



Teaching about Scotland

This is one of a series of units for teaching about Scotland in German Secondary schools. All the materials were created by very motivated students in my Area Studies Scotland class, some with experience of teaching in a “Gymnasium“. The materials can be tried out as they are, or altered as desired. They can also be combined. One basic idea behind them all is that both the teacher and the learners can develop the materials themselves, according to their own interests, and then even offer them to another class. For some of these units printed information material is needed, for example ferry timetables, but if you don't have this, it is no problem to print it out from the Internet. Useful websites are given.

Trainspotting – the book and the film

Or: How to get some Scottish literature and film into the “gymnasiale Oberstufe“.

Target group and Aim.

The unit is intended for grades 12 or 13 (or 16 upwards) of a German Secondary school and covers two lessons (90 minutes). The goal is to show the class that writing and film in Scotland today are relevant for them.

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Course: Area Studies Scotland

Introduction

Why I think it makes sense to use the novel “Trainspotting” and the film in English class, and how I would like to do it

There are a couple of things I learned in the course of my school practical. First of all I was amazed at how enthusiastic children start off in grade five and six and then shocked at how poor their English is in contrast to that in grade eleven and upwards. As a consequence, for me, there are three main things to be given priority. Firstly, to keep pupils interested, secondly, to enrich their vocabulary whenever possible and thirdly, to get them to use the vocabulary themselves, by encouraging them to talk.

From what I have seen at school so far and from what my younger brother, who is sixteen, tells me, I know that pupils of that age are definitely interested in films. I think they would like the film adaptation of Irvine Welsh’s novel by director Danny Boyle. Ewan McGregor is a famous actor, there are a couple of really funny scenes in the film and the soundtrack is anything but old-fashioned or boring.

So I would like to combine work on the novel with looking at some scenes of the film adaptation. Using scenes from the film is not just meant to entertain the pupils but to make it easier for them to understand the novel. The greatest difficulty for the students might be the particular Scottish accent both in the film and in the novel. But as the “Lehrplan“ (curriculum) suggests that pupils should learn more about the different facets of the English language, this, as I see it, is more of a pro than a contra.

In addition to that, I see no point in making pupils read the entire book. In my opinion, some well-chosen bits will do.

Furthermore, the story of both the book and the movie, which is about young people searching for their path in life and their identity, as well as about the problem of drug abuse, should get them going.

As to the vocabulary: there are two useful word fields I would like to focus on. The first one is “film“, the other one “drugs“.

Apart from these content-based aspects, I want pupils to learn some techniques and skills, such as how to make a mind map and how to stand up front and give a short and interesting talk. These skills can be used in other classes too.

So, in the following, I shall

- (1) present the text extracts I would like to work with
- (2) present the parts of the film that I would use
- (3) offer some suggestions on how to use these materials, including mind maps and presentations

Below is a page from the old “Lehrplan“. I also consulted the new “Bildungsplan Gymnasium“. I see both as a justification for seeing this Area Studies Class assignment not just as some sort of occupational therapy or theoretical piece of work, but something that I will actually be able to put into use one day (which I am really looking forward to).

Gymnasium 12 und 13	Englisch	Grundkurs
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<p>Der junge Mensch und seine Suche nach Orientierung</p> <p>Zwänge</p> <p>Berufswahl</p> <p>Möglichkeiten und Gefahren des Lebens in der soziale Kontakte, Großstadt Vereinsamung, Konsumzwang</p> <p>[Wissenschaftliche Entwicklungen / technische Entwicklungen / wirtschaftliche Gegebenheiten]</p> <p>Die weltpolitische Stellung der USA Welt</p> <p>Einwanderung – Zuwanderung USA und Kanada GB und Europa [Formen des religiösen Lebens]</p>	<p><i>partnership, peer group, community</i> (auch Begegnungen mit dem Alter) Idole, Ideale Werte,</p> <p>Selbstfindung und</p> <p>z.B. kulturelles Angebot, Arbeitsmöglichkeiten,</p> <p>→ EK, LK, LPE 7: Stadtstrukturen</p> <p>[nur exemplarisch]</p> <p>Aufgaben in der heutigen Verhältnis zu Europa</p> <p>Schwerpunkt USA</p>
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Source: Kultus und Unterricht. Amtsblatt des Ministeriums für Kultus und Sport Baden-Württemberg. Bildungsplan für das Gymnasium, 21. Februar 1994, Lehrplanheft 4/1994, Neckar-Verlag.

(1) The text extracts

(My page citations refer to the 1994 Minerva paperback edition.)

Text 1

As a whole chapter, I want to read “Searching for the Inner Man”(pp 181-188). This chapter certainly has its humour, but behind this very laid-back tone there are a couple of serious and important issues. What reasons can there be for taking drugs? What role does society in general play? The chapter ends with the famous Trainspotting manifesto “Choose Life“ and I would hope for a lively discussion on whether they agree or not.

The chapter begins and ends with:

“Ah’ve never been incarcerated for junk. However, loads ay cunts have had stabs at rehabilitating me. [.....] Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fucking junk food in-tae yir mouth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye’ve produced. Choose life.” (pp 181-187)

Text 2

In addition, I would like to look at the scene where Tommy, left by his girlfriend, comes to see Renton and asks: “What does that stuff dae fir ye Mark?” (pp 89-90). That way, pupils can compare what Renton says (text 1 vs text 2) and consider Tommy’s reasons as well.

The scene begins and ends with:

“Amazingly, Tommy still husnae mentioned smack. Even wi ma works lying aw ower the place, n he can probably tell that ah’m pretty bombed. [.....] Ah’ve no goat enough tae spare. Ah’ve never goat enough tae spare.
- Too fuckin right, he sais, flingin oan his jaykit.”(pp 89-90)

Text 3

In order to make Tommy’s story complete, I think it makes sense to read “Winter In West Granton“, too (pp 314-317).

This begins and ends with:

“Tommy looks well. It’s terrifying. He’s gaunny die. Sometime between the next few weeks and next fifteen years, Tommy will be no more. [.....] He takes the money. Oor eyes meet, and something flashes between us. It’s something ah cannae define, but it’s something really good. It’s thair jist fir a second; then it’s gone.”(pp 314-317)

Text 4

An impressive contrast can be created by reading pages 261-262 as well. Here pupils can experience the contrast between someone who can afford to survive HIV and someone who cannot. A comparison between Dave (who has never touched drugs but is HIV positive), Renton (an addict who is not) and Tommy opens up a wide field of discussion on questions of chance, responsibility, guilt and more.

This begins and ends with:

“My health, touch wood, has been good. I’m still asymptomatic. I fear colds and get obsessive from time to time, but I take care of myself. [.....] Life is beautiful. I’m going to enjoy it, and I’m going to have a long life. I’ll be what the medical staff call a long-term survivor. I just know that I will.”(pp 261-262)

Text 5

Finally, there’s a fairly short paragraph on page 228 concerning Renton’s view of England and Scotland, what these names mean to him and the idea of nationality in general. I would like to combine reading this short extract with watching a certain scene of the movie, which I will go into in the following part.

This begins and ends with:

“The pub sign is a new one, but its message is old. The Britannia. Rule Britannia. Ah’ve never felt British, because ah’m not. [.....] Ye can be freer here, no because it’s London, but because it isnae Leith. Wir all slags on holiday.”(p 228)

(2) The scenes of the film I would like to deal with

Of course making a choice of scenes must also depend on the time at your disposal, but that there are some scenes I wouldn’t want to leave out.

Firstly, there’s the scene when Renton and his friends go for a very short walk in the wilds with the panorama of the Scottish Highlands in the background. Here, Renton quite harshly puts forward his opinion on the nature of Scottish identity and the role of the English with respect to that. Of course it’s funny at first, shocking in the end. But if you take a closer look, this scene really has something to say. This is the scene I want to combine with reading text 5, as they are both concerned with the same thing.

Secondly then, I would like to watch the beginning of the film with the class. Here you have Renton and his friends chasing through Edinburgh. Pupils will not only be introduced to the main characters and get to see a little bit of the city, but they will also get a first idea of the soundtrack and its role. Last but not least Renton’s voice-over gives the audience a slightly different version of

the novel's "Choose-Life" manifesto. So I think it makes perfect sense to watch this scene in connection with reading text 1.

Thirdly, there are a couple of scenes which I consider as true classics. I would use them after phases of hard work or when pupils come into the classroom exhausted after a difficult maths test or something like that. Here they can simply enjoy the story, get used to the dialect and have a little chat about what happens in the scene, what lighting, soundtrack or camerawork has been employed and so on. These scenes are:

Renton's dive into the toilet

Spud's speed-driven interview (in order *not* to get a job)

Renton's cold turkey locked up in his room by his parents

The "Perfect Day" sequence with Renton sinking into the floor after a shot of heroin and his way to the hospital (in a taxi, not the ambulance visible in the street where he lies helpless!)

(3) Some ideas on how I would use the material I chose

The texts

Text 1: pupils can be language detectives who find out "what means what"
e.g. that

ken = know

fae = for

Ah = I

tae = to

Text 2: I would let pupils act it out (Renton with Mr. Forbes)

Text 3: pupils could try rewriting this (Winter in West Granton) from Tommy's point of view

The film scenes

While-watching activities:

Pupils can fill in a handout with questions on the who/where/when/what of the scene

And/or a handout with questions on the lighting/camera work/soundtrack of the scene and their effects

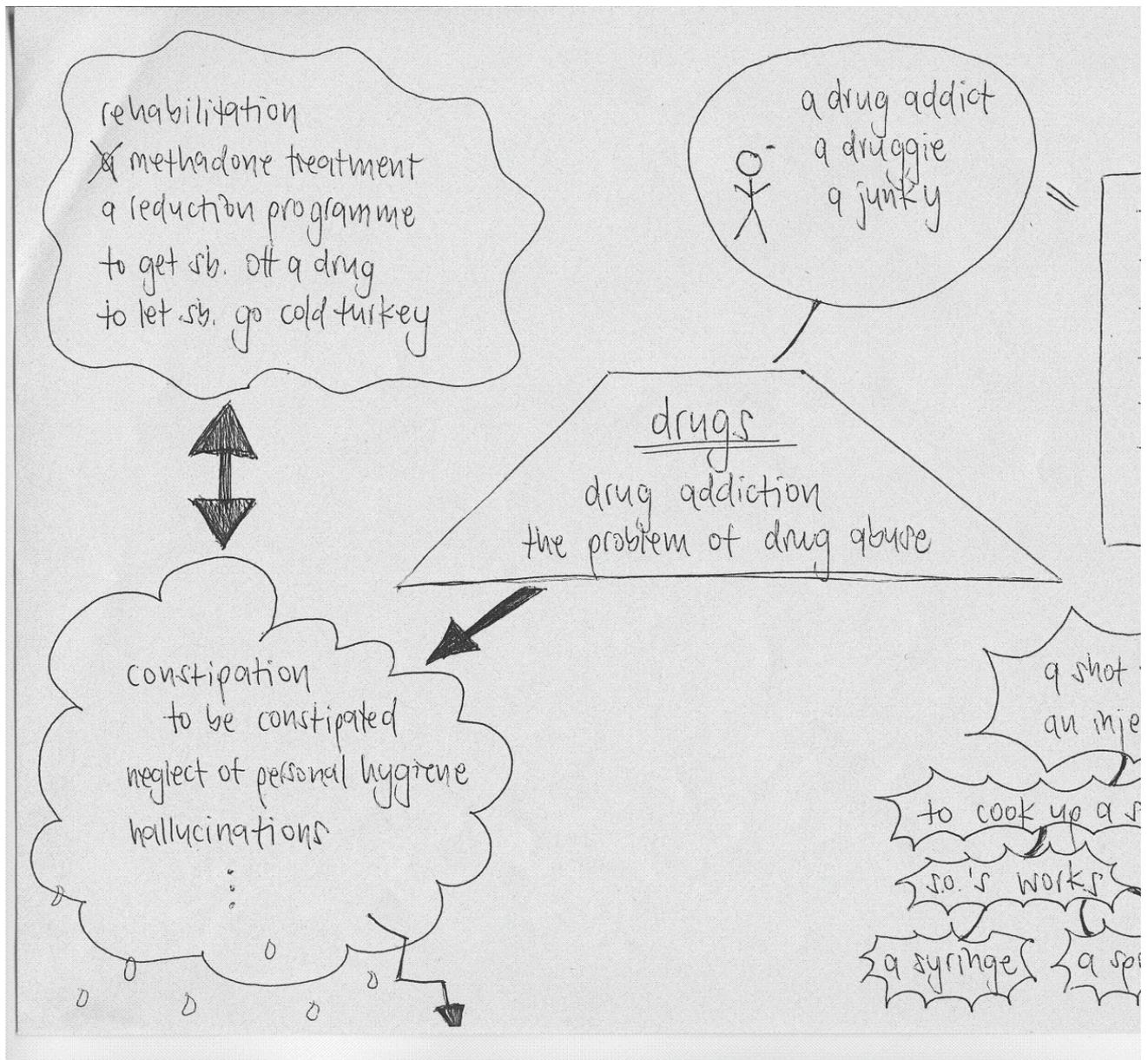
After-watching activities:

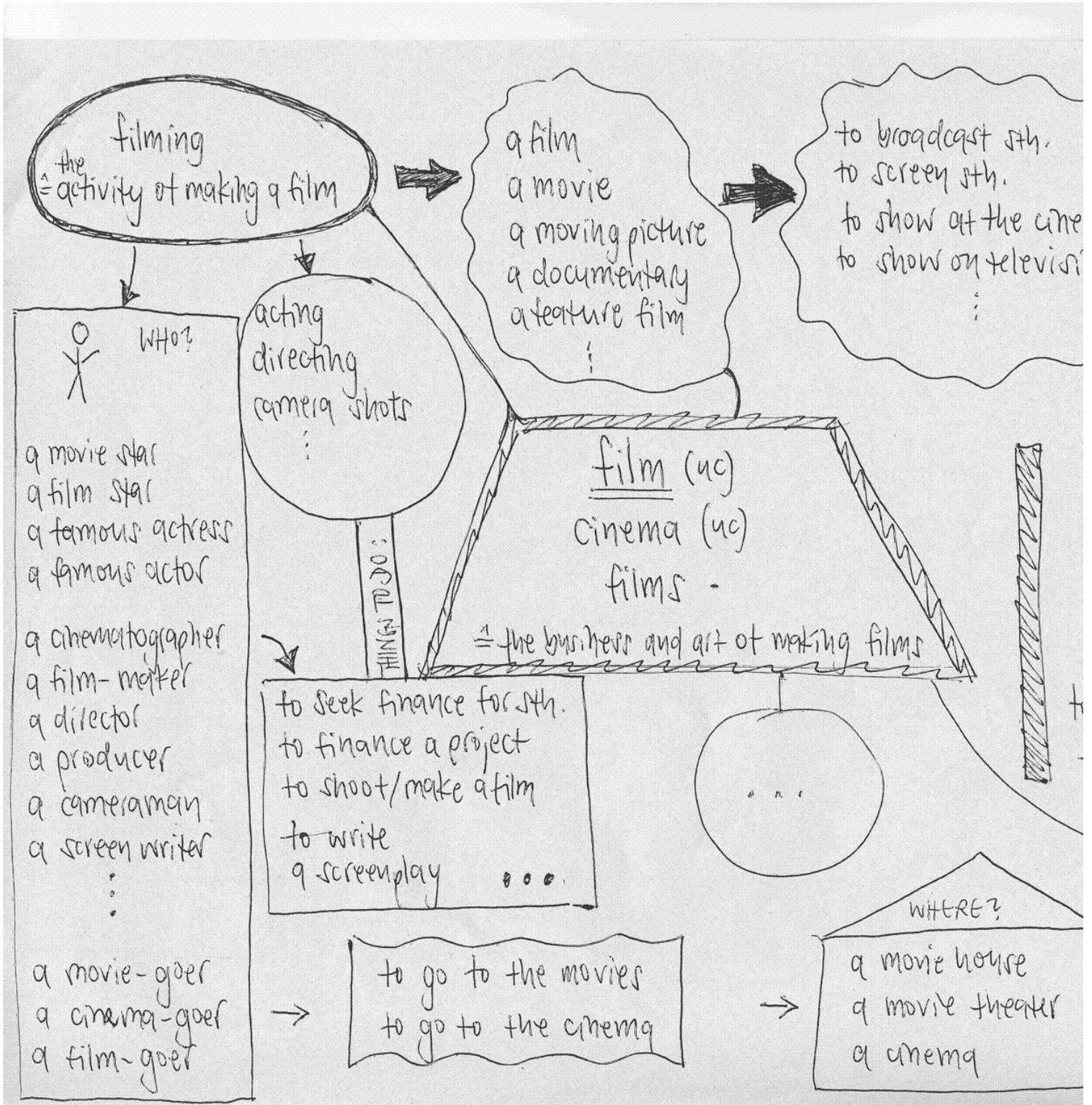
Pupils can write a short summary of the scene (task: "imagine you are XY and tell the absent Z what happened.")

Vocabulary mind maps

I think it is worthwhile introducing the technique (if the class is not familiar with it already), and then let pupils develop and expand their mind maps while working on the texts and film. Near the end of the “Trainspotting” unit I would like to let them complete their drafts as homework. I would then gather in and correct their work for them.

Below are parts of two mind maps I created. They are only reproduced here in part as I do not intend them to be copied and used as they stand. Since the whole point of a mind map is that each person makes their own these should be treated simply as sketches, examples, open to any kind of reorganization or expanding, only a starting point for the learner’s own work.





Pupils' presentations

Maybe "presentation" is the wrong word for what I have in mind here. I am not thinking of a huge show or anything that is longer than about five to seven minutes. From what I have seen so far (and from what I remember about school), as soon as they are forced to produce and present something on their own, pupils (especially the older and more lethargic ones) sort of come alive, be it only for the sake of not wanting to make a fool of themselves in front of their classmates. I intend to add to their motivation by giving them the opportunity of choosing their favourite topic out of a very long and colourful list. I want them to tell the others only what they themselves found interesting: This is not so much about conveying literary knowledge but more about getting them to talk, and to express their own opinions.

Some possible topics:

More film-based ones

Ewan McGregor (life, career, other films, ...)

Robert Carlyle (life, career, other films, ...)

Any other Scottish actor

The soundtrack of the film (artists, tracks, effect, ...)

The making of the film: where? When? Financed by whom? ...

The making of any film: what has to be done? (writing, directing, acting, ...)

Your favourite scene: story, soundtrack, camera work, ...

Your personal casting (which other actor would have been a better Spud, Sickboy, ... and why?)

Your personal soundtrack (which songs for which scene and why?)

other films/ another film on the same topic

another Scottish film

More novel-based ones

Irvine Welsh (life, career, other books, ...)

Summary of the whole story

Characterization of your favourite character

Analysis of a part of the text we have not looked at so far

Others

Scotland-England: historical background

The problem of drug abuse in Scotland today

The problem of drug abuse in England/ Germany/ ...

The problem of drug abuse in your own town

Drugs: some medical facts

Getting off drugs: possible therapies...

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