

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT AFRICA: FILMS AND A/V MATERIALS

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Introduction:

One too frequently hears the complaint - "films don't work ..."
I AGREE, films don't "work" of themselves. In using A/V materials one must be aware of three basic problems, those of INTEGRATION, SELECTION and PRESENTATION.

(A) INTEGRATION: A/V materials must be part of an integrated programme. They must be related to other aspects of the course and must be used as a teaching tool, illustrating specific aspects which the instructor wants to emphasize. A generalized, "well-lets-watch-a-film-about-Africa" approach predisposes an audience to relax and assume they are watching just another TV travelogue. It becomes a period OFF from schoolwork, rather than an alternative learning experience. So build your A/V material into your lesson plans.

(B) SELECTION: Films should be carefully selected as to content and approach.

(i) Does the film illustrate those aspects you want to emphasize?

(ii) If the film is suitable for your purposes, does it nevertheless contain elements and biases you feel your audience should be forewarned to be on the lookout for? Biases need not be altogether bad for teaching purposes. They can be used as illustrations and as the starting point for discussions.

(iii) Does the film present materials in a way suitable for your particular audience - what I call the "blood and boobs" element.

Ethnographic films frequently contain scenes of sacrifice or human scarification which certain audiences might find distressing, just as teenagers, et al, can be distracted by too much bare flesh ... (?) (?) ...

I've put together a critical guide to Films on Africa available in Australia to give you an appreciation of the range of films available as well as help with the process of selection. In addition to technical information such as length, colour or black and white, and location, I've tried to survey the contents, approach and any pronounced biases.

(C) Finally, the problem of PRESENTATION: By presentation, I do not mean the internal presentation within the film itself. Rather, the teacher's presentation of the film. Films should be "introduced" by a brief pre-film talk or handout concerning:

(i) the context of the film: where, when, who, about?

(ii) Use this opportunity to reinforce those points you want your audience to observe.

The film should be followed by a discussion (even if you plan to discuss the film at length at a later session and even if the post-film discussion must be very brief). Ideally, film discussion at length should immediately follow the screening.

(i) Be prepared with one or two fairly generalized questions to get discussion moving. However,

(ii) let the questions emanate for the audience as much as possible. Only when the AUDIENCE asks the questions do you get feedback - indications of THEIR problems/insights/misunderstandings.

I intend to use this afternoon's session to show you some of the range of films available and what you can do with them ... before proceeding, ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

No. 1

I want to begin with one of the potentially most flexible A/V systems, that of the cassette/slide presentation, using a twenty minute colour slide-lecture prepared for the forthcoming La Trobe University Open Day (14 September). The format on that occasion will be a videotape in conjunction with a display of African cloth, costumes and artifacts. However the principle can be applied to many subjects:

- (A) a brief lecture discussing aspects you want to stress
- (B) accompanied by pictures taken from books, journals, etc.

ADVANTAGES of slide/cassette:

- (i) Flexibility and
- (ii) Applicability: you can customize your presentation to your subject, stressing those features or aspects you want.

DISADVANTAGES:

- (i) Time) Writing your script and
) locating your illustrations and
- (ii) Effort) getting them recorded and photographed.
- (iii) Money - cost of production.

In putting together the slide-cassette program, I was mindful of a diverse, generalized audience and therefore the need for something "popular" and "colourful":

- (i) West African cloth is colourful.
- (ii) Crafts such as weaving and dying are "in".
- (iii) I could supplement the slide-lecture with "things", which could be put on display to attract an audience in the first place.

In addition, I wanted to use the opportunity to get across a number of messages:

- (i) La Trobe University offers courses in African studies.
- (ii) African Studies is stimulating and "fun".
- (iii) As well as a series of historical and attitudinal messages:
 - (a) West Africans had culture, crafts, industry, trade, etc., before the coming of the Europeans.
 - (b) European colonial conquest as much more about control of natural resource, imperial trading interests, the electorate and powerful business interests in Britain, as about the so-called "civilizing mission".
 - (c) Africans have proven responsive to marketing opportunities when they are offered a fair return for their labour, but that they cannot be expected to produce goods for low prices just because we want those goods.
 - (d) The effects of commercial change on the African craft industry.
 - (e) Finally, the non-stated and fairly sophisticated point, which some in the audience may grasp, that the economy of the Kano area in Northern Nigeria has shifted from a merchantile-craft industry to that of agricultural primary producer for the world market which the Nigerians are unable to control or effectively influence: development or economic regression?

Hopefully some of those viewing the lecture will draw parallels with Australia.

DISCUSSION FOLLOWING THE SLIDE LECTURE: WEST AFRICAN CLOTH

- (A) What additional points could/should I have made?
- (B) Comments and suggestions?

No. 2 SECOND A/V PRESENTATION: extract from NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE NIGER

We will be seeing the first segment of a 50 minute film made in 1947 by the British Colonial Information Service. It was originally produced presumably as a Pro-British Colonial Propaganda film, however it now seems "dated" and amusing - at times an almost Monty Python tongue-in-cheek spoof at the British colonial service.

It should be emphasized that this was originally produced as a PRO-COLONIAL film:

- (i) That it is the British self-image of what they thought they were doing that was right.
- (ii) That it tells us very little about what Africans really thought of British colonialism and the demands made upon them.
- (iii) That Nigeria, and northern Nigeria in particular, were regarded by the British as an example of the BEST of British Colonial Administration.
- (iv) To fully appreciate the irony of what the British are doing in the first segment, one should point out that bananas are a tropical rainforest-wet region crop, while it doesn't rain for nine months out of every year in Kano (which is in the dry sudan savanna zone). Hence any attempt to grow bananas or even citrus crops in Kano emirate of northern Nigeria is going to require a great deal of irrigation and careful cultivation.
- (v) One can use compulsory, unpaid prison labour to grow exotic crops. You can afford the time and labour to grow such crops in a hostile

environment because you don't have to pay your workers anything. But that won't form the basis for economic development unless you turn the country into a prison camp.

(vi) If you are going to use unpaid, forced prison labour, it might just as well be on some socially and economically more beneficial project.

(vii) The Hausa people of Kano do not eat bananas (just because we like bananas, does not mean that other people will think they are tasty).

(viii) Besides, bananas are not a particularly good foodstuff and do not add anything nutritious to the traditional diet of the Hausa.

(ix) Finally, you might point out how little the British have done to improve the transport and communications network (what has become of "development" and the "civilizing" mission?) Also ask your students to be aware of the racial and cultural biases of the British colonial officials, however well-meaning.

DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS FOLLOWING EXTRACT FROM NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE NIGER

No. 3 AFRICAN ODYSSEY: The Two Worlds of Musembe colour, 17 min.

Moving from the shortcomings of colonialism to the problems of modern Africans in two worlds.

This film explores the contrasts between life-styles in the modern African city (Nairobi) and the native village. Musembe and his parents live in Nairobi, where he goes to a private school and speaks both English and Swahili. On the first anniversary of his grandfather's death, Musembe and his family return to their village for the traditional ceremonies and division of property. Musembe likes the simplicity and friendliness of the village and wishes to stay. His informative comments

give insight into many aspects of life in a modern African state - religion, agriculture, city life, education - and also provides a look at the personal problems involved in changing from an indigenous to a modern way of life.

No. 4 AFRICAN ODYSSEY: The Red Bicycle colour, 14 min.

The story follows a red bicycle as it changes hands and criss-crosses the country, a picture emerges of the economic, cultural and social patterns of modern Kenya. In Nairobi, a village farmer buys the bike for his son, who rides it to school where it is stolen by a poor man who trades it to a government coffee tester for a cow. The tester uses the bike to ride through the fields, where he advises farm workers. When the bike falls from a truck it is picked up by some tourists and eventually returned to the village from which it was stolen, where it is broken up for use in various ways by the entire village.

DISCUSSION -----

