

Practical Aspects of *courts métrages* in the French Classroom

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One of the greatest challenges of teaching is keeping learners motivated and engaged. In the 21st century environment, where everyone is constantly consumed with electronic input, especially in the younger generations, engaging students in the classroom is even more difficult. The latest research states that 92 % of teens go online daily while 24% of teens go online “almost constantly” (Pew Research Center). To meet the needs of the digital natives, more teachers are using technology in class than ever before (EdTech Review). One way that French teachers can incorporate technology into the classroom while providing the necessary input for language acquisition is the use of films, specifically the French short film or *courts métrages*. The link between France and cinema comes from the recognition of the brothers Lumière as the fathers of the modern film in 1895. Cinemafrancais-fle.com points out the changes of French cinema over the years, highlighting that before WWI France held 85% of the worldwide market for the production of movies, against only 10% en 1918: “Elle [la France] ne *possède* désormais que 10% du marché mondial (contre 85% en 1912)”. Therefore the French movie industry is now known for producing artistic movies rather than competing with Hollywood and its big budgets, something that film connoisseurs appreciate. However, one popular genre remains the province of the French movie industry—the *courts métrages* or short film. This article presents the use of the *courts métrages* in the French classroom. We offer reasons why short films are a great choice for all levels of French learners including examples from personal experience. Most importantly, we discuss all aspects of planning and implementation of *courts métrages*; the development of activities across all levels of learning (beginner, intermediate and advanced) while using the same film and the presentation of activities already developed for a specific *courts métrages*.

Le court métrage

The *Centre national de la cinématographie* defines *le court métrage* as a film that lasts up to 59 minutes. However, their length varies greatly, ranging from just a few minutes up to the 59 minutes mark, but most are usually under 30 minutes. The vast majority of short films come from independent animated features, or experimental movies, because they require a smaller budget to produce. The importance of the *courts métrages* in the French culture is easy to notice with the quantity of festivals specialized for the short features. The efforts from the *Centre national de la cinématographie* to promote them, in addition to the multiplicity of publications (magazines and books) on short films also testify to the importance of the format. In addition, 2015 saw the French Embassy securing limited time rights to short films from the *film international du film d’animation d’Annecy* to share with institutions in the US that seek to promote the French language and culture.

Why short films?

For French teachers, there is no better medium to present grammar, vocabulary and culture in context than with a short film in the French language. French films are usually set in a French-speaking country, and therefore present students with authentic French cultural behaviors and settings. French films generally feature native French-speakers providing authentic audio input of the language and allowing students to experience local and regional accents that an individual classroom teacher cannot reproduce. However, the traditional full-length films range in duration from one and a half to over two hours, and most French teachers do not have the class time required to watch a long film and then discuss it. In addition, use of full-length films, especially in beginning level French courses, tends to leave the students lost and unable to follow the film, which limits learning opportunities.

The *court métrage* is much better suited for use in the classroom than the traditional full-length film. Short films, just like their traditional counterparts, use the language in context and present authentic cultural locations yet do so in a condensed timeframe. The condensed time frame allows more time for discussion, group activities, etc. which will (hopefully) keep student interest better than a long film. Also, the traditional full length film demands a fairly high level of proficiency in order to grasp all the dialogues and actions (unless subtitles are used which usually results in the students paying attention to English writing rather than the spoken French), but *courts métrages* can be used with beginners just as easily as with advanced students. Due to their brevity, the storyline is limited to the plot, eliminating extraneous and complicated elements that might otherwise confuse the students' comprehension of the story. And since they are short, they can be played multiple times if needed.

The value of *courts métrages* became apparent during a language immersion weekend for high schoolers. One of the activities for the students was to watch a movie, and then talk about it. It was difficult to find a movie with a theme that would appeal to all students, but several *courts métrages* seemed to provide the answer. Students engaged in pre- and post-viewing activities and seemed to enjoy the short films. However, the full impact of the lesson was not realized until later in the evening during a game of charades in which instructors gave the students words to act out. As the instructors exhausted their array of words, the students said they had suggestions, and immediately launched into reenacting the various *courts métrages* seen that afternoon. This made it obvious that they had all grasped the plots and intricacies of those short films, no matter their level of proficiency, and no matter how tired they had been, proving that short films were as effective if not more than the full-length ones.

Guiding students through an active viewing process

Viewing a film, whether it is full-length or short, should not be passive. Students need to be guided in an active viewing process. Teachers need to design activities that will enable this active viewing process while incorporating ACTFL's World Readiness Standards for Language Learning (2013). In developing lessons, teachers must ask

themselves the following questions:

1. Which standards (Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, Communities) are to be addressed?
2. What mode or modes of communication (Interpretive, Interpersonal, Presentational) should be used?
3. What level are the students who will be engaged in the activity (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced)?
4. What types of activities should be used (individual, pair, group)?
5. What type of response is expected (yes/no, multiple choice, short answer, essay)?

Well-designed lessons using *courts métrages* can address all of the World Readiness standards. *courts métrages*, provide a rich cultural context, which opens the door for comparisons between target and home cultures. Many also address current social issues that allow for connections to other disciplines and to the global community. However, for the sake of brevity, this article will only discuss development of activities for the communication standard.

Courts métrages and the communication standard

Within the communication standard there are three modes of communication: Interpretive, Interpersonal and Presentational. The interpretative mode focuses on one's ability to make sense of and interpret a video, audio or written text. The interpersonal mode focuses on a meaningful exchange of information, either oral or written, between two or more individuals while the presentational mode would be a formal, one-way communication to either the teacher or peers. The use of short films allows teachers to integrate all three modes of communication.

Once the *courts métrages* and the standard/s to be addressed have been determined, the level (novice, intermediate, advanced) and type of activity (individual, partner or group) should be decided. The answer to these questions will determine the type of response expected (oral or written, short or long answer, yes/no questions, multiple choice). Novice learners have a limited vocabulary and know few structures; therefore asking *yes/no* questions is a level appropriate response. Novice learners can follow along with the movie, and decide whether the actions described are accurate or not. By the same token, multiple-choice questions work well to help them understand the plot and order of actions. Lastly they can also put elements in order. At the intermediate level, they are able to produce more complex answers. Therefore the questions asked can encourage them to give short answers (one to two sentences), write dialogues, or give short descriptions (just a few sentences). Finally at the advanced level, the questions can focus on the usage of their language competencies. They can therefore produce short and long answers, write dialogues, give developed descriptions and produce longer narrations.

For each level, it is important to design pre-viewing activities that will activate the students' background knowledge on the topic or perhaps provide them with some

background knowledge. Research demonstrates that providing context/background knowledge for students facilitates comprehension (Hammadou; Hauptman). Providing a clear goal for viewing the *courts métrages* and teaching key vocabulary will also improve comprehension.

Once the pre-viewing activities have been completed, students should watch the *courts métrages* without the “while viewing activities”. This first viewing allows students to enjoy the *courts métrages* as entertainment and to interpret it through their own lens before being asked specific, guided questions. Teachers can then ask for students’ first impressions and perhaps take note of anything students say that is not in the “while viewing” or post-viewing activities. Next, students should receive the list of questions they are expected to answer and watch the *courts métrages* a second or even third time if necessary.

The post-viewing activities provide the opportunity to incorporate the interpersonal and presentational modes. Students may be put in to pairs or small groups to discuss the *courts métrages* (interpersonal). They may write a narrative or summary of the *courts métrages* or perhaps an alternate ending (presentational). They could make their own *courts métrages* on the same topic or in the same genre to present to the class.

“Le Baiser”

The examples that follow include all modes of the communication standard and are based on the *court métrage* “Le Baiser” which can be found on YouTube. This short uses the silent movie style, with its specific screens and music. Particular attention needs to be paid to the title page as the A in *baiser* is upside down. Two lovers meet on a seawall at the edge of an ocean to exchange their first kiss. As their lips are about to meet, the film reel breaks, and one word is heard, revealing an invisible producer on the film. However as he repairs the film, the image is inadvertently glued upside down, everything begins to fall, including the water from the ocean, prompting the protagonists to hold on to a rock or risk falling. The humor, which was apparent from the beginning, heightens as the enamored character allows his beloved to fall in order to save his own life. The silent producer then reestablishes the proper position of the reel. The water regains its proper place soaking our protagonist who is disappointed because he never received his kiss.

The pre-viewing activity for the Novice level consists of the following matching activity of key vocabulary (see Appendix). With this vocabulary novice learners should be able to comprehend/interpret the film.

For the Intermediate and Advanced levels, the vocabulary activity can be used if deemed necessary by the teacher. The sample questions below are more open-ended and allow for more creative expression by the students (the full activities are available in the appendix). With this activity learners are encouraged to reflect on movies and their structures in order to fully grasp the intricacies of the *court métrages* while they’re viewing it.

1. Quel genre de films est-ce que vous connaissez ?
2. Qu'est-ce que c'est un baiser ?
3. Qu'est-ce que la musique indique ?

The same questions can be used for both levels. The difference lies in the teacher expectation of the response. For example, at the intermediate level, for the last question a student might give very short answers such as “*la musique indique la joie*” etc. More advanced learners would use more sophisticated language such as “*la musique indique les sentiments dans le film: la joie peut-être*”.

For the novice level, forced choice questions were used to guide the students through the actions of the film. Examples of some of the questions are given below.

Regardez le film et répondez aux questions :

1. Au début, qu'est-ce que vous voyez ?
 - Un homme
 - Une femme
2. Est-ce qu'ils s'embrassent ?
 - Oui
 - Non

Again, for the Intermediate and Advanced levels, the same type of short answer questions can be used. However, the expectation for the language level used in the response is different.

1. Au début, qu'est-ce que vous voyez ?
2. Qu'est-ce qui se passe quand le film casse ?
3. Qu'est-ce qui se passe à la fin du film ?

Here, at the intermediate level, students will have very short answers such as “*je vois une femme*”, for the first question. More advanced learners would use more sophisticated language such as “*Au début du film il y a une femme. Elle est à la mer et elle attend son petit-ami*”.

For the Novice level discussion after viewing the film, students can use the “while viewing” questions as their guide and compare answers. If they have different answers, they may ask the teacher for clarification. Then, they ask each other a series of questions that require only one or two words in answer:

Demandez à votre partenaire :

1. Quel genre de film est-ce que c'est ?
2. Est-ce que tu aimes le film ?
3. Qu'est-ce que tu penses : est-ce qu'un dialogue est nécessaire ?

At the Intermediate level, again students compare their answers to their peers while viewing questions. Then, they ask each other a series of questions that require a higher level of language than the novice level. For example, at both levels students are asked if they like the film. However, at the intermediate level they are then asked to explain why they like it.

1. Quel genre de film est-ce que c'est ?
2. Est-ce que tu aimes le film ? Pourquoi ?
3. Qu'est-ce que tu penses : est-ce qu'un dialogue est nécessaire ?
Pourquoi ?

An additional activity that can be done at the intermediate level is the creation of a dialogue between the two main characters. The film can be found on YouTube so students may watch it as many times as they like in order to complete the assignment outside of class as homework. Once the dialogue is complete, the students may read the dialogue while the film is playing. This activity allows for further discussion concerning the use of the silent film genre. Below are sample questions that can be used.

1. Est-ce que le dialogue rend le film plus intéressant ?
2. Est-ce que le dialogue est important ?
3. Connaissez-vous d'autres films similaires ? (muets).

For Advanced learners, students compare their answers to the while viewing questions and then discuss the film further with more open-ended questions that require them to speculate/hypothesize about certain aspects of the film. For example, students are asked if they think the film would be better with a dialogue and why or why not.

1. Pourquoi le « A » est à l'envers dans le titre ?
2. Est-ce que le film aurait été meilleur avec un dialogue ? Pour quoi oui?
Ou pour quoi non?
3. Connais-tu d'autres films muets ?

The last question prompts a connection with the specific genre of silent movies.

Other activities that more advanced students can do after viewing the film include writing a narration of the films action adding thoughts for each of the main characters. Then, they can present their story to the class. As with the Intermediate level, this activity allows for further discussion concerning the use of the silent film genre.

Another activity for Advanced level students is to have them create their own *courts métrages*. In groups of 3-4 students, they write the story, create a plan, decide on a location, film the project themselves. The films may then be shown in class or posted to a class forum where they can be viewed and discussed. For an example of a student created film visit this site: <https://youtu.be/xHspWvmAwu8>

Tools for language teaching

The purpose of this article was to provide teachers with tools they can use to develop course materials for all levels of language learning using the French short film genre. The viewing medium provides an engaging method by which teachers can bring in authentic language and culture to the French classroom. The example activities demonstrate that a large library of *courts métrages* is not necessary. The same short film can be used at multiple levels by changing the tasks the students are asked to do. The activities provided here also allow for an integration of all modes of the communication standard.

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Appendix

Classroom Activities for “Le Baiser”

Novice level

Pré activité :

Qu’est-ce que c’est un baiser ?

Quel genre de film c’est ?

(Faire un sondage à mains levées)

Section optionnelle :

Vocabulaire pour le film.

Trouvez le mot qui va avec l’image



Casser

À l’envers

Un baiser

S’embrasser

Pendant le visionnage :

Regardez le film et répondez aux questions :

Au début, qu’est-ce que vous voyez ?

- Un homme
- Une femme

Qui est-ce qu’elle rencontre ?

- Son aimé
- Son père

Où est-elle ?

- Au travail
- Au lac

L'homme et la femme ont une rencontre...

- Professionnelle
- Amoureuse

Est-ce qu'ils s'embrassent ?

- Oui
- Non

Qu'est-ce qui se passe quand ils s'embrassent ?

- Le film casse
- Le père arrive

Qu'est-ce qui se passe quand le film casse ?

- L'image est à l'envers
- C'est la fin du film

Quand l'image est à l'envers...

- C'est amusant
- C'est dramatique

L'homme sauve la femme.

- Oui
- Non

Pendant le film, est-ce que l'homme et la femme s'embrassent ?

- Oui
- Non

Après le film :

Avec un partenaire, comparez vos réponses.

Demandez à votre partenaire :

1. Quel genre de film est-ce que c'est ?
2. Est-ce que tu aimes le film ?
3. Qu'est-ce que tu penses : est-ce qu'un dialogue est nécessaire ?
4. Est-ce que c'est amusant ? Pourquoi ?

Avec la classe entière :

Discutez des questions avec les réponses correctes.

Classroom Activities for “Le Baiser”

Intermediate level

Pré activité :

Quel genre de films vous connaissez ?

Quel genre de film c’est ?
(Faire un sondage à mains levées)

Qu’est-ce que c’est un baiser ?

Pourquoi le « A » est à l’envers ?

Qu’est-ce que la musique indique ?

Section optionnelle selon le niveau de la classe :

Vocabulaire pour le film.

Trouvez le mot qui va avec l’image



Casser

À l’envers

Un baiser

S’embrasser

Pendant le visionnage :

Regardez le film et répondez aux questions :

Au début, qu’est-ce que vous voyez ?

Qu'est-ce que le mot lui demande de faire ?

Qu'est-ce qui se passe quand ils s'embrassent ?

Qu'est-ce qui se passe quand le film casse ?

Quand le film est à l'envers qu'est-ce que l'homme fait ?

Qu'est-ce qui se passe à la fin du film ?

Après le film :

Avec un partenaire, comparez vos réponses.

Demandez à votre partenaire :

5. Quel genre de film est-ce que c'est ?
6. Est-ce que tu aimes le film ? Pourquoi ?
7. Qu'est-ce que tu penses : est-ce qu'un dialogue est nécessaire ? Pourquoi ?
8. Est-ce que c'est amusant ? Pourquoi ?
9. Pourquoi le « A » est-il à l'envers dans le titre ?

Avec toute la classe :

Discutez des questions avec les réponses correctes.

Posez des questions des questions de suivi (pourquoi ?, etc.)

Post-Activité #2 :

Un dialogue.

Avec un partenaire, créez un dialogue entre l'homme et la femme.

La vidéo est sur YouTube, alors les étudiants peuvent faire l'activité en devoir, ou en classe.

En suivi, la vidéo peut être jouée avec les étudiants qui lisent leur dialogue (pas plus de 3 groupes).

Cela permet une conversation selon les questions suivantes :

- *Est-ce que le dialogue rend le film plus intéressant ?*
- *Est-ce que le dialogue est important ? Est-ce qu'il rend le film plus poignant/... ?*
- *Connaissez-vous d'autres films similaires ? (silencieux).*

Classroom Activities for “Le Baiser”

Advanced level

Pré activité :

Quel genre de films connaissez-vous?

Quel genre de film est-ce que nous allons voir ?
(Faire un sondage à mains levées)

Qu’est-ce que c’est un baiser ?

Pourquoi le « A » est-il à l’envers ?

Qu’est-ce que la musique indique ?

Pendant le visionnage :

Regardez le film et répondez aux questions :

Au début, qu’est-ce que vous voyez ?

Qu’est-ce que le mot lui demande de faire ?

Qu’est-ce qui se passe quand ils s’embrassent ?

Qu’est-ce qui se passe quand le film casse ?

Quand le film est à l’envers qu’est-ce que l’homme fait ?

Qu'est-ce qui se passe à la fin du film ?

Après le film :

1. Avec un partenaire, comparez vos réponses.
2. Demandez à votre partenaire :
 1. Quel genre de film est-ce que c'est ?
 2. Est-ce que tu aimes le film ? Pourquoi ?
 3. Pourquoi le « A » est à l'envers dans le titre ?
 4. Est-ce que le film aurait été meilleur avec un dialogue ?
 5. Quel est le rôle du dialogue et de la musique dans un film ?
 6. Connais-tu d'autres films muets ?

(Pour #6 : Lien possible avec Charlie Chaplin, ou le film *L'artiste*.)

Avec toute la classe :

Discutez des questions avec les réponses correctes.

Posez des questions des questions de suivi (pourquoi ?, etc.)

Post-Activité #2 :

L'histoire.

Avec un partenaire, racontez l'histoire. Qu'est-ce qui se passe dans le film ? Ajoutez des pensées internes pour chaque personnage.

Projet :

En groupes de 3 ou 4, vous allez créer un film muet de 2-3 minutes.

D'abord, décidez de votre histoire. Qu'est-ce qui se passe. Écrivez l'histoire.

Ensuite, créez un plan pour votre film. Dans chaque séquence, qu'est-ce qui se passe ? Quelle musique utilisez-vous ?

Finalement, faites le film.

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