

Film Shows and Primary Education

Norman C. Borg

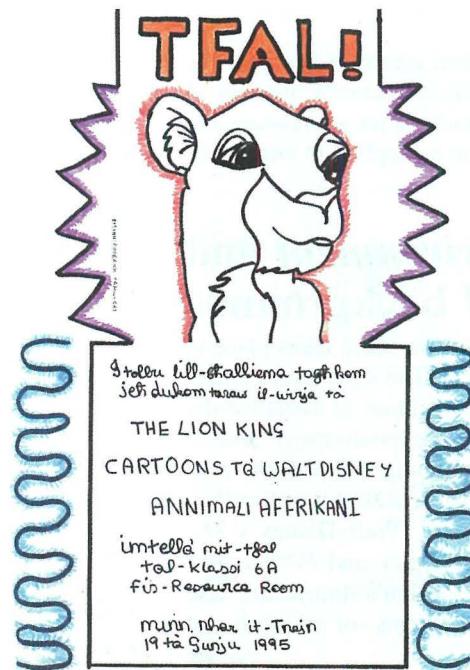
Like any other multimedia experience in the hands of a professional teacher, film shows can offer a multitude of educational opportunities for children of all ages and educational abilities. Taking a class to a film show may be an educational event in itself, but much more can be elicited by the kind of film actually selected as well as the planning involved in organising remote preparation and follow-up sessions. For best effect, make the most out of a film show by actually putting it in the centre of a topic web. In fact, a film show is arguably one of the best vehicles for a thematic approach.

Firstly, the teacher will have to be thoroughly familiar with the film show itself. You should see the film show (preferably more than once) *before* the actual showing with the class. Check whether the film is available in the school video library so that you may be able to view it comfortably at home. Alternately, you can rent it.

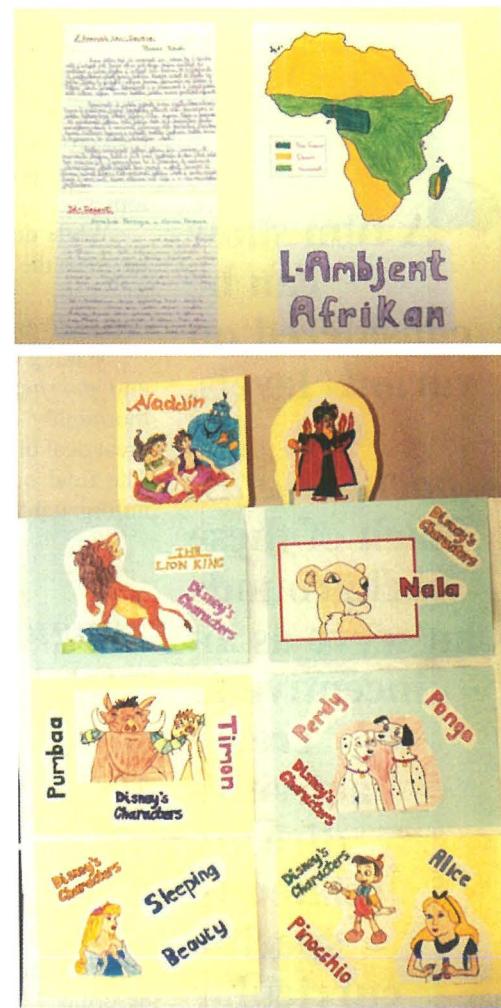
Although practically every state primary classroom is nowadays equipped with a video player and monitor, it is still recommended to organise the actual class screening in a cinema theatre. Most cinemas nowadays offer the possibility of group bookings with the option

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The poster for the exhibition. It was a time when computers were still not available in schools, but the children's own handiwork is still as effective



NORMAN C. BORG,
B. A., B. Ed. (Hons), Dip. Ed.
(Adm. & Man.) is an
Assistant Headteacher at
Birzebbuga Primary A. He
currently lectures in I.T. in
the Primary Classroom to
B. Ed. and P.G.C.E. students
at the Faculty of Education,
University of Malta.



Some of the children's work as mounted for the exhibition

of specific film shows. Check with your nearest cinema for the film shows available before actually planning the activities.

Taking the children to the theatre rather than showing the film in class is more feasible educationally, and definitely more effective. There is nothing better than the large screen to actually hook the children's attention. There are even fewer interruptions than when viewing the film in the classroom. There is a change of atmosphere.

The children have been taken out of the school premises. A theatre screening is a thoroughly *different* experience from a video screening.

The video player and monitor combination in the classroom can then be used for replaying parts of the film for discussion.

During my personal work experience as a Year 6 teacher, I have organised activities based

around film shows. The following example is based around Walt Disney's *The Lion King*. Most of the activities can be applied to any other feature film with only some slight modifications.

Applying a Film Show to the Primary Curriculum

A film show can be considered on various levels, or *backgrounds*. Each of these backgrounds can serve as an incentive to create activities directly related to specific curricular topics.

While doing these activities, children will be given the opportunity of learning a number of skills, covering various educational *perspectives*.

Making the best use of these *backgrounds* and *perspectives* to combine them into a thoroughly educational event will involve a great deal of planning from the teacher's part. The final outcome, however, will create an unforgettable experience for the children.

The literary and linguistic backgrounds of *The Lion King*

The most obvious point to start with is the *storyline*. It is the best launch pad for discussion, on a number of levels. How does the story evolve? Make the children recount parts of it. This can be organised individually or in groups. What can be learned from the story? Are there any *morals* worth highlighting?

What about the characters? How do they differ from each other? How can they be described? What kinds of adjectives can be applied to the different characters? Is it enough to categorise the characters as simply either *good* or *bad*?

Make the children aware of the fact that even if the characters are actually animals, in this case, their characteristics are *human*, and that their actions can be applied to humans as well.

The environment and historical backgrounds

The story of *The Lion King* takes place in the African savannah. The story gives ample opportunity for the children to visualise the background scenes, the environment and its respective flora and fauna. Other films may have a prominent *historical* element rather than an environmental one (Walt Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Pocahontas*, for instance, or Don Bluth's *Anastasia*). Use such backgrounds as items for research and write-ups.

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The technical and scientific backgrounds

The Lion King's 'Circle of Life' theme is ideal for the concept of the food chain covered in the Science syllabus. But there are other points to consider especially where *cartoons* are concerned.

A fascinating aspect which may interest children is the technical way cartoons (and films in general) are created. The use of light and the concept of persistence of vision can be discussed in a superficial way (there is no need to go in great depth, here).

There is a special point about cartoons worth considering, and which can easily be applied to a Mathematics activity. Cartoon films are simply a sequence of drawings shown at a fast speed (usually 25 frames per second). Ask the children to work out how many frames would it take to create a cartoon film lasting 95 minutes.

Check out the duration of a number of cartoon films, and get the children to work these out as well.

The genre background

When speaking especially of cartoons, this item simply cannot be overlooked. Chances are that the children are very familiar with the more popular cartoon characters (both on TV and the cinema). Of course this may imply that you have to be up-to-date with the subject yourself. You can get the children to gather information about other cartoon films – other Walt Disney features, for instance.

Backgrounds as topics for teamwork

Divide the class into groups, and assign each group a different background to work on. In the case of *The Lion King*, you can have one team working on the recounting of the story (including drawings as well as write-ups in *both English and Maltese*); another working on Animals of the African Savannah; and yet another on Walt Disney's filmography, especially the more recent cartoon features.

Give different responsibilities to the individuals on the team: establish the roles of researchers, writers and illustrators. But give the team the opportunity to decide together the way the project will be worked out. This will help to ensure that you are covering both the *co-operative* (role taking) and *collaborative* (group discussion) aspects of teamwork.

Organise an exhibition in your school's Resource Centre to display the work. The teamwork, as well as the exhibition itself, will enable you to target particular curriculum *perspectives* as follows.

The creative and social perspectives

Creativity, of course, will be the main driving force behind the project. Items can be as various as models (clay or paper-based), charts, cuttings and drawings. Some of these items will require individuals to work on their own. Still, their work can always make part of a larger group effort. So make sure that every individual is well aware of contributing specific skills in a team.

Although competition may sometimes be effective in particular circumstances, there is no need to introduce it here. Since the teams will be working on different projects, there is no need for any comparisons.

Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that there will be an *audience*, which will be seeing the mounted projects during the exhibition. This should serve as ample incentive to motivate the children to create attractive and as correct a work as possible.

The research perspective

This is an opportunity for teaching the concept of *surveys* and rudimentary skills in *data collection*. Start off by doing an in-house job. The class can vote for favourite Walt Disney films, for instance, and a graph is drawn out of the results. Other surveys can include the most popular characters in a particular film.

Such an activity can be expanded, however, to cover the entire school. Children can go in pairs around the school to organise similar surveys in other classes. Teachers as well as children can be asked to take part.

The data collected can be presented as tables and graphs on some of the charts that the teams will put up in the exhibition. Graphs can be

drawn in the form of bar graphs or even pie charts (utilising the concept of percentages and degrees of angle). Presentations can be either hand-made or put on the computer and printed out.

The communicative perspective

The exhibition is an excellent vehicle for developing skills in more ways than one. Children can be handed over the responsibility of organising, promoting and hosting the exhibition, always under your supervision. This is particularly possible with the older year groups (Years 5 and 6).

Organising

hold some sessions during which the layout of the exhibition can be discussed. Each team can then plan their way of displaying the material.

Promoting

Get some of the children to design adverts and invitation cards (to individuals, such as the head of school, or even to whole classes) for the exhibition. This is even more possible with the use of *The Print Shop* or any other similar software on the computer. The children themselves will be responsible for handing over the invitations or putting up the posters on the notice boards.

Hosting

During the exhibition itself, place a couple of children in the Resource Centre as guides for the visiting classes. Make a roster system, so that all children in the class will have the opportunity to take a turn.

Conclusion

The activities planned around the film show are quite time consuming and will definitely require planning and time management, not only within the closed boundaries of the classroom walls. Apart from the booking of the theatre itself, you will also need to ensure that the school Resource Centre will be available at a stipulated period during the scholastic year. This in itself will render the project even more interesting and motivating, once the children are aware that there are certain deadlines to meet. There are then, of course, other events in the school that will have to be considered. There are two ways of organising the time for project work. The activities can be staggered across a number of weeks. The Midweek period, for instance, can be ideal for a number of the projects.

Alternately, especially where Junior Lyceum classes are involved, the weeks immediately following the exams can be wholly dedicated to the project, and the exhibition timed to take place some time before the annual examinations for the other classes in the school.

Notes for Contributors

Education 2000 is a magazine distributed free to all teachers, school administrators, student teachers and other educational practitioners who are interested in the study and development of the various areas of the school curriculum, teachers' professional development and school management. Its main objective is to facilitate the dissemination of research findings, effective practice and teaching and learning ideas. It carries contributions related to education in the primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary sectors. We welcome the following kinds of contributions:

- Reports of research which has implications for the school/classroom situation. (A considerable amount of work in this regard is carried out in the form of dissertations for education degrees. Often this kind of work is shelved and forgotten. This journal will seek to assist in the publication of such work);
- Accounts of school/classroom curriculum-related activities and teaching ideas;
- Discussions of current issues in the teaching of the various curriculum areas and subjects at all ages.

Advice on suitable material in any area of the curriculum and help with the preparation of submissions will be given by the Editorial Board. Articles should not normally exceed 2,000 words. In fact shorter contributions are encouraged. Manuscripts and all bibliographical material should be set out in standard A.P.A. style. The Editorial Board reserves the right to make changes to manuscripts to be consonant with the scope and style of the publication.

ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL: Authors are encouraged to submit illustrative material with their articles. Such material (photographs, children's work, diagrams, etc.) should be in its original form and not as photocopies. Copyright permission, when required, is the responsibility of the author. 300 d.p.i. scans of good quality are also acceptable (.jpeg or .tiff formats).

Contributions should be submitted:

- on 3.5" diskette, containing the original file of the submission (for example Word, Claris documents, etc), and a **rich text format (RTF)** version. Both PC and Macintosh formatted diskettes are acceptable; alternatively, both files may be sent as attachments to this e-mail address: **gmai1@um.edu.mt**.
- a hard copy of the contribution, including detailed notification of the insertion points of illustrative material, as well as the author's photo and a short biographical note.
- all illustrative material in a separate envelope, with the name of the author and contribution noted on it. Scans on diskette or CD must be clearly labeled.

Contributions are to be submitted to *any* member of the Board, or sent to:

The Editorial Board, Education 2000, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida - MSD 06 - Malta