

Unspoken Content: Silent Film in the ESL Classroom

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Silent film provides a useful resource for all levels of ESL instruction.

Recent scholarly research into second language and literacy acquisition has affirmed the value of popular film as a resource for the enhancement of linguistic, metalinguistic, critical, cultural, and visual literacy skills (Kasper, "Film Imagery"; Kasper and Singer; Pally, "Critical Thinking"; Stoller). The value of film as a resource for ESL education derives from its ability to create an optimal language-learning environment (see Egbert 152 for a discussion of the criteria for optimal learning). Through repetition of words and phrases, cues to context, and development of schematic knowledge, film directs students' attention to features key to successful language acquisition. At the same time, through engaging plot and technological effects, film diverts students' attention away from the aspects of language acquisition that cause them anxiety, thus lowering their affective filters and allowing them to acquire language with reduced self-consciousness (Pally, "Film & Society").

With its visuals, story, music, and words, popular film represents a powerful source of "comprehensible input" (Krashen) as it offers what Stempleski has called a "total communicative situation" (7). This "total communicative situation" extends to the ESL student a mirror through which to view and understand the norms, assumptions, and contradictions inherent in the target culture as it reflects a range of issues spanning a variety of academic disciplines commonly studied in college. Students may view an entire film text or edited shot sequences, and be asked to articulate their reactions to issues and characters, often for the purpose of forming interdisciplinary, analytical links.

While contemporary popular film may be generally accepted as a resource in the discipline-based ESL classroom (see Kasper, "Imagery of Rhetoric"), perhaps the single most overlooked cinematic resource to facilitate the development of ESL students' critical thinking and writing skills involves the creative deployment of the short silent film.¹ Because silent film conveys meaning totally through visual imagery, its usefulness as a tool for ESL instruction may not be immediately apparent. However, an interdisciplinary body of research supports the value of the visual image as a useful textual mode for developing verbal language skill. For

example, research in psychology maintains that visual processing is at the foundation of our language development (Piaget and Inhelder), and that the mind stores and manipulates linguistic information pictorially (Paivio). Moreover, a number of psycholinguistic studies note that creating imagery associations to new vocabulary and language structures improves learning and that the more vivid and interactive the images are, the more effective (Kasper, “The Keyword Method”). Finally, research in developmental education supports visual imagery as a valid means of helping students build both knowledge and the vocabulary and language structures needed to express that knowledge (Weiner).

Silent film relies on the power of vivid, interactive visual imagery to depict personal struggles, interpersonal interactions, and societal problems. The images these films present are filled with meaningful content to activate students’ imagination and engage their interest. In addition, music, used to highlight key points in the film and evoke emotional response from the audience, reinforces the sensory experience, while short titles, interspersed throughout the visual narrative, describe the upcoming action. By providing ESL students with raw material for the creative use of language, as well as for the analysis and interpretation of interdisciplinary issues, silent film can be a useful tool for promoting the development of verbal language skills.

Silent Film as a Discipline-Based Resource

Silent films by directors like D. W. Griffith depicted a wide array of social and cultural issues, including class and labor tensions (*A Corner in Wheat*, 1909), alcoholism and domestic abuse (*A Drunkard’s Reformation*, 1909), or urban crime and the immigrant experience, even white slavery (*The Musketeers of Pig Alley*, 1912). In particular, the silent film melodrama² represents a content-rich text in which individual, family, and societal crises are personalized via standardized plot contrivances, and where, even without the conventions of spoken language, the audience is able to intuit that there is more to the story.

As they did for the audiences of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, silent films can be used today in the ESL classroom to “speak” to students through a context-rich visual narrative that develops linguistic competence while circumventing the anxiety produced by the struggle to understand discursive, spoken language. There is no literal conversation, complex word association, or slang to intercept the flow of this visual narrative for the ESL student unfamiliar with patterns of standard language or colloquial speech. The occasional screen title presents

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key words or phrases that can be understood even by beginning students. Fluency in the second language is not essential for the comprehension of a wide range of emotions, plot contrivances, experiences, and social issues rendered visual in the silent film.

This paper illustrates the use of silent film in the ESL classroom through an analysis of D. W. Griffith's *The Painted Lady* (1912), a unique melodrama about a repressed young woman faced with an identity crisis, which raises important issues related to gender, class, and especially the representation of female beauty as a commodity. Through its visual depiction of issues touching social psychology, health, personal development, and cultural norms, *The Painted Lady* provides a resource that may be used to provoke discussion and stimulate critical analyses of discipline-based themes and issues.

The Text of the Film

The text of *The Painted Lady* involves a young woman who still lives, appropriately, with her turn-of-the-century, middle-class family. As the narrative develops, the young woman seeks the approval of her father. Yet she is torn by awakening desires and impulses that lead her to emulate the latest socially constructed notion of "fashion" and to wear cosmetics. She rejects the notion and impulse to "paint her

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face." After a series of humiliating social events, she meets a young man who feigns interest in her. She later discovers that his romantic interests were in fact disingenuous. This leads to a melodramatic sequence in which she shoots a disguised intruder as he attempts to rob the family fortune, only to discover that the intruder was the young man. After this she experiences the symptoms of a nervous breakdown and becomes more depressed, delusional, and withdrawn. In an attempt

to cope with this stressful humiliation, she applies the makeup she once disdained, only later to be overcome by the experience.

Reading the Film Text: Prereading Exercises

As with a print text, reading and comprehending a film text require that students be given preparatory exercises to activate background knowledge of content and to prime them for the unique experience of viewing a silent film. Because there is no spoken dialogue in *The Painted Lady*, understanding content requires careful attention to, and awareness of, metalinguistic cues. To activate and expand their awareness of nonverbal cues to meaning, students should be asked to describe how they might convey a message to someone if they could not speak. They should then

be asked to act out a short phrase or sentence without using words. They might also be asked to explain how nonverbal cues are used to convey meaning even when speech is present, as in television, contemporary film, or everyday interpersonal interactions. As students come to understand and appreciate the variety of ways in which people convey messages both verbally and non-verbally, they naturally develop increased metacognition of the processes inherent in language and communication.

To prepare students to understand the issues presented in the silent film narrative, instructors should also provide a short list of key words or phrases that refer to focal events in the film; for example, *melodrama*, *father-daughter relationship*, *mental illness*, *betrayal*, *burglary*. After defining the terms, students might be asked to predict some events these key words and phrases might describe and to illustrate how to depict these events without using spoken language.

Many ESL students in our secondary and college classes today have experienced (or are experiencing) conflicts similar to those depicted in *The Painted Lady*. Preparing students to comprehend the film narrative requires that this background knowledge be activated. To do this, students might be asked to describe the social pressures felt by young people today. They should discuss the effects that peers and family may have on a young person's behavior and how those effects are mediated by cultural beliefs. They could be asked to describe how an adolescent's self-image might be related to popular fashion.

These prereading exercises promote ESL students' active engagement with and active processing of information presented in the silent film text. We have found that the exercises effectively activate background knowledge necessary for comprehension of the film text and result in an interesting cross-cultural exchange of ideas. They prepare students to read and comprehend the visual text in much the same ways in which they would be prepared to read a print text. In addition, these pre-reading exercises tap into students' visual literacy skills, facilitating comprehension of the film narrative and building linguistic competence.

Although representative of the cultural values and mores of the early 20th century, *The Painted Lady* addresses complex psychological, social, and historical conflicts that young women (and men) still experience in their struggle for self-definition and personal independence. The societal messages of perfection that so conflicted this silent film heroine are relevant for our contemporary student audience. Young women and men today, flooded with magazine and television images that represent beauty as razor-thin females and well-muscled males, continue to struggle with questions involving what is sexually desirable, "weight/fashion" issues, parental obligation, and media-created images of inaccessible beauty (Phillips; Hall). Like the silent-film heroine who painted her face and disobeyed her father in order to be accepted by her peers, today thousands of young women with the same desires take diet pills or undergo liposuction because they feel they are not "perfect." Further, as both Colleary and Hall note, societal images of perfection also affect today's young men, many of whom work out religiously, inject steroids, or shave body hair, all in an effort to look "buff."

Speaking about Silents: Activities for the Discipline-Based Classroom

A silent film such as *The Painted Lady* exposes students to a media genre rarely seen in the ESL classroom, but one that offers a multitude of possibilities for creative and critical discussion and analysis of discipline-based issues. Lacking spoken language, silent film must rely on visual representation of complex issues, and in order to

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glean an understanding of the interactions between characters and the causes and effects of their actions, ESL students must focus their attention on image rather than language. Furthermore, because silent film does not offer pre-authored dialogue, students are not only allowed, but also encouraged, to author their own conversational texts, using English creatively to develop a personally meaningful interchange between characters that fits within the action viewed on screen. Thus silent film, more

than any other film property, capitalizes on ESL students' visual literacy, using it as both a foundation and a catalyst for honing the verbal language skills that are key to acquiring and articulating complex knowledge in English.

We maintain that silent film represents an important instructional resource for students at all levels of English language proficiency, and in this section of the paper we describe various activities for using silent film in a discipline-based curriculum. With appropriate modifications, these activities may be used to build linguistic skill and content knowledge in beginning, intermediate, or advanced ESL courses. At all levels, we suggest that instructors be careful to provide as much structure and guidance as possible, both to alleviate students' anxiety and to facilitate acquisition of language and content knowledge.

Because it is so short, with a running time of approximately thirteen minutes, *The Painted Lady* lends itself to multiple viewings. These multiple viewings allow students to practice and build knowledge of language and content progressively as they examine the film and the issues it presents more closely with each subsequent viewing. We suggest that during the first viewing students be encouraged to focus on the visual and sensory experience of the silent film so that they may glean the basic plot line. Subsequent viewings should engage students in a more comprehensive examination of the issues presented and an in-depth analysis of the techniques used to convey meaning. At this point, students should be given a list of comprehension questions (see Appendix A) that they must answer after watching either the complete film or selected shot sequences.

We also suggest that activities at all levels provide a carefully constructed mix of both language-focus and content-focus exercises. Language-focus exercises

target the development of linguistic competence by providing students with extensive practice in identifying and generating individual vocabulary and language structures. Content-focus exercises are designed to tap and expand the schematic knowledge base, offering students the opportunity to frame new knowledge within existing knowledge and challenging them to extend their overall base of knowledge as they engage in active analysis and synthesis of issues.

Language Focus

Language-focus exercises include practicing vocabulary and language structures, as well as writing and speaking dialogues. The silent film contains no dialogue, so building knowledge of vocabulary and language structures requires some creativity on the part of both instructors and students. To test students' comprehension of the visual narrative, instructors should begin by asking them to write a short summary of the plot. Several of these summaries should be read aloud to the class or put on the chalkboard, and students asked to identify words or phrases that appear in each of the summaries chosen. The terms identified could then be used to create cloze and/or modified cloze exercises³, and students asked to fill in appropriate words or phrases based upon the content of the film (see Appendix B for examples). Instructors might also prepare a conversation exercise in which they provide the father's voice and students supply the daughter's responses. Roles can then be reversed, with the students speaking as the father and the instructor as the daughter. Students should also be encouraged to author their own dialogues between the daughter and her father, between the older and the younger sisters, and/or between the daughter and the young man. The cloze exercises and sample interchanges introduce relevant vocabulary and language structures and provide a context for students to interact extensively with these language features.

Content Focus

Content-focus exercises are designed to engage students in an analysis of the film and the key issues presented in it. Although lacking in spoken language, *The Painted Lady* presents a number of content issues. Here we remind students of the key words and phrases introduced in the prereading exercise that refer to focal events in the film (*melodrama, father-daughter relationship, mental illness, betrayal, burglary*). We ask students to describe scenes or events in the film that correspond to the key words and phrases. For example, we ask students to locate a definition of *melodrama* and, by identifying specific scenes in the film, to explain how *The Painted Lady* fits that definition. We also ask students to describe the father-daughter relationship and to indicate the specific scenes or events in the film that led to their answers.

Instructors should remember that understanding the content of this or any other silent film requires that students become aware of and attend to nonverbal cues, including the events taking place on screen and the facial expressions, body movements, and emotional responses of the characters. Here it is useful to study the silent film for its value as a concrete visual illustration of the power of unspoken

communication. It is very likely that ESL students have had little, if any, exposure to silent films, and so it is both useful and interesting for students at all levels of English language proficiency to examine their reactions to it. Students should be asked to speak or write about their impressions of the silent film and the primacy of the visual, its absence of language, and how (and what) the film communicated to them. In letters addressed to Griffith or performers in the film, ESL students can discuss how the directing and acting contributed to or detracted from their understanding of the complex social ideas presented. These activities help students tap into their visual literacy skills and use them to build competence in verbal language.

Due to differences in ethnic culture, religion, or class, the messages conveyed by the gestures, facial expressions, music, and tone of the film might not be the same for all ESL students. Here students should be asked to describe and discuss

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the subtle (and not-so-subtle) cross-cultural and/or cross-generational differences in meaning expressed by the same nonverbal cues. This exercise not only enhances metalinguistic awareness and cultural understanding, but also helps to build metacognitive knowledge about the multitude of factors involved in the process of communication.

In the contemporary ESL classroom, the wide variety of ethnic cultures, religious and class differences, as well as varying levels of cultural and visual literacy, produce lively and insightful analyses of the content issues presented in the film. One of the key issues presented in *The Painted Lady* is parental obedience, and its effect on a child's developing independence. *The Painted Lady* depicts attitudes toward parental obedience that were typical of the early 20th century in the United States. Content-focus exercises may involve asking students to compare the early 20th-century views on parental obedience as presented in the film with those held in the U.S. today or with those held in their native countries. Finally, they may be asked to compare the views held today in U.S. culture with those held in their native cultures.

Our students have explored some of these issues in their in-class discussions and written assignments.⁴ During an in-class discussion on the film, one advanced-level female student from the Dominican Republic said that *The Painted Lady* "was very sad . . . it made me think of how my father and my older brother try to control everything I do, even what boys I go out with . . . I wasn't allowed to wear makeup until I was sixteen." In a written piece, a high-intermediate female student from Russia discussed the ways in which young people often choose to assert their independence to fit into the peer group:

As a rule teenagers try to be independent. They do not often listen their parents. They do things they want to do and go where they want to go. Parents of children sixteen, seventeen years old have a difficult controlling of their behavior

... When I was a teenager I had many friends ... many free time and we spent many times together. My parents worried about it and wanted punish me because I spent a lot of time in the street with my friends [and] my grades in school became very low. I answered my mother very strongly. My parents didn't have a good result. But when I received my report card, I was very upset and I understand that my parents were right in that situation. I must depended on my parents. . . .

In these examples, each student has taken a major theme presented in *The Painted Lady* and related it to her own life experience. The former compares her own experience to that of the silent-film heroine, noting strong similarities that have spanned the decades. The latter discusses the desire for independence that she believes is characteristic of adolescence, as well as the behavior that results from this struggle for independence. She also points out the reactions of parents to this behavior and acknowledges that parents' efforts to change their children's behavior do not always work; rather, children must learn from their own experiences. She concludes, based on her own experience, that parents are often right. The events presented in the film prompted these students to examine adolescent behavior, to connect events in the film with their own experiences, and to draw conclusions from their analyses.

Another key issue presented in *The Painted Lady* is that of the adolescent's desire to fit cultural perceptions of beauty. Although *The Painted Lady* was made in 1912, the questions it raises regarding societal perceptions of and pressures to attain beauty are still relevant. Young people struggle with these issues everyday, and the film can be used as a springboard to discussion and analysis of the ways in which these issues have affected their lives. At the lower levels, ESL students can be asked to assume the role of a psychologist and write letters of advice to the young girl concerning her behavior. Some recommended and immediate areas of discussion would involve the young woman's passivity; isn't she too old to be so "good"? Why does she have so much conflict over applying makeup? How could the phony boyfriend fool her so easily? Why does she seem to "fall apart" over this one bad incident? Lower- and intermediate-level students can also discuss, either orally or in writing, their own personal experiences or family background concerning issues regarding weight, beauty, fashion, makeup, and popularity, dating, relationship betrayals, even sexuality.

When *The Painted Lady* was shown to advanced ESL students, it prompted a lively interchange as students reacted in the following ways to these various issues raised in the narrative. The ending of the film troubled one young woman, and she wanted to know why "the girl [didn't] just find another man or go to get some help." Another student, an adult returning to college after many years, concluded that "the father meant well but you cannot control the lives of your children," to which another male student replied, "she caused her own problems; he [the father] didn't make them happen." One especially compelling insight into the film occurred when a recently arrived female student from China stated, "[I]t is typical of young people to be insecure, but her real problems began with trying to be like

other people and not really act like herself.” This caused several female students in the class to question whether or not male students could “ever understand the pressures women experience if they are not beautiful or popular [meaning, sexy].”

Our low-intermediate level ESL students have also addressed issues like the importance of appearance. One student, contrasting her experience with that of a “friend,” wrote:

When I was young, I was thin, small and graceful girl. My parents always brought me nice clothes and I had a good appearance. I had a lot of friends . . . and I thought that my age is best age in my life. In the same time I knew a girl . . . also small, thin, and look an “ugly duckling.” She always stayed at home and felt very lonely and unhappy. I wanted to help her and offered friendship to her. I explained that life and young age were always pleasure, but she didn’t understand what I meant.

The Painted Lady as a Stimulus for Written Argumentation

In addition to being an effective stimulus for creative and critical thought, *The Painted Lady* can be used as an apparatus for developing skill in written argumentation. Through its presentation of the conflicts that plague key characters, the film

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To help them begin to develop skill in written argumentation, students can be asked to write position papers in which they take the stance of one of the characters and present a persuasive argu-

ment. Students can work with partners, one taking the position of the daughter and preparing an argument in favor of wearing facial cosmetics or beginning a relationship with the young man; the other student can take the position of the father and prepare an argument against wearing cosmetics or getting involved with the young man.

The next step involves asking students to extend and synthesize knowledge by describing what they believe to be the distinguishing features of a powerful and convincing argument. Understanding how to develop and present effective arguments is critical to students’ success in English-speaking academic and professional environments. In fact, many institutions, at both the secondary and university levels, require that students pass skills assessments for which they must construct written arguments in order to indicate their readiness for mainstream courses. Students who do not obtain satisfactory scores on these assessments may be denied admittance to or may be barred from continuing in the academic mainstream. In addition,

success in both academic and professional environments requires that students be able to take a stand on an issue and support their views through critical analyses of claims from a range of sources.

However, because the rhetorical conventions associated with effective argumentation vary across cultures, ESL students may lack the schematic knowledge required to produce an effective written argument in English. Raimes defines the following elements as being essential for written argumentation in American English: a strong thesis stating the issues and/or questions to be answered, supporting evidence, and a call to action (6, 16, 18, 19). However, this rhetorical model is not followed in all cultures, and many consider an effective argument to be based simply on traditions and widely held beliefs. Consequently, ESL students who come from these cultures may lack the schemata necessary to meet the expectations of an English-speaking audience.

A silent film like *The Painted Lady* offers these students a rich opportunity to observe the process of argumentation in action and to begin to build the schemata necessary to compose an effective written argument in English. As they watch the film, students are prompted to examine the stages of a conflict: its causes, the events surrounding it, and the results of characters' actions as they struggle to resolve it. Students see both the stance taken by the characters and the way in which the characters convey and defend that stance to each other and to the audience. The model of argumentation that derives from study of *The Painted Lady* illustrates for students an active process of inquiry and communication. This model also provides them with a foundation for taking a firm written stand on other issues presented in the film, for example, the importance of appearance, fitting into the group, developing self-concept, and the role of self-esteem in personality development.

Knowledge Synthesis through Multimedia Treatment of Issues

The oral and written discussions of the adolescent experience described above provide a smooth segue to a number of interesting follow-up activities. Students can be asked to synthesize film content and their own classroom discussion in a more comprehensive written analysis of the adolescent's (or the adult's) desire to fit into the group or society. Here other media can be brought into the course to provide a wide range of popular culture resources in order to expand linguistic and content knowledge and offer a foundation for further critical analysis and discussion of the adolescent experience.

Depending upon level, students can listen to the song *At Seventeen* by Janis Ian (Kasper "Using Songs") and/or read Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, both of which address the relationship between physical beauty and acceptance, by oneself and by society at large. Students can also read and discuss magazine, newspaper, and academic texts such as "How *Seventeen* Undermines Young Women" (Phillips), "Tarzan Bulks Up" (Colleary), "The Bully in the Mirror" (Hall), and "Beauty and the Best" (Bersheid and Hartfield). Each of these texts presents data from psychological studies to offer insights into the societal pressures felt by young people, both

female and male, and their behavioral responses to these pressures. Students can draw upon information presented in these multimedia resources to produce written pieces spanning a variety of rhetorical modes, including description, comparison/contrast, cause and effect, and argumentation.

For example, in a discipline-based course or unit focusing on business or nutrition, students can be shown or asked to bring in examples of television or magazine advertisements that show razor-thin models holding up diet pills and suggesting that weight loss is easy. Students then must explain how these ads represent a market-driven frenzy to control how women (and men) see themselves and analyze the effects these ads have on consumer behavior. Knowledge synthesis results from having students critically examine and react to these mass media ads within the framework of data presented in the Phillips, Colleary, Hall, and Bersheid and Hartfield texts, as well as the context of *The Painted Lady* and their own personal experience.

The Painted Lady may also be used as part of an interdisciplinary course that introduces the language and intellectual disciplines of sociology, women's studies, history, political science, literature, psychology, business, and nutrition. A variety of texts, both print and cinematic, are used in this course, which is designed to teach intermediate- to advanced-level students the rhetorical and research skills key to their success in the academic mainstream (Kasper "Film Imagery"). To establish a socio/historical perspective for analysis of the various texts used in this discipline-based course, students are asked to research, in the library or on the Internet, the socio/historical era in which each is set. They gather information on the emerging feminist movement in the late 19th and early 20th century, as well as on popular (and literary) views of women, traditional social "family" values, makeup and modernity, social/political progressivism, the emerging shopping and fashion industry, and changes in dating/sexual attitudes.

Student Feedback on the Silent Film Experience

When students are asked to complete questionnaires on the use of silent film in the ESL course, their response is overwhelmingly positive. Students say that they enjoyed viewing the silent film, and found it interesting to watch a movie made so many years ago. As one male student noted, "[T]hey look so different from us in the film . . . it's like looking into history. . . ." Students stated that even though the silent film had no spoken language, it presented a lot of interesting topics for spoken and written discussion. As noted by this female student from Haiti, students felt that these topics were still relevant to their lives today: "Even though it takes place a long time ago, I can understand how she feels . . . people are always trying to get over on you, like the boyfriend did . . . she had nobody to really talk to. . . ." Students also commented on the value of visual imagery, saying that the material was easier to understand and then speak about because they could remember the images presented in the film. As this student stated, "I liked the way the pictures told the story, along with the music . . . it was easier for me to follow than a lot of TV shows where everybody talks so fast. . . ."

As a result of the various language- and content-focus exercises used in the course, students also expressed increased confidence in their ability to use English. They attributed this improvement to the use of multimedia in the discipline-based course, saying that the film and print texts, language- and content-focus exercises, and writing assignments taught them English and a lot of other necessary information that would be helpful in other courses.

Conclusion

This paper has described how one short silent film, *The Painted Lady*, may be used to build language and content knowledge in ESL courses. There are many other silent films, both short and full-length, that are readily available and that present issues relevant to a variety of content areas. For example, *Birth of a Nation* (1915), a full-length silent directed by D.W. Griffith, depicts the racial intolerance and struggle for freedom that characterized the Civil War and the Reconstruction period in the United States. *The Kid* (1921), a shorter silent film by Charlie Chaplin, illustrates the difficulties of single parenthood, poverty, and the abusive nature of welfare and city agencies. These and many other silent films hold for the ESL course a valuable, motivating, yet highly underused discipline-based resource.

To assist instructors in their efforts to incorporate silent film into ESL courses, we have provided a representative list of titles and corresponding content areas in Appendix C. The Internet also offers extensive information on silent films. A list of “Greatest Silent Films,” many with comprehensive descriptions of plot and technique, is available at <http://www.filmsite.org/silentfilms.html>; additional silent film resources may be found on “The Internet Movie Database” at <http://us.imdb.com/>.

We hope that this paper has inspired instructors to tap into the power of early 20th-century silent film as a resource for ESL instruction. After all, like the ESL students sitting in our classrooms, the silent film was never really silent; it just communicated differently. ◀

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Directions: You have just viewed *The Painted Lady*, a silent film made in 1912. Now, as you watch the film again, please answer the following questions that refer to the content presented and the techniques used.

1. Who are the main characters in the film?
2. What kind of relationship does the young girl have with her father?
3. What kind of relationship does she have with her sister?
4. Why does the young girl become involved so quickly with the stranger?

5. What are the main issues presented in the film?
6. Although there is no spoken language in the film, we can still understand the story. What elements are used in the film to help us understand its content?
7. Do you think the silent film communicates its message clearly? Why/Why not?

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE CLOZE EXERCISE

Directions: Use the following vocabulary items to fill in the blanks in the sentences below. Each item should be used only once.

against, cry, recognize, struggle, interested, unpopular, fancy, shoots, tempted, secretly, scolding, collapses, applying, steal, pale, refuses, confronts, mirror, sweetheart, delusional, intruder, stranger, conservative, contemplates, business, introduces, mask, lose her mind, investigate, compliments, ignore, kiss, fit in, pistol

1. As the film begins, the father is (scolding) his daughter.
2. Her sister is wearing a (fancy) dress and is (applying) makeup to her face.
3. The young girl is more (conservative) than her sister is.
4. She (contemplates) putting on makeup but then decides (against) it.
5. When she goes to the party, she is (unpopular) because she doesn't (fit in).
6. She tries to talk to two young men, but they (ignore) her.
7. She goes off alone to sit and (cry).
8. Meanwhile, a young man who is a (stranger) in town arrives at the party.
9. The minister (introduces) the young man to the young girl.
10. The young man seems (interested) in her.
11. He (compliments) the young girl on her pretty face.
12. He becomes her first (sweetheart) and gives her a first (kiss).
13. Her father disapproves of the young man and (refuses) to let her see him.
14. Despite her father's objection, she decides to meet the young man (secretly).
15. The young girl tells the man about her father's (business).
16. The young man returns to (steal) the money.
17. He enters the house wearing a (mask) and carrying a (pistol).
18. The girl hears an (intruder) in the house and goes downstairs to (investigate).
19. She enters the room and (confronts) the thief.
20. They (struggle) and she accidentally (shoots) and kills him.
21. When she realizes that she has killed her sweetheart, she begins to (lose her mind).
22. She becomes (delusional) and goes to an imaginary meeting with the young man.
23. She looks in the mirror at her (pale) face and is (tempted) to put on the makeup.
24. When she sees her painted face in the (mirror), she doesn't (recognize) herself.
25. She becomes very upset and (collapses) into her father's arms.

(In a modified cloze exercise the instructor provides the first letter of the word to be filled in the blank.)

APPENDIX C: REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF SILENT FILM TITLES AND CORRESPONDING CONTENT AREAS

Content areas are listed as a general guide only; certainly each of these films presents issues relevant to a variety of content disciplines. The first six films listed are shorter silent titles (under 60 minutes); the remaining titles are full-length films.

Silent Film Title	Content Area
<i>The Immigrant</i> (1916)	Sociology
<i>Daydreams</i> (1922)	Psychology/Fantasy
<i>The Narrow Road</i> (1912)	Criminal Justice
<i>How Men Propose</i> (1913)	Gender Studies
<i>The Great Train Robbery</i> (1903)*	Literary Narrative
<i>The Painted Lady</i> (1912)**	Psychology/Sociology
<i>The Birth of a Nation</i> (1915)*	American History
<i>Broken Blossoms</i> (1919)*	Psychology/Sociology
<i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> (1920)	Psychology/Science
<i>Greed</i> (1924)*	Psychology
<i>J'Accuse</i> (1939)	World War I History
<i>The Kid</i> (1921)	Sociology
<i>Napoleon</i> (1927)	History/Biography
<i>Regeneration</i> (1915)	Darwinian Science

* Indicates full script available on the Internet at <http://www.filmsite.org/silentfilms.html>.

** Information about *The Painted Lady* is available on the Internet at <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0002415>.

Notes

1. The Kino Video Company at 333 W. 39th Street in New York, and on the Internet at <http://www.kino.com>, provides an extensive selection of silent film titles.

2. Melodrama is characterized by a combination of simple plot, clearly delineated characters, strong emotional values, spectacle, and moral tone (*Infopedia 2.0*, 1996). According to Lang (1989, p. 8), “The melodrama . . . is first a drama of identity. A woman . . . often dominates the narrative of the family melodrama because individual identity within the patriarchal context—always defined by a masculine standard—is problematic for women.” Today’s media continues the traditions established by the stage/screen melodrama: romance novels and magazines, afternoon soap operas, ethnic and commercial radio shows, and television programs, such as *N.Y.P.D. Blue* and *Dawson’s Creek*. These are a few examples of contemporary melodramas.

3. Both cloze and modified cloze exercises require students to fill in the blank with appropriate vocabulary or language structures. A cloze exercise requires that the student generate the entire word; a modified cloze provides a cue to the correct item by providing the initial letter. In both cases, students should be given a list of words or structures from which to choose.

4. All excerpts from student writing are reprinted here with permission. Surface errors are retained in all excerpts from student work.

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