

## Using TV Shows and Movies to Enhance Language Learning

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[synopsis]

The purpose of this presentation is to introduce some of the premises behind my use of TV shows and movies in language teaching, and to show examples. For the sake of simplicity I will refer to both TV shows and movies as videos since they would each be used in the classroom as a video.

Let me begin by stating that we begin learning our native language from the moment we are born. To whatever level we are capable, we hear it and respond to it. As we grow, we learn by watching and listening to people around us, then begin formal study after gaining a basic level of language usage.

In contrast, studying a second or a foreign language usually occurs in a more limited setting — the classroom — where we tend to focus more on the components of language and less on actual production and delivery. In this respect our students have been at a disadvantage up until now. They have been struggling to learn language

without the benefit of the wide array of visual cues that help convey meaning in a normal, real-life situation. For instance, practicing language using an audio tape is a little like speaking to someone on the phone. You can't see the setting, the context, the actions, facial expressions or even the way the mouth and jaw move to produce sounds. However, videos include all of these features, plus more. They give access to an infinite variety of people, places, situations, ideas, and styles.

So, how can we utilize an ordinary videotape of a movie or a TV show in the classroom? In short, we could use them in much the same way that we would use a textbook, handout or audio tape.

**Videos give you everything that a drawing or a still photo gives you, but has the added value of action and reaction with speech and sound in a setting or context.**

Students can see people whom they can imitate. They can see for themselves how

people act when they say what they say. They can more easily match verbal styles and situations. Essentially, they can accomplish more of what they would accomplish by living in a foreign country.

One example of a film that can be used in many teaching activities is “**DAVE**” . This is a fictitious story about Dave Kovik, whose hobby is doing impersonations of the US President, Bill Mitchell. After the president has a severe stroke, Dave is asked to impersonate him indefinitely while the president's chief-of-staff, Bob, tries to manipulate himself into position to succeed him as president. The story is filled with drama, comedy, mystery and subtle romance. The setting is Washington, D.C. and shows numerous famous sites as well as famous people who portray themselves. The fact that the same actor plays two roles, and in the story has to change himself to convincingly portray the president, is a boon for classes teaching description, comparison, contrast, observation. There is also a lot of material for classes about personal style, presentation skills, feelings, relationships, attitudes and values. In addition, since the film shows politics in action, there is a clear difference in the way people speak and the language they use in public and in private. Is it any surprise that this is my favorite film for classroom use?

Another great movie for observations and

description activities is “**MY FAIR LADY**” . It shows what someone can accomplish through hard work in developing their language skills. Students are readily able to notice the improvement in the heroine's way of speaking. Diction, vocabulary, sentence structure, and personal style all change and improve.

Among TV shows I like to use situation comedies such as “**Mad About You**” , where the main characters are a young married couple living in New York City. This show often portrays culturally significant situations in a funny way.

Although I haven't mentioned **sports programs** previously, they provide tremendous incentive to students. The prospect of being able to understand sporting events transmitted in a foreign language is a huge incentive to many students who would otherwise have little interest in studying language.

In summary, TV shows and movies can be utilized in numerous ways to develop language skills. They provide visual input that cannot be found in audio tapes and the typical classroom, plus a broad range of people, settings and situations. In addition, they give students encouragement and the incentive to learn language well.

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