary and a table with film genres and subgenres at the end of the book, explaining most of the cinema jargon used in *English through Film*.

There is no particular order in which the teacher has to cover the various activities and films proposed. That is why the specific film activities have been presented in alphabetical order. For each one of them, its duration (excluding the debating questions), the CEFR-level and the skill(s) practised have been added. For each film, a sequence or clip has been suggested, which the students can be shown as a warming-up activity.

The films selected are “seminal”, both from the point of view of content and form. They have been chosen for their controversial message and their role in film history as having altered the language of cinema. Attention is paid to both issues. Several of them are award-winning pictures.

Worksheets go with the various units. No or little prior knowledge of cinematographic principles is required to be able to use this book.

The activities and debating questions proposed have been tried out on students of all kinds of levels, in the context of a film club that was set up over ten years ago. In satisfaction surveys, students reported that film is an ideal starting point for conversation, improving one's listening and speaking skills and getting to know the target culture. Next, film is an ideal motivator, making the language-learning process more entertaining and enjoyable. Then, film offers the viewer “real-language input”, exposing students to authentic expressions and a natural flow of speech, often the only contact with native speakers the language-learner will ever be exposed to. Further, film offers an enlargement of the viewer's knowledge of the

world. Finally, movies enable the learner to understand more by interpreting the language (and the body language) in a full visual context. And last but not least, both the teacher and the student will see that making sense of the visual rhetoric (the cinematographic aspects) of a film will vastly broaden what the viewer will be able to draw from it.

*English through Film* has been endorsed by Professors Willem Hesling and Jacques Polet, who taught film history and filmography, respectively at KULeuven and UCLouvain-la-Neuve, as well as Marc Van De Walle, who teaches film directing and editing at the Luca School of Arts in Brussels.

This book is meant to be both a resource book and a workbook. It is intended for teachers who want to step out of their comfort zones and improve their learners' mastery of the English language in an original way, leading, more generally, to a better understanding of Anglo-Saxon culture. The level aimed at is broad enough to span B1 to C1. The activities can be adapted to virtually any level.

For further reading, see:

Condé, M., Fonck, V. and Vervier, A. (2006). *A l'école du cinéma. Exploiter le film de fiction dans l'enseignement secondaire*. Brussels: De Boeck & Larcier.

Stempleski, S. and Tomalin, B. (2001). *Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



# 1.

## *At the Oscars*

*Forrest Gump* (US, 1994)

by Robert Zemeckis

with Tom Hanks, Sally Field, Robin Wright, Mykelti Williamson and Gary Sinise



Students choose film stars to present film awards at the Academy Awards Oscars Ceremony. Divide the class into groups. Each group runs a Hollywood studio. They must choose five top male actors and five top female actors, as well as one top film director. Each studio brainstorms their list of 11 names. Then each group presents its stars and director to the class, explaining the reasons for its choices. The class as a whole can finally nominate and vote on its ten “all time” film stars.

See <http://www.oscar.com> for information about Academy Awards nominees, past and present.

See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109830/awards> for the awards won by the movie Forrest Gump in 1995.

(suggested sequence: 28'27" to 34'05")

### Worksheet:

Five Top Male Actors	Five Top Female Actors
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

One Top Film Director
1

Top Ten Film Stars
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

## Debating Questions

### 1. Forrest Gump: Madman or Genius?

- a) he is \_\_\_\_\_ inferior (with an IQ of 75)  
 b) he is \_\_\_\_\_ superior

2. **Dramatic Irony** is a literary technique, originally used in Greek tragedy, whereby the implications of an event are understood by the audience but not grasped by the characters in the movie, the play or the book.

Event in the film What Forrest says	What the audience knows What Forrest doesn't know
JFK – Robert Kennedy – Marilyn Monroe	
Forrest and his African-American friend Bubba both come from Alabama	What happened in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1 <sup>st</sup> 1955?
Forrest's attitude to the army Forrest's respect for Lieutenant Dan	
"This guy named Charlie"	
"Dallas, from Phoenix"	
"Cleveland, from Detroit"	
"There was always some place to go" "There was always something to do" "The war wasn't always fun"	
"The rain was falling upwards"	
"That river in Vietnam"	
Forrest's love for Jenny	

3. What is the **symbolism of the feather** blowing in the wind at the beginning and end of the film?
4. What do you think of the **relationship between Forrest and Jenny**? What makes her decide to marry Forrest? Are they compatible or incompatible?
5. Forrest's mother insisted that her son should attend an **ordinary school**, not one for disabled children. Discuss.

6. What is the **symbolism of Forrest running** in the film?
7. What genre does this film belong to?
8. Do you agree with the criticism that *Forrest Gump* symbolizes “aggressively conservative values” and criticizes “the counterculture movement of the 1960s”?
9. Which music do you prefer in *Forrest Gump*? Why?
10. What is your favourite scene from *Forrest Gump*? Why?
11. Describe the person who was your best friend when you were a child. How has your relationship evolved since then? Do you have another best friend now?
12. Is it possible to be best friends with the following:
  - a) one of your family members
  - b) a colleague at work
  - c) a classmate
  - d) one's boss
  - e) one's teacher
  - f) a member of the opposite sex, while having a partner
  - g) one's partner

Discuss why (not)

13. Is it possible to have several best friends?
14. Are age, race, gender and social status stumbling blocks in creating friendships?
15. Are you your best friend's best friend? Are you sure? How do you know?

### Film Fact Sheet

*Forrest Gump* is considered by many to be the prototypical Hollywood box-office hit, a commercial (grossing \$ 25,5 million in its first weekend of release) as well as cinematographic success. It won six Academy Awards in 1995, for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Tom Hanks), Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Visual Effects and Best Film Editing. *Forrest Gump* was one of the first films to use the CGI technique (computer-generated imagery), which allowed the Forrest Gump character to meet and shake hands with real-life figures who were in reality long dead, such as the scene with President John F. Kennedy. Other famous CGI sequences in the film are when Forrest carries his friend Bubba away from an incoming napalm attack, or when Lieutenant Dan has his legs amputated. *Forrest Gump* has been accused of defending “aggressively conservative values” and “criticizing the counterculture movement of the 1960s”. The impressive movie soundtrack includes songs by Elvis Presley, Fleetwood Mac, Clearwater Revival, Aretha Franklin, The Byrds, The Doors, The Mamas & The Papas, Simon & Garfunkel, Bob Seger and Jimi Hendrix among many others.





# 2.

## *Best-loved Film Scenes*

*Erin Brockovich* (US, 2000)  
by Steven Soderbergh  
with Julia Roberts, Albert Finney and Aaron Eckhart



Students fill in a worksheet with information about three favourite scenes in a film and then report the information to the class.

**suggested sequences:**

Scene 1	11'53" to 15'20"
Scene 2	1:18:30 to 1:20:30
Scene 3	1:58:10 to 2:00:54

Divide the class into groups. Tell the groups to number the scenes in the order preferred by the group. They should use the worksheet to write down information about:

- a) the setting
- b) the characters
- c) what happens in each scene

After brainstorming, each person in the group reports back to the whole class information on the group's favourite scene.

**Worksheet:**

	Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3
<b>Preference (label A to C)</b>			
<b>Setting</b>			
<b>Characters</b>			
<b>Action</b>			

## Debating Questions

1. **Genre:** discuss the following possibilities: thriller – melodrama – docudrama – « biopic »
2. **Typecasting:** What is typecasting?

Julia Roberts in “*Pretty Woman*” (1990) → give other examples of typecast actors

**Exercise:** Match the name of the actor with the typecast role they often play:

Actor	Typecast role
Angelina Jolie	Wise Old Guy
Hugh Grant	Babe
Samuel L. Jackson	Macho
Morgan Freeman	Badass
Cameron Diaz	Tomboy
Elijah Wood	Mr Muscles
Clint Eastwood	Clumsy
Sylvester Stallone	Nerd

3. This film is based on **real-life events**: give other examples of such films (featuring unlikely triumphs against the odds)
4. **Class-action lawsuits**: give examples from reality in the US /elsewhere
5. **Steven Soderbergh**: mention other films by him

Does this film fit the type of Soderbergh film we are used to seeing?

6. **React** to the following words in connection with the film:
  - a) David versus Goliath: who is who in this film?
  - b) Discuss the relationship between Erin Brockovich and Ed Masry  
George
  - c) “*Courtroom drama*”: give other examples of such films

- d) How do you react to this film? sentimental – authentic – sincere – a “*tear-jerker*”
- e) Does the viewer underestimate Erin Brockovich because of the way she looks?

### Film Fact Sheet

*Erin Brockovich* was directed in 2000 by Steven Soderbergh, who had previously gained notoriety with films such as *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989) and *Kafka* (1991). He later directed *Traffic* (2000), the *Ocean's* films (2004 and 2007) and *Che* (2008). Julia Roberts won the Academy Award for Best Actress in 2001. Reviewers admired the fact she had stepped out of the roles she had been cast in up to then, e.g. in *Pretty Woman* (1990). The film is a so-called biopic, based on the real-life Erin Brockovich, an activist who in 1993 investigated illnesses related to chromium contaminating the groundwater in the town of Hinkley, California. Together with the residents, she filed a class-action suit against Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E). The case was settled in 1996 for \$ 333 million, the largest settlement ever paid in a direct-action lawsuit in US history. The real Erin Brockovich came up in the news again in 2015, when she sounded the alarm bell about polluted water in the city of Flint, Michigan, which, incidentally, also happens to be the hometown of documentary filmmaker Michael Moore.

