



Course Concepts Combined Skills

All the Course Concepts focus on skills and are based on general principles set out in the introduction to the series. One of these principles is that skills are not acquired by the learner being told about them, but rather by actually doing things themselves, or to put it another way - we learn by actively engaging in a learning process. The teachers job is to provide suitable and sufficient support.

What follows here are the specifics for Combined Skills - Enjoying books and films.

Combined Skills - Enjoying books and films. This concept combines the skills of reading, viewing, speaking and writing with enjoying books and films. Why and how?

There are so many good books, and so many good films, with so much useful language. The challenge is to make use of them in a 90-minute practical language class in such a way that students enlarge not only their command of English but also their horizons, the one mediated by the other. These classes are not lectures, nor are they cinemas, but places of interaction and communication; the topic is not literary or film theory or English, but life, expressed through English.

I designed several different courses based on reading books, mainly fiction, and watching films, each with a slightly different focus and approach. From these I have selected two to offer as Course Concepts. In both, the students are involved in viewing and listening, reading, speaking and writing, so they need to have a fairly advanced level knowledge of English which enables them to read without too much difficulty, and express themselves quite fluently. In other words, they should have already attended courses which cover the groundwork such as Oral Skills or Reading and Vocabulary Skills. To help them become more accurate, different kinds of language support is provided, both in class e.g. language focus sheets based on specific weaknesses observed, and on my website [www.FindYourFeet.de].

These courses were attractive for many students, including those from other Faculties who were keen to have a different perspective on things. To keep numbers down, however, the courses sometimes had to be restricted to students majoring in English. In general, apart from their level of English, the main requirement for taking part was that they like books, are interested in

films, and enjoy sharing their ideas. What is expected of the students can be differentiated, with those studying English being asked to complete a more challenging assignment, for example.

Please note that the title given to these courses here is Books and Films, for simplicity.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Books and Films 1. Comparing books with the film adaptation.

One possible approach to working with books and films in the language class is to compare books with the film adaptation. Within this approach one way to select materials is to choose a set of books with their film adaptation which come from various parts of the English-speaking world. This provides a wide range of topics and settings, as well as themes and characters, and a range of language varieties.

Fortunately, we had a large collection of contemporary books and films at the university, which has of course grown even larger since then. For a list of the books with film adaptations I could choose from:

This is a list of books and film adaptations in English available in the library of Konstanz University. (1) Some comments on how this list came into being and its purpose. (2) The list of book and film titles [...].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_fictionfilm.pdf].

Below is a description of the course in the form required by the university. It was distributed at the first meeting of class and talked through carefully. This is really important, as it gives the students the chance to ask questions about anything that puzzles them, and it gives me the chance to explain in more detail what I would like to do and why.

Books and Films 1 (or whatever title you wish to give it e.g. Fiction and Film)

Target group: Open to all students who have enough English to feel comfortable reading contemporary literature and giving a brief oral presentation.

Course aims and contents: In this class we will be comparing 20th and 21st century writing (novels and autobiographies) with the film version. (This means, however, that wonderful books by Thomas Hardy and Henry James, for example, which have also been made into very interesting films, do not appear on this list as they were written in the 19th century.) It is a class which combines different skills: reading, listening, viewing, discussing. It is not about literary

or film theory, but about reading carefully and imagining, viewing critically, and giving expression to our reactions. The books and films to choose from will cover a wide variety of themes, settings and country of origin.

Materials: All the books and films are available in the library or in the self-access centre of the Language Institute. Further materials including language support are available at [www.FindYourFeet.de]. For anyone interested there are lots of useful reference books on reserve in the library. They cover literary terminology and text interpretation as well as film. They are not necessary, however, for our course.

Requirements: Regular active participation, choosing a book from the list and presenting it to the class, and for those studying English, a written contribution comparing the book to the film.

Additional information:

The writers I have chosen are Scottish, English, American, Canadian, New Zealand, Australian, South African. The setting and period of the books are very varied, from a farming community in the north-east of Scotland during the Second World War to South Africa in the post-apartheid period. Although the settings of the books are so different, they not only have many topics in common but also share many recurrent themes.

Some of the books are short, others long. Some are action-packed, others slow moving, thought-provoking. Some have a story line which is easy to find and follow, others need puzzling out. Some are openly challenging, from the first page. But even the short and slim books have a lot to offer, provided you read carefully. If you need any assistance with choosing, just ask.

Please note:

I do not expect you to know anything about these writers.

If you are a keen cinema goer you might know some of the films, but I do not expect you to.

I hope to introduce you to many books and films and encourage your interest in reading and film-watching.

Please do not choose a book that you have already read.

You can choose to work with a partner if you like. It means reading, discussing and arguing with your partner before you present your ideas in class. This can be more interesting than working alone.

As in all classes, the students are encouraged to get the contact details of one or two neighbours, for meeting outside of class. They also get a card for them to write their first name on. I always had one too, with my first name on one side, my second on the other. They could choose which they felt comfortable with.

This first meeting is a good time to make use of one of the Handouts which provide language support:

Help expressions

Some useful expression for you in class - when things aren't going so well. They are the basics of (classroom) communication.

(zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz) Sorry, I haven't quite wakened up yet. (Ask my neighbour.)

Sorry, I didn't quite get that. Could you say it again please / Could you say it more slowly.

What did you want us to do?

I get the meaning of the words, but I still don't get the meaning of the whole sentence / text.

[...].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_helpexpressions.pdf].

They are also reminded to bring their English-English dictionary with them. Most are familiar with it from attending other English classes.

Step by step through the course

There are many other activities in this class apart from students presenting books, for the following reasons. Firstly, it should be remembered that this is not a seminar where the focus is on solo performance and where students are assigned a topic and date to present it. It is a language class in which students interact and cooperate. They need opportunities to get to know each other, they also need time to be introduced to the language support available and make use of it, and they need time to choose a book and actually read it.

Encouraging the students to get to know each other is an integral part of the course; it helps create an atmosphere of trust, which is essential if students are to actually enjoy talking to each other and sharing ideas.

Starting the class:

'You look like someone who ...'

First we gather in the centre of the room, standing, with nothing to hold on to other than a pen. We talk about this situation, and how we automatically make snap judgements on people based on what we see. Then they get the sheet 'You look like someone who ...' and start off.

Take this sheet and move around the room, talking to as many of the others as possible. You should start each interaction with the words: "You look like someone who ...". Your task is to talk briefly to everyone and see if you can find someone in this room who accurately fits each statement on the list.

So:

You look like someone who

likes to dance
doesn't like getting up early
is a vegetarian
prefers the writing of past centuries to contemporary writing
can keep calm in an emergency
can live with books and papers scattered all over the place
[...].

The idea was gratefully taken and adapted from:
Civikly, Jean & Schuetz, Janice (1984). *Participating in the Communication Process*. Dubuque: Kendal Hunt Pub. Co., 2-3.

There are usually about eighteen statements on the sheet, mostly not too serious. Despite the instructions above, the students immediately become so involved in talking that they forget to move on, and in general don't want to stop talking.

After a while, however, I stop them, and we gather in the middle again and talk about any surprises they got e.g. if someone said to them 'You look like (something which was totally off track)', and why that could be (appearances deceptive).

Following this I ask them to think about their two favourite hobbies or things they are passionate about, and then they move around again, trying to find out if there are any other people in the class who share these keen interests.

This activity is more than just a good ice-breaker. The students find out a lot about each other, they are no longer strangers. You can also learn a lot from observing or taking part, about the different personalities and the individual strengths and weaknesses in English.

Creating your own stories:

This is best done with neighbours or in small groups. Given a set of book titles, preferably the books chosen for this class, students are asked to imagine a story around one of them. Examples:

Another time, another place
Red Dust
Whale Rider
How I live now
[...].

They enjoy this, as there is no right answer, and they discover that another group working with the same title will probably have imagined a completely different story. This all helps them tune in to the process of interpreting texts.

Introducing books:

To introduce the students to the books they can choose from, I hand out a collection of first lines, with no indication of the source. If preferred, extracts from inside the books can be used instead of the opening lines. How many

you offer will depend on the size of your class.

Below is one example of opening lines. It is from 'How I live now':

My name is Elizabeth but no one's ever called me that. My father took one look at me when I was born and must have thought I had the face of someone dignified and sad like an old-fashioned queen or a dead person, but what I turned out like is plain, not much there to notice. Even my life so far has been plain. More Daisy than Elizabeth from the word go [...].

First I would read it out aloud, then the students start to work on it together, trying to imagine what is going on: whose voice? where? when? They are encouraged to use good reading strategies such as guessing meaning of words from the co-text, and also their English-English dictionary. See the Course Concept Reading and Vocabulary Skills for details on this.

Given the list of book titles selected for this class, they can now try to match the extract to a title.

Now they work their way through all the extracts, talking to their neighbours, sharing ideas, trying to imagine what the book will be about, and trying to match all the extracts with the titles. This takes time and generates a lot of discussion, and the ideas that emerge from this work are always very interesting. In the end, however, there has to be one right answer. Some of the correct matches are a surprise.

Then they get the list of books, complete with title, author, date of publication, and the corresponding details for the films. Below only the book title and author:

Angel at my Table (Frame, Janet)
Hideous Kinky (Freud, Esther)
Atonement (McEwan, Ian)
Red Dust (Slovo, Gillian)
Last King of Scotland (Foden, Giles)
Brokeback Mountain (Proulx, Annie)
Out of Africa (Blixen, Karen)
Looking for Alibrandi (Marchetta, Melina)
Whale Rider (Ihimaera, Witi)
Another Time, another Place (Kesson, Jessie)
Rabbit-proof Fence (Pilkington, Doris)
How I live now (Rosoff, Meg)
The Constant Gardener (Le Carré John)
The English Patient (Ondaatje, Michael)

Once everyone has chosen a book to present, working either alone or with a partner, the dates for their presentations can be decided. Now the programme for the term is more or less fixed.

In between students presenting their books I would present some that they did not choose or were not on their list.

Presenting a book:

This is not as daunting as it perhaps sounds. To help them prepare, they are given the following guidelines:

In your **oral presentation** (i.e. when you are telling the others about the book) you should:

give clear information on the title of your book, the author, date of publication, then on the period and setting, and the main characters; a brief outline of the story, and the main themes of the book.

make some comments on the narrative technique and the language of the book.

provide one or two particularly significant short passages from the book as a handout for the class.

offer your comments on your own personal reaction to the book.

ask the class what possible filming difficulties they can see and perhaps add some comments on what you expect of the film including possible filming difficulties.

As written backup for their oral presentation they should make a **handout** for the class, something for everyone to keep and refer back to. I provided a framework for this. Each student presenting was required to hand it in to me for checking, then make copies for the class. Since the language is checked by me to make sure it is correct, this gives the students more confidence when they 'present'. Framework for the handout:

Book title:

Author:

Date:

Period and setting:

Main characters:

Story:

Themes (some details, not a list of single words):

The mood or atmosphere of the book:

Narrative technique and language:

Comments:

Filming difficulties:

Key extracts (copies):

It is a good idea to give the students an example by presenting a book not on the list. I wrote the notes as a handout following the guidelines above, and talked it through. In this way the students can get a clearer idea of what I expected of them and why.

'The French Lieutenant's Woman' is a good choice. It is not on our list as I could not expect the students to tackle it in such a short time. It is much too demanding, but looking at it briefly gets students interested enough to perhaps read it themselves at some later date. It is set in the Victorian Age in England and has many interesting themes including fact/fiction. Since it also offers two possible endings, it is an excellent opportunity to speculate on possible filming difficulties. For those really interested there are actually three different versions: the novel, the screenplay and the film itself.

Fowles, John (1969). *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Pinter, Harold (1981). *The Screenplay of The French Lieutenant's Woman*. London: Cape.

Reisz, Karel (Dir.) (1981). *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Another good choice for the teacher is 'The Little Drummer Girl'. It is a complex book, with the ambiguity of people's personalities, split identities, and the playing of multiple roles, all embedded in violent political machinations. In the end the main character, an American theatrical actress, is still alive, but what terrible price has she had to pay for being a good actress. The film is equally complex.

Le Carré, John (1983). *The Little Drummer Girl*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Apart from doing this guideline-presentation, all through the term I presented other books and the film adaptation, whenever there was time available. This can be done, for example, in conjunction with the informal discussion topics below, to make sure there is a range of activities in any one class session.

Watching the film adaptation:

After each book presentation, the first ten or fifteen minutes of the film are watched in class together and reactions gathered. In this case we watched the opening scenes of 'The French Lieutenant's Woman', which already give an idea of how the film director is going to tackle the problematic theme of fact/fiction in the novel. The rest of the film is normally watched outside class by the presenter, as the basis for their written assignment, where relevant.

Informal discussion topics in small groups:

Obviously it takes time till the students are ready to present their book. Apart from me presenting books, one effective way of using this time is to have informal discussions, in small groups and then possibly later in the round. The topics are broad, no expert knowledge is required and for the questions there is no right answer.

What is a good book?

As there is no right answer, talking about it is interesting. They usually talk about their personal favourites, in any language. Then sometimes about what they had to read in school, and at university; and if they are studying English, they may wonder about the lecturers' criteria for their choice of required reading, and they usually start to talk about 'literature'. One or two quotes on literature and literary criticism could be useful here, but they are not the focus of this class.

Nowadays, no one of sound mind and body is ever likely to read a book of literary theory [...] All this is really too bad, because people who read are constantly making judgments about books [...] Who's better: Stephen King or Thomas Pynchon? Alice Walker or Toni Morrison? A mystery "falls apart at the end." What does this mean? A certain writer's novels aren't "true to life". Should they be? [...].

Dirda, Michael (1990). How Stories Work. *The Washington Post* (exact date untraceable).

Literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Criticism can never be a science: it is, in the first place, much too personal, and in the second, it is concerned with values that science ignores. The touchstone is emotion, not reason [...].

D. H. Lawrence. Quoted by Gomme, Andor (1984). Criticism and the Reading Public, in: *The Pelican Guide to English Literature, 7, From James to Eliot*. Harmondsworth:Penguin, p. 422.

What is a good film?

As with books, but adding questions such as: Where do you watch films? Do you go to the cinema? What is the relationship of book and film? If they had a favourite childhood book, what was it like seeing the film of it? Were they ever disappointed? Have they ever seen a film first and then read the book?

Neil Gaiman makes some interesting comments on this at the end of his novel.

Gaiman, Neil (2013). *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. London: Headline, p.254.

These questions generate a great amount of talk and attentive listening. It can go on for a very long time.

Language support:

Language Handouts: The following are available on my website for all students to download. This should be done early in the term so that they are available for use in class and at home. They should be talked through carefully in class, certainly not all at one time, but as required.

Word Stress

This handout is to help you with the pronunciation of some words which crop up frequently when you are talking about Literature and Linguistics. The words here were collected in the Advanced Oral Proficiency Class which focuses on topics from Literature and Linguistics; they are frequently mispronounced. The focus of this handout is not on individual sounds but on where the stress goes within a word. Example: The word “contents” has two syllables “con” and “tents” so which gets the stress? This handout has three parts: (1) Test yourself (2) The right answers (3) Some tips [...].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_wordstress.pdf].

Prepositions

This handout is about prepositions that often go wrong, both in students' speaking and writing. The phrases and sentences here were collected in the Advanced Oral Proficiency Class, which focuses on topics from Literature and Linguistics. There are three parts: (1) Gap-filling task (2) The right preposition (3) One or two tips You can use Part (1) to test yourself then look at Part (2) for the right answers [...].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_prepositions.pdf].

Summary Writing

This handout gives tips on how to write a summary of any kind of text, whether newspaper article or film. There are tips on how to structure a summary, how to keep the summary separate from your own comment, and there are useful English expressions. (1) General comments on writing a summary (2) Writing a summary of an editorial (3) Writing a summary and comment on a documentary film (4) Writing a summary and comment on a book (5) Writing a summary and comment on a feature film [...].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_writingsummary.pdf].

Chaired discussion

This is a list of useful expressions for use in a chaired discussion i.e. a more formal discussion with a chairperson who opens and closes this discussion and asks people to contribute – and keeps order if things get a bit heated! [...].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_ha_chaireddiscussion.pdf].

Giving a talk

Here are some tips for giving a talk in English. There are structuring tips for organising your talk and some useful English expressions. You can use these to give a talk anywhere, both inside the university and out [...].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_ha_giving_a_talk.pdf].

Language focus sheets:

These are written specifically to focus on the language problems of each particular class.

Listening in unobtrusively to the talk going on in the groups gives a good idea of the students' command of English. Language which they need can be put on the board; I also wrote up notes after class, making structured language handouts in which important points can be brought to their attention.

Each Language Focus sheet was produced very soon after class, with the topic noted at the top of the page, and the context clear to everyone in the class. Each sheet was clearly structured so that students became familiar with the layout, and each was talked through in class the following week, to make sure that the points were understood. References to the materials available on my website were included. These sheets also gave me the opportunity to point out other interesting ideas, books or films relevant to the topic. An example:

Language Focus sheet

Topic:

Date:

Words and whole expressions:

The book is written from the point of view of ...
the writer/ the author ≠ narrator
a first person narrator/a third person narrator

a documentary is different from a feature film

I did/went to/ a course on Linguistics with Prof XYZ
(formal style) I attended a course on Linguistics

Is there anyone with a different opinion?
I don't think I want to read this book – I would rather chose another one.

This is explained - in detail/in great detail/ very well/very clearly
I can't go into detail here
To present something in a positive way/in a negative way
[...].

Tense and Aspect:

Use the present SIMPLE to narrate events in sequence (tell a story):

She comes back to South Africa, she goes to see ...

CAREFUL: Present simple is used for habits, routine etc;
present progressive is used for something temporary, ongoing.
He wears a suit to work because he works in a bank
He's wearing a suit today because he's going for an interview
[...].

Prepositions:

(See Prepositions Handout)

a book by Toni Morrison

to compare A with B; to make a comparison between A and B

to discuss ~~about~~ books

to give a good example of something

[...].

Pronunciation:

Irregular verbs:

to choose /u/ - chose /o/ - chosen /o/

to read /i:/ - read /e/ - read /e/

to split - split - split (the novel is split into two parts)

[...].

victory, visitor, very

The “th” sounds really exist in English and have “meaning”!

(voiced “th”)

other udder

this diss.

[...].

(unvoiced “th”)

think sink

thick sick

death deaf

[...]

Think of minimal pronunciation differences in German, with big differences in meaning:

drucken drücken Fahrten Fährten fordern fördern

Word stress: (See also Word Stress Handout)

a NOBLE MAN = ein edler Herr

a NOBLE man = ein Adliger

to tell a story, to naRRATE a story; the naRRATor; the NARRative;
the NARRative technique [...].

Reference and the article:

Where there is generic reference (talking about something in general) there is no “the”: ~~the~~ human rights, ~~the~~ Catholicism
American society
Spanish literature
human dignity is inviolable [...].

Where there is specific reference (talking about something specific), there is “the”: the death penalty, to retain the death penalty/ to abolish the death penalty [...].

Can you correct the following:

- * he don't want
- * he at least applies for amnesty
- * she is some kind of pulled out of her normal life, she is some kind of free
- * Janet finds it difficult to get in contact with other students [...].

FINALLY, but most important, keep it polite. Use the expressions on the Chaired Discussion handout. They are particularly useful for disagreeing with someone. If you think someone is wrong you can say "I don't think that's right" instead of "That's wrong."

And a quote to think about:

A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant [...]. The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid - it may even be better.
Eliot, Thomas S. (1942). *The Music of Poetry*. Glasgow: Jackson, Son and Company, 15-16. Reprinted 1969, Folcroft: Folcroft Press.

Taking Sides – is the name of the film and play I mentioned. Both are available in the library.

The additional task for those studying English is to write a short paper. This was usually done during the term break.

Your Written Paper

In your written paper you should:
give a very brief summary of the book

write about how the film deals with the book e.g. does it present the characters in the way that you see them? does it tell the same story? does it present the same themes that you saw in the book? how does it do this? In other words, in what relationship does the film stand to (your interpretation of the) book?
You could add comparisons to other films and books if you want to. This would make your writing even more interesting.

For this task the Summary Writing Handout part 4 and 5 is particularly useful. [http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_writingsummary.pdf].

Rounding off the class:

By the end of the term the students will have been introduced to many new books and watched the opening scenes of the film adaptations. They will have had the chance to comment on them and make comparisons with regard to themes, style of writing, and the handling of adaptations. They will also have done a lot of language work. And they will have travelled the world. You might like now to give the students the chance to simply talk to each other about their experience of the class - favourite book, favourite film, favourite activity; what they would like to read now, which films they would like to finish watching.

Evaluating the students' work:

This a big question, and the answer is dependent on both the individual course and on the situation within the institution. In this kind of course everyone should be contributing all the time, so they all do a 'good job'. You can decide yourself how important the accuracy and fluency of their oral and (where relevant) written contributions are, and how this should be expressed in their grade.

Course evaluation and feedback:

You might want to use an evaluation sheet, which is private and gets handed in to you. I made one for all classes which is short and uncomplicated and gave the students the chance to offer their own ideas. Some of the questions are below; scales were provided from 'really interesting' to 'dead boring', or 'a lot' to 'very little', or 'Yes', 'Partially', 'No'.

Please note that the questions have to be chosen to suit the particular class, and to suit your interests as the teacher: what would be helpful for you to know? Example questions:

- How would you rate this course from really interesting to dead boring?
- How much do you feel you learnt?
- Be honest! How much effort did you put into this course?
- How motivated do you feel to go on learning English?
- Given the aims of this course (Please read the course description carefully!): Do you think we/you reached them?
- What would you definitely have liked more/less of?
- Any other comments on this course?
- Would you recommend this course to other students?
- If you could give first year students of English some advice, what would it be?

At the end of term, apart from the evaluation sheet for them to fill in, students were surprised but happy to be asked to write a short poem of their own, quickly and spontaneously, to sum up their experience of the class in a light-hearted way. This was always fun. The poems were shared in class, and later I wrote them all up for everyone to look back on.

From this class unfortunately the poems have disappeared ... into computer limbo ... I regret that.

This one is taken from an Oral Skills course, just to give an idea.

We have travelled for a long time
through fields of Imagination and Regeneration
have learned 'bout Coetzee and Female Crime,
Frankenstein, Pidgin and Creole – How fine!!

We have visited the Elizabethans in their theatre place
have stopped and looked in the Victorians' face
have chatted with Edgar Allan Poe
until the chairperson stopped the show.

We discussed literature and linguistics
argued enthusiastically about New Critics.
The story of the poor Africans made us cry
so it's time to say good bye.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Books and Films 2. Finding themes.

This time the approach is slightly different. The main task is looking at a range of contemporary writing and contemporary film with a view to finding themes. Although some of the books have been adapted for film, the books and films chosen here are approached as separate entities. I decided to focus on books and films from a particular country, in this case Scotland. I chose to do so for several reasons. It is the country whose writing and film I know best and learned to appreciate greatly, mainly through teaching Area and Cultural Studies. This focus gave me the chance to introduce students to new land and let them see the wealth of topics and themes covered, and most importantly, how much of this they as young people can relate to.

Below is the course description as it appeared in the semester programme. It was distributed at the first meeting of class and talked through, so that students could ask questions and I had the chance to explain what I wanted to do, and why.

Books and Films

Target Group: All students of English who love books and films.

Course Aims and Contents: This course will give students interesting opportunities to hone their close reading and viewing skills. Working primarily with contemporary Scottish writing and film, we will be reading and trying to interpret passages taken from many different novels and short stories, and watching selected scenes from films, all with a wide variety of themes. (There are lots of wonderful books and films, just waiting to be enjoyed!)

Materials: My website [www.FindYourFeet.de] has many materials for language support, to download and bring to class, and information on Scottish books and films:

Contemporary Scottish Writing

(1) What I mean by “Contemporary Scottish Writing“ (2) A list of book titles with author and publication date, some poets and dramatists (3) Some names from older Scottish writing [...].
[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_scotlandwriting.pdf].

Contemporary Scottish Film

This handout was originally made for use in an Area and Cultural Studies Scotland class at Konstanz University, with the focus on contemporary writing and film. It contains a list of 'Scottish' feature films available in the university library, a list of Scottish film directors and actors, and some information on other material available for viewing [...].
[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_scotlandfilm.pdf].

Requirements: Regular active participation, presentation of a selection of scenes from a film, and discussion of a book. More details at the first meeting of class.

As in all classes, the students are encouraged to get the contact details of one or two neighbours, for meeting outside of class. They also get a card for them to write their first name on. I always had one too.

This first meeting is a good time to make use of one of the Handouts which provide language support 'Help expressions':

Some useful expressions for you in class - when things aren't going so well. They are the basics of (classroom) communication.

[...]

Sorry, I didn't quite get that. Could you say it again please / Could you say it more slowly.

What did you want us to do?

I get the meaning of the words, but I still don't get the meaning of the whole sentence / text.

[...].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_helpexpressions.pdf].

Starting the class:

The most important thing is to create a relaxed but attentive atmosphere in the class, so that all the participants will feel comfortable expressing their opinions. One way to do this is to use the activity 'You look like someone who ...' as in the Books and Films Course 1.

It is more than just a good ice-breaker. The students find out a lot about each other, they are no longer strangers. You can also learn a lot from observing or taking part, about the different personalities and the individual strengths and weaknesses in English.

Here too it should be remembered that this is not a seminar where the focus is on solo performance and students are assigned a topic and date to present it. It is a language class in which students interact and cooperate. They need opportunities to get to know each other, they need time to be introduced to the language support available and make use of it, and they need time to choose a film and watch it, and choose a book and read it. And they choose the date for presenting their film themselves.

What is different this time is that students are going to be focussing on discovering themes in the books and in the films. To help them with this, they are given large sheets of paper (A3) on which to collect themes from all the books and films they will be covering during the term. I start the sheet for them with some large circles on it for collecting themes. Most of them I leave empty. In only one or two I entered a theme as the heading, such as the search for identity; childhood; alcohol and drugs; family; the power of nature. With this sheet the students can begin to imagine what kind of themes they might come across. Later they will be able to enter the title of the relevant books/films as they discover them, and add new circles with other thematic headings, and also make subdivisions. For example, the theme 'The power of nature' may be subdivided into 'a destructive force' or 'a healing force'.

Like their dictionary, this sheet should accompany them to class every week. By the end of the term they will have filled it, and sometimes another one, with a complex pattern of themes and titles.

This class is really dynamic and interesting, as nearly every week there are activities with both films and books. Language support is provided, in the form of handouts to download from my website and Language Focus sheets, as described in Books and Films 1. This is essential for the students' progress.

Introducing the books. First lines:

One problem for me as the teacher is that there is quite simply so much good contemporary writing in Scotland that it is hard to select books for any class. Here I chose very carefully with the aim of covering a wide range of themes. Then, instead of simply giving the students a list of the titles chosen, I gave them a set of extracts, each of them the opening lines of the novel, with no indication of source. We started together with only the first of those, a very short one:

(1) I pull back the curtain an inch and see their heads bent together. I have no idea how long they have been there. It is getting dark. I keep expecting them to vanish; then I would know that they were all in my mind. I would know that I imagined them just as surely as I imagined my life.

As with all the extracts, they first listen to me reading out aloud, and then go through the extract with neighbours, imagining what is going on: whose voice? where? when? What could the book be about? Here, effective reading strategies and monolingual dictionary use is encouraged and practised. The ideas they come up with can be shared with the whole class.

Then they are introduced to the rest of the extracts. I found this set worked very well, throwing up in only a few lines the possibility of many interesting themes. Students puzzle their way through these, with their neighbours, as with extract (1). This takes time and can be spread over one or two sessions of class. From these they can choose their own book. This set continues with:

(2) The most human feature of the valley was the railway. It emerged from a cutting between the hills and swept out above the bogland on a narrow embankment, the loch lying to the north of it. All that was left of the halt was a rusted shed, ramshackle and crazily tilted, by the solid little bridge that spanned the burn.

(3) I sat up in the coffin, reading a comic and eating a sherbet fountain. Bit the tip off the licorice, sucked the sherbet through it. Mix of the two tastes, that was the thing. The sticky sweet licorice, a dark taste, flat. Then the rush of sherbet, sharp and tart. Wersh. The word my father would use, screwing up his face.

(4) The baby cries, the Scots pines whisper, I write for you by the light of the moon.
Ach, and I exaggerate already. She's a child not a baby, and she's not crying now, so don't you worry about her. But half an hour back she woke from a bad dream, so I carried her over to the window and showed her the moon and the harbour lights through the trees, and talked quietly till she slept again.

(5) He'd cut His throat with the Knife. He'd near chopped off His hand with the meat cleaver. He couldn't object so I lit a Silk Cut. A sort of wave of something was going across me. There was fright but I'd daydreamed how I'd be.

(6) There would be no gathering in of the corn today. The rain that had swept across Inverraig blotted out the firth itself. The corn that had stood just yesterday, high and ripe and ready to fall to the binder, bent earthwards now, beneath the driving lash of the wind.

She could, the young woman thought, be standing high in some inland country, not in a sea-girt place at all. But then, she had not yet become accustomed to this alien place in which she now had her being.

(7) Mine is a city by the northern sea. It sits on the coast of Lothian at the point where the river Forth suddenly broadens into a wide estuary dotted with small islands, and, if you stand on the embankment above the water and look to the north, you can see the green fields of Fife on the other side veering away sharply to a blue horizon of hills, sky, and a sea that stretches to Norway.

(8) Trapped. Crushed. Weight coming from all directions, entangled in the wreckage (you have to become one with the machine). Please no fire, no fire. Shit. This hurts. Bloody bridge; own fault (yes, bloody bridge, right colour; see the bridge, see the man drive the car, see the man not see the other car, see the big CRASH, see the bone-broken man bleed; blood colour of the bridge. Oh well own fault. Idiot).

(9) I don't understand things sometimes. Quite easily, I can become confused by a word or a look or a tiny event and then I just can't help but wonder why my life should happen in one particular way and not another. I always end up asking for answers I can't have.

(10) Let us begin with two girls at a dance. They are at the edge of the room. One sits on a chair, opening and shutting a dance-card with gloved fingers. The other stands beside her, watching the dance unfold: the circling couples, the clasped hands, the drumming shoes, the whirling skirts, the bounce of the floor. It is the last hour of the year and the windows behind them are blank with night.

(11) These are times when what is to be said looks out of the past at you – looks out like someone at a window and you in the street as you walk along. Past hours, past acts, take on an uncanny isolation; between them and you who look back on them now there is no continuity.

This morning, the first thing after I got out of bed, I looked in the mirror.

(12) As I begin to tell this, it is the golden month of September in southwestern Ontario. In the splendid autumn sunshine the bounty of the land is almost overwhelming, as if it is the manifestation of a poem by Keats. Along Highway 3 the roadside stands are burdened down by baskets of produce and arrangements of plants and flowers.

(13) It began with a photograph. The sound and the feel of it.

Raghu Rai's photo of the child in the dirt. This is what led me to India. I'd first seen it in a newspaper. It was taken in Bhopal, in 1984, just hours after the gas disaster.

(14) "Rosie, this time I'll tell you everything: right to the end ..."

I was barely conscious when he spoke. I was half-dead, on a ventilator in a hospital bed. I long now to remember the specifics – his face, the timbre of his voice, the actual words he used – it would bring me such comfort. But the more I try to bring to mind memories of my father, the more worn and insubstantial these memories become.

The images created by that voice, though, and the story it told, persist. They go round and around in my mind like a loop of film, and never stop. I cannot forget them. I dream them. I can almost see them.

(15) Through in the livin room Patrick was paintin the fireplace while Mona and Rona practised their line dancin. *Silver bells and golden needles they won't mend this heart of mind.* Step two three, cross two three, turn [...] . Mona and Rona are twins [...] See, she thinks the twins are wee angels and when Mammy's around they nearly always are, but the minute she's out of sight they turn intae monsters.[...] The number of times she's come hame tae an upside doon settee, earth fae a plant spilled all ower the carpet, and turnt tae me and said, *Fiona*, in that voice. *How could you let the twins make such a mess?*

(16) *I can't remember the last week with any clarity.*

I want to be able to remember it because it was the last time anything was in any way unremarkable. Eating and drinking routinely, sleeping when I wanted to. It wold be nice to remember but I don't.

Now I remember everything all the time You never now what you might need to recollect later, when the significance of the moment might appear. They never give you any warning.

They never give you any warning.

In the end they are given the list of titles so that they can try to match titles with the extracts they have puzzled over.

Titles and authors:

1. Trumpet (Kay, Jackie)
2. The Green Man, in Apple from a Tree: and Other Visions (Elphinstone,
3. Way to Go (Spence, Alan)
4. Electric Brae (Greig, Andrew)

5. Morvern Callar (Warner, Alan)
6. Another Time, Another Place (Kesson, Jessie)
7. The Sound of the Sea (Mackay, Colin)
8. The Bridge (Banks, Iain)
9. So I am Glad (Kennedy, A. L.)
10. The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox (O'Farrell, Maggie)
11. Young Adam (Trocchi, Alexander)
12. No Great Mischief (MacLeod, Alistair)
13. The Red Book (Delahunt, Meaghan)
14. Nightingale (Dorward, Peter)
15. Being Emily (Donovan, Anne)
16. The Trick is to Keep Breathing (Galloway, Janice)

Sometimes I added more snippets from inside the books above, to give a better idea of the story. An example from (2) p. 6-7 in the 1991 Women's Press edition:

He: Sarah, he said.
(.....)
She: How did you know I was Sarah?
He: When I realised you were on your way.
(.....)
She: Who? How ...? What are you doing here?
He: I am meeting you. It's a great pleasure.
She: But you weren't expecting me?
He: Not in so many words, no.
She: Who are you?
He: Not yet, he said. I hope so, by the end of my journey.

This text really intrigued them!

Another good snippet is from (15) p. 118-119 in the 2008 Canongate edition. It is perfect for working through in class. Once the students have heard it read aloud, they can crack the code.

The librarian glared at us fae behind her glass screen and we shut up. I opened my books and pretended to read. Still didnae get it but. Jas always had clear ideas about things, had principles. He'd never get sucked intae studying the wrang course out of loyalty. But I couldna see why he was so keen on pharmacy except that it suited his family. And I couldnae understaund what he meant about it giving him the life he wanted. Sure it was steady and a good job and that. But Jas wasnae materialistic. He didnae want a fast car or fancy holidays. I wished we'd talked mair then about what kind of life he did want, about the future. I assumed I was part of his plan whatever that was but, like sex, it was something we never discussed. Mibbe if we had things might have been different, Naa, I don't believe that. Probably it would of only made what happened next even worse.

Students have the whole of the term to read their book and prepare to talk about it in small groups. It is their books which round off the class. Books which they did not choose I would fit in, in between films presented by the students.

Introducing the films:

Choosing materials is never easy, what do you include, what do you leave out. However, as fewer films are made than books are written, choosing films for the course was not quite as difficult as choosing books. From what was available in the library at that time, I chose very carefully to cover a range of themes. Since then of course the stock of films has grown.

To introduce Scottish film, usually in the second meeting of class, I sometimes used the opening scenes of a classic black and white film from 1948, *Whisky Galore*, and one or two scenes from any contemporary film that was not in their set of choices. A few minutes of 'Late Night Shopping' (Scottish director), in which a well-known German actress, Heike Makatsch appears, was just for fun. Or 'Gregory's Girl', or 'Gregory's Two Girls'. These were made twenty years apart, by the same director, same setting, with some of the same cast, and some similar themes. After watching scenes from these films, the students can begin to enter titles on their theme sheets.

Mackendrick, Alexander (Dir.) (1949). *Whisky Galore*.

Metzstein, Saul (Dir.) (2001). *Late Night Shopping*.

Forsyth, Bill (Dir.) (1980) (2000). *Gregory's Girl. Gregory's Two Girls*.

The main work on film is done by the students, usually in pairs, to present a film of their choice. If there is time left in the schedule, I fit in more film snippets, to introduce the students to as many as possible, going beyond the selection of feature films for this class.

As there were many actors students could recognise, but never connected with Scotland, we sometimes did a fun quiz together in class. It was made by a former Area Studies Scotland student from France. Oh, cool, they said!

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_sc_teachfilm03.pdf].

There are also a few interesting questions about actors and actresses at the end of the file on Scottish film:

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_scotlandfilm.pdf].

Next, the students are given brief descriptions of some films to choose from. The titles can be left out, and given as a separate list, to try matching description and title. This is just one possible set which could easily be expanded:

The chance meeting of a young woman and an ageing civil servant leads to an unusual relationship, and a completely unexpected opportunity for the young woman to act on the political stage of a G8 Summit. (Girl in the Cafe)

A German scientist tries out his rocket knowledge to send post from one Scottish island to another. Second World War, true story. (Rocket Post)

A young woman, whose job it is to monitor the images on CCTV in Glasgow, sees a man from her past appear on the screen one day. Not a past lover but the man who was responsible for the death of her husband and daughter, under the influence of drugs. (Red Road)

A mother hires a young man to play the part of the father of her son for a couple of important days. The son is deaf, thanks to the violent treatment from his real father. (Dear Frankie)

A young Muslim of Pakistani origins meets a young Irish Catholic music teacher. The background is contemporary Glasgow. (Just a Kiss)

A young man who is set on a career has to rethink his life when his mother can no longer look after his sister, who has Downs Syndrome. (After Life)

A teenager wishes to have good accommodation ready for his mother who is due to be released from prison. The way he gets the money to do this is the problem. (Sweet Sixteen)

Based on the true story of a murderer who served his time in prison, developed into an artist, but is hunted down again by the detective who put him in prison. (Debt Collector)

A mentally unstable young woman engages in sex with strangers to “save” her husband, paralysed in an oil-rig accident. She is judged harshly by the narrow-minded island community, but does work the miracle. (Breaking the Waves)

Queen Victoria’s love affair with Scotland. (Her Majesty Mrs Brown)

A young Glasgow bus driver gets a rude awakening when he goes to Nicaragua with his girlfriend, to help her find her husband. It is 1987 and there is war there. (Carla’s Song)

A Texan oil magnate wishes to buy up a large portion of Scotland for the oil industry. He sends over an employee “Macintyre” he mistakenly believes to be Scottish. Macintyre changes completely when he discovers a very different way of life. (Local Hero)

A young Scottish doctor is coerced and charmed into working for the Ugandan dictator, Idi Amin. Youth and naivety, and the charisma and total violence of dictators. (Last King of Scotland)

Once they have chosen a film, the dates for this are fixed to suit the presenters, so that we now have a programme for the term. Students usually work in pairs, watching the film and preparing to present it to the others. In this case presenting means choosing some key extracts from the film, i.e. extracts which they feel convey the central information, whether about

The last time I held this course, by the end of term the class had found the following thematic fields:

parent-child relationships (love, overprotection, neglect, misunderstanding); friendship, loyalty, affection vs. passion; crime, punishment, retribution; the land, landscape, climate (the influence of these, a force to be reckoned with); education; being an outsider, insider, foreigner, 'abnormal'; searching for identity (cultural, national, racial, sexual etc.); religion and morality, in conflict; taking responsibility or not; fighting for a cause (a waste of time, criminal, embracing violence, morally wrong); searching for the truth behind the facade; childhood and growing up; searching for love and acceptance; the existence of other realities; illness, death and dying.

Many of the books and films had been entered in several different theme circles; some theme circles had eight titles in them; there was only one theme circle which had only two titles in it.

Course evaluation and feedback:

I did this in the same way as described in Books and Films 1. The evaluation sheet is not stressful for students to fill in and it provided me with useful information. Writing their own poem was always fun. Sometimes their good-humoured creativity was so impressive that I felt moved to write a poem dedicated to them.

Obviously there are other approaches to Books and Films, and many different ways of selecting the materials used. Your choices will depend on the availability of material, on your own interests and on the particular interests of your students. Whatever you do, I hope you have as much pleasure in teaching as I did with these courses.

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