

## The Long and the Short of It: The Use of Short Films in the German Classroom

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### Introduction

An increasing number of German language teachers at the secondary and postsecondary levels in the United States and abroad have started to use short films in the classroom in recent years. Short films such as the famous *Schwarzfahrer* (1993, Pepe Danquart, Germany) have inspired German teachers in many institutional contexts around the world and at various levels of instruction to create original classroom activities and publish lesson plans or develop wikis to discuss teaching strategies using short film.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising that this medium has become popular in language classes in general: the running time of short films is often around 15 minutes, enabling teachers to begin and end a film with pre- and post-viewing activities over the course of one day's lesson plan. It is also not surprising that instructors of German language and culture, in particular, have exhibited a new wave of interest: Germany has one of the most robust short film industries and some of the largest short film festivals in the world. Despite this growing popularity in German-speaking culture and increasing interest among German teachers, there has been relatively little research conducted on effective ways to implement short films into language and culture classes.

The goals of the present article are twofold. First, I will provide an overview of the advantages

to using short film in German language instruction. Examining the unique characteristics of this genre, I intend to show how shorts provide instructors with new opportunities to engage their students in interactive communication, critical thinking, and intercultural learning. Secondly, I will argue that German short film as a course topic or thematic unit allows students to explore a number of new areas of contemporary culture that bring instruction in line with the national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1996/2006). While discussing several examples of German short films, I will show that many aspects of shorts, including technical and aesthetic innovations, the history of the genre, subject matter, and the contemporary short film scene in German-speaking culture, provide teachers with an interesting, overarching theme around which they can build a course that promotes cultural literacy and fits effectively into a standards-based curriculum.

### Characteristics of Short Films

Before discussing the application of short films in the German language classroom, I will address some terminology and describe some characteristics common to many short films. As previous film scholars have noted, a definition of short film is difficult to formulate when one considers the diversity

<sup>1</sup>For an overview of recent scholarship on short film in foreign language teaching in general, see Kinda-Kerekes' dissertation. Welke also gives a useful introduction to the application of short film to German language teaching. The ZUM-Unity network for teachers provides a useful wiki for teachers who wish to use short film to teach various topics, including German as a foreign language: «<http://wiki.zum.de/Kurzfilme>». The Goethe Institut provides a useful

compilation of nine recent shorts. *Kurz & Gut macht Schule* can be ordered through the Goethe Institut in Boston, and the Goethe Institut Belgien provides useful lessons and transcripts of all the films on the DVD: «<http://www.goethe.de/ins/be/bru/lhr/mat/dkt/de-index.htm>». Also, an early study on the use of short film in the teaching of various disciplines by Berresheim and Hoersch provides interesting background information.

of these films in the past and present (Wolf; Kraja and Gjuzi; Welke). The most obvious parameter to use in differentiating shorts from feature films is length: short films are between a few seconds and 60 minutes, although most are about 15 minutes in length. Since the earliest years of the film industry, length was often a criterion used to distinguish film types, including “one-reelers” (ca. 11 minutes) and “two-reelers” (Monaco). As film curator Reinhard W. Wolf notes, because of technical limitations, most films in the early days of motion pictures would be considered short films by today’s standards (2). In fact, as Kraja and Gjuzi point out, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences started recognizing short films in various categories as early as 1931, when it included animated, live-action, and documentary short film awards and defined short films as anything less than 40 minutes in length (126). Most film festivals follow similar criteria of length, including the *Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin* that classifies short films as those under 30 minutes, or the *Deutscher Kurzfilmpreis* that lists two categories, namely, films under 30 minutes and those less than seven minutes in length.

Despite the wide range of running time among short films, their overall brevity compared to that of feature films is the only consistent characteristic that all shorts have in common. This lack of similarity across short films is a result of the wide range of subject matter and themes as well as the diverse cinematic techniques employed by directors. Wolf describes this variation as follows:

[Short film] encompasses both black-and-white and hand-coloured films, documentaries, fiction, experimental films, animation, dramas and melodramas, thrillers and horror films, slapstick and comedy, as well as commercials, cultural and educational films and artists’ films. Short film preserves the early diversity of the cinema, while history has increasingly forced „big-screen cinema“ into narrowly constricted boundaries. (2)

As a result of the blurred distinctions and an “anything goes” attitude towards short films, directors are often more innovative and creative artistically and technically, liberated by a genre without clear definitions and expectations (see Kremiski for more information on short film makers’ attitudes toward innovation).

Although not a characteristic that defines all shorts, technical and artistic innovations are quite common in contemporary short films. In terms of technical innovation, many of the animated shorts

experiment with new forms of computer-generated effects and animation techniques that are easier and more cost-efficient to carry out over the course of a short film than feature films with high production costs. Short films are often the testing ground for new technical advances. According to Wolf: “From electronic image processing (software) and production to digital formats (data media) to digital distribution (Internet, mobile phones), everything new under the sun was first tried out in short film” (2). As for artistic innovation, the length of shorts often forces directors and screenwriters to employ unique narrative devices that create more tension and complexity than in feature films. Kinda-Kerekes describes this as follows: “Diese erhöhte Komplexität wird durch verdichtende Formmittel, wie der fragmentarischen Darstellung der Spanne an Erzählzeit, dem Rätselcharakter des Titels, eine häufige Abruptheit von Anfang und Ende und die Verwendung von Symbolen als Informationsträger hervorgerufen” (12). Furthermore, because of the abbreviated length of many short films, the plot is often streamlined with little screen-time devoted to background and character development, quickly moving towards a climax without much resolution and aftermath. The beginning rarely involves any kind of back story while the ending is often vague and uncertain. The result is a complex bundle of experiences, feelings, messages expressed more intensively through image and language than is common among feature-length films.

Besides the shortened length, innovation, and unique narrative features, another characteristic short films share is the unique circumstances under which they are shown. Because of their brevity, short films have always been shown in different contexts than feature length films. As late as the 1970s, shorts were often shown as supporting films immediately before feature films in German theaters. As Wehn points out, trailers and commercials have gradually replaced shorts in order to provide movie theaters with more revenue (3). However, contemporary short films in Germany or in the US have retained their unique status on the periphery. In Germany, short film on television is limited to a few late-night time slots or special programs on some channels, including the important *Kurz-Schluss* program on ARTE that also shows interviews with independent short filmmakers. Another forum for short film in many countries is the short film festival. Most major cities in Germany, including Cologne, Munich, Hamburg, and Berlin, have hosted large short film festivals for years in addition to occasional student-run short film festivals. Per-

haps the most important venue for short film has been the internet. Some new filmmakers take advantage of well-known, open-access web sites such as youtube or ifilm, in which viewers can provide immediate feedback on new short films, while others make their work available through professional online databases that control the viewing and downloading of each film. As Wehn notes in her introduction to short film on the web, the internet has brought about a renaissance in short film, allowing everyone to create short films and to view them at almost any time (3). Unlike feature films in which production and consumption are limited by financial constraints, short films are liberated by many of these constraints and allow both filmmakers and viewers a more direct and intimate relationship with each other.

### Use of Short Film in the German Classroom

Previous publications have discussed various ways in which the unique characteristics of short films can be advantageous to German teachers (Welke; Kraja and Gjuzi). As pointed out by Kinda-Kerekes, the length of shorts is particularly beneficial in the language classroom (12). Naturally, feature films often take up a significant amount of instructional time that could, otherwise, be devoted to interactive, communicative activities or intensive work with the actual themes that unravel over the course of a film; short films, on the other hand, allow teachers and students to work on activities immediately before and after viewing in order to focus students' attention on the content and language. Also, teachers avoid having to split up short films over more than one lesson. When students' viewing experience is interrupted several times, they often fail to grasp the overall structure and development of plot or characters. A short film such as *Kleingeld* (1999, Marc-Andreas Borchert, Germany) provides an example of a film that lends itself well to classroom activities to be undertaken in a single lesson.<sup>2</sup> *Kleingeld* involves a beggar and a successful businessman who gives the beggar change on the street every day except for one day when conflict arises after he doesn't have anything

smaller than a large bill that he doesn't wish to give out. The film deals with broader themes such as homelessness, wealth, human compassion, and guilt. Because it is only 15 minutes in length, such a film as *Kleingeld* allows instructors to build most of a day's lesson around the film without having to show it in smaller segments. Pre-viewing activities with this film could include brainstorming with a screen shot of the businessman putting change in the beggar's cup or vocabulary preparation exercises; post-viewing activities may involve students writing a new ending or retelling the story from a different perspective. Thus, instructors have much more flexibility in lesson planning with such films than they would with feature films that are often too long to be shown during one lesson.

Another benefit of short films is that teachers can show them multiple times in a lesson. This flexibility allows students the opportunity to practice "bottom-up" activities that focus on vocabulary and dialogue in one viewing, for instance, and then engage in "top-down" activities to understand the plot or general themes and concepts in the short film during a different viewing. As pointed out by Welke, a film such as *Alles für den Hund* (2000, Birgit Lehmann, Germany) is well suited for multiple showings (23). Because the film is only 12 minutes in length, students may concentrate on the characters and plot in the first viewing, focus on vocabulary and dialogue in the second, and view the film a third or fourth time to retell the story orally or reconstruct the film in written form for homework. Such multiple viewings could be spread over different lessons or take place on the same day, depending on the length of the lesson.

Thirdly, the length of short films often makes intensive work with the film's short screenplay more attractive to teachers. Unlike feature films whose screenplays are often too long for more detailed analysis by the students, short films have screenplays that are brief with fewer scene changes and less dialogue for students to read through. For instance, the transcript for *Schwarzfahrer* is useful for students to examine the monologue of the racist woman on the *S-Bahn* for new vocabulary or for closer analysis of the stereotypes that she describes in her speech to the young man sitting next to her. Because the screenplay is so short, those students

<sup>2</sup>All films discussed here are listed in Appendix B. Appendix A includes sample activities of one film, *Fanny*, which can be undertaken at the intermediate level. For additional examples of lesson plans that in-

volve shorts, see the Goethe Institut's suggested activities for use with films from *Kurz & Gut macht Schule*: «<http://www.goethe.de/ins/be/bru/lhr/mat/dkt/deindex.htm>»

who might otherwise lose their motivation in working through the subtleties of complicated dialogue can remain on task. Such a short transcript opens new avenues for teachers to work more intensively with vocabulary exercises that allow students to focus on phrases used in context without overburdening them with long lists of new words.

As discussed earlier, short films often have abbreviated story arcs with fewer characters. This characteristic also enables teachers to focus more intensely on character motivations and point of view than they would with other instructional material or video. Unlike long films with numerous major and minor characters, short films often involve a limited cast. For example, in the short film *Fanny* (1996, Andreas Schmid-Thomae, Germany), the audience gets to know only three characters over the course of the 15 minutes of the film: a young man named Al, his best friend, and a young woman named Fanny, whom Al would like to ask out on a date. The film follows the three characters over a short period of time in which Al gets Fanny's phone number during an encounter in a park but loses the number only to discover that fate brings them back together again. The film lends itself well to an activity in which each group in the class picks one of the few characters or an omniscient narrator and retells the story from that perspective. In feature length films with complicated plot lines, numerous scenes, and a large cast of characters, this kind of in-class activity is often difficult for students and teachers to carry out for logistical reasons.

In addition, short films offer great opportunities for students to expand on what they've seen by creating alternative endings or filling in missing background information. Welke takes note of this quality of concentrated plotlines in short film, describing it as follows: "Alles, was für die Geschichte und das Thema relevant ist, wird unmittelbar danach dargeboten, d.h. der Kurzfilm baut ... auf keiner Vorgeschichte auf" (22). This characteristic of short films makes them more accessible to students during activities in which they have to infer and create background stories for characters to explain their motivations in the rest of the film. In the same way, the abrupt endings of many short films often leave questions unanswered and the fate of the characters uncertain. In her 1998 book on the history of short film, Heinrich describes this unique characteristic, pointing out how the audience must often work hard to interpret and process the meaning of a short film's ending rather than passively accept what has happened (154). Language teachers

can take advantage of such abrupt endings in order to get students to expand on what they've seen and continue the story in their own words. In the final scene of the Swiss short film *Auf der Strecke* (2007, Reto Caffi, Germany and Switzerland), for instance, the protagonist, Rolf, a security guard at a department store who secretly loves a fellow employee, Sarah, feels guilty for not preventing a fatal attack on a man on the subway who turns out to be Sarah's brother. Rolf can't bring himself to tell Sarah that he could have stopped the gang from attacking. The last shot in the final scene is open-ended: Rolf is watching Sarah through the store's security camera, and she returns the camera's gaze, staring at Rolf with an expression of helplessness, hope, and despair. Such an ending lends itself well to an activity in which students put themselves in the shoes of the characters and analyze their motivations. The abruptness of the ending allows for multiple interpretations and the opportunity that students expand on what they've seen in creative and meaningful ways.

One final advantage to using short films in the language classroom is the diversity of themes. Since each short film is quite different from the next, instructors can choose from a broad spectrum of topics and subject matter to fit the needs of their class. As Wolf points out, "[f]rom the broad repertoire of short films available, suitable material can be found for every application, every intellectual level and every target group" (3). For instance, teachers can select short films that correspond to almost any of the typical textbook themes on any level, such as "Umwelt" (*Das Rad*; 2001, Heidi Wittlinger, Germany or *Die Rechnung*; 2009, Peter Wedel, Germany), "Multikulturelle Gesellschaft" (*Schwarzfahrer*) or "Familie und Partnerschaft" (*Fanny* or *Der Ausreißer*; 2004, Ulrike Grote, Germany). However, as an authentic instructional tool, short films also provide an opportunity for even deeper exploration of themes than traditional instructional material usually allows. Many German short films allow students to investigate a wide variety of historical, culture, and societal issues from new perspectives. For instance, Leni Riefenstahl's historical documentary short *Tag der Freiheit* (1935, Germany) offers teachers and students the opportunity to discuss the persuasive power of propaganda in the Nazi era and the significant effect of media on personal and societal values. The recent Oscar-winning short film *Spielzeugland* (2007, Jochen Alexander Freydank, Germany) explores issues of guilt, lies, and childhood fantasy in its portrayal of the deportation of a Jewish family to a

concentration camp from the perspective of a young boy and his mother. Other films, such as *Dufte* (2001, Ingo Rasper, Germany), *Fraktur* (2009, Hans Steinbichler, Germany), and *Abhaun!* (2004, Christoph Wermke, Germany) deal with issues of materialism, unemployment, and *Heimat* as they pertain to identity in Germany and the former DDR and the *Wende*. In sum, the ever-growing collection of German-speaking short films is a treasure-trove of authentic instructional material that can be suited to a vast range of themes to be covered in beginning through advanced classes. Although the language in these films is often challenging to beginning students, teachers can cater their lessons to fit the appropriate level and type of task.<sup>3</sup>

### **“German Short Film” as a Course Topic: A Case for Standards-Based Course Design**

As the previous sections have discussed, there are a number of benefits to teachers and students who are engaged with short films in the German language classroom. Many of these advantages are apparent when short film is used as a supplement to regular instructional material in order to fill in gaps or provide variety to lesson plans. However, because of the unique connection between contemporary German culture and today's short film scene, another possibility arises for those German teachers who wish to explore short film in more depth: teachers may choose to design an entire course or a longer thematic unit around the short film as a cultural phenomenon. “German Short Film” as a course topic provides students with an opportunity not only to view and learn from actual short films; through course readings, group projects and presentations, and writing assignments, students can focus on historical, economic, technological, and societal issues pertaining to short films as well. In other words, students learn about short films in German-speaking society at the same time

that they are engaged with the subject matter and linguistic elements of the films themselves.

As the following section discusses, such a course or thematic unit fits effectively into a curriculum that follows the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1996/2006; henceforth referred to as the Standards). As Arens points out, the Standards provide a model for curriculum design in which language and culture are taught in tandem, allowing teachers the opportunity to meet the goal of “a joint literacy about a second language (L2) and culture (C2)” (321). Although mainly conceived of as a set of guiding principles for large-scale curriculum design, the Standards can be applied equally as well on a small scale to provide a framework within which a single course at the post-secondary level or a thematic unit for Intermediate or Pre-Advanced (according to ACTFL Performance Guidelines) at the secondary level may be designed. In the case of the short film as the central theme for a course or thematic unit, the Standards’ “5 C’s” of Communications, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities lay the groundwork for planning and preparing course material that is both authentic and interesting and which can be easily modified to fit the changing needs of both students and teachers.

“German Short Film” as a course topic emphasizes various aspects of shorts that highlight their unique status in German-speaking culture. First of all, students could have the opportunity to explore short films historically if enough time is available over the course of a semester. By reading essays and online articles on film history, students have the opportunity to discuss what was meant by the term *Kurzfilm* early in the history of film, tracing its development through decades as it diverged from or is currently different from feature films.<sup>4</sup> The issue of American influence on German film is relevant in this discussion, and readings that highlight differences between Hollywood blockbusters and independent German short films are especially topical.

<sup>3</sup> Note that most of the short films available on DVD that have been released as part of international compilations are in the original language with English subtitles. Thus, the option is available with most short films, that the teacher can choose subtitles or not, depending on the methodological approach of the teacher and the linguistic needs of the students.

<sup>4</sup> The study by the AG Kurzfilm entitled *Kurzfilm in Deutschland: Studie zur Situation des kurzen*

*Filmes* provides over a hundred pages with a wide range of articles, facts, graphs, basic information, and recent polls on the short film scene in Germany. Although this authentic material is linguistically challenging for language learners, teachers can make them accessible through scaffolding, vocabulary preparation, and modification for use as the main source of learning material for the class.



Secondly, a course on “German Short Film” could focus partly on the perspective of the film makers themselves. Podcasts with interviews of German short film directors, online bios, and behind-the-scene documentaries and printed interviews help provide students with a fresh perspective as they explore the artistic motivations of directors, many of whom are just getting started with their careers in cinema (Schmidt; Kremski). Peter Kremski’s *Überraschende Begegnungen der kurzen Art* includes printed interviews with short film directors concerning their views on artistic innovation and inspiration. Students can also find out more about directors and screenwriters’ background and education, investigating the typical curriculum at *Filmhochschulen* in German-speaking countries that produce so many young, award-winning filmmakers. Various online sources, including the online movie production blog «www.filmtrip.de» provide students with up-to-date, interesting insight into the lives of young producers, directors, and actors on set and in the editing room as they put a film together. Other sub-topics that pertain to the production of short films in Germany that could be of interest to students include the financial issues involved in producing and distributing the films as well as the effect that the media have on artistic innovation.

A third aspect that a course on short film might address is the viewing experience. In particular, students could explore such questions as “Who sees short films in Germany?” “How or where are short films shown?” or “What role does television play in promoting short films in German-speaking countries?” or “What attitudes do many movie-goers have towards short film in Germany compared to other countries?” Class discussion and assignments could highlight differences between the movie-going experiences of viewers in the US and Germany and focus on the popular film festivals in large cities in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.

Lastly, a larger thematic unit such as this could focus on the technical side of short film creation. As a final group project, students could be asked to write, direct, record, and show their film at a mini short film festival at their school or university while making it available online. They might also take the opportunity to explore secondary literature on the influence of the media in the digital age and the role of technology in German culture. In the end, students would have the opportunity to explore the production side of creating a short film while learning more about the multiple perspectives of the consumers, viewers, media, and artists in contemporary German-speaking society.

In terms of the Standards, this topic would clearly emphasize Communication on many levels. Students could not only be asked to view and analyze short films themselves to improve their listening skills; they could also be asked to exchange opinions on the films in groups, analyze the written transcripts, converse informally on a range of topics, or engage in written essays, reviews of the films, online journals documenting their thoughts about what they have seen. Thus, students would have the opportunity to engage in both interpersonal communication in face-to-face conversation with each other as well as presentational communication in which they describe cinematic aspects of a film or present background information to an audience. The films that the students create would also allow them to communicate, expressing themselves artistically while using appropriate language in a variety of contexts. In other words, teachers would have a range of activities at their disposal that correspond to the Standards’ view of Communication.

Secondly, a course or unit on the German short film would also emphasize the goal of the Standards to focus on Cultures. This component of the Standards recommends that students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied (9). In a course on the German short film, students could discuss cultural *practices*, including what it is like to go to the movies in German-speaking countries (including topics like seating and tickets, concessions, dubbing and subtitles, or commercials before films) or seeing short films at student film festivals. The perspectives of the culture are reflected best in the films themselves and the attitudes of the directors and screenwriters as they focus on various humorous and serious themes and subject matter. Thus, students would also have the opportunity to focus on the relationship between cultural *products*, the short films themselves, and the *perspectives* of German-speaking culture, including the attitudes, values, and ideas of filmmakers and viewers that produce and experience the short films online, in movie theaters, or on television.

The third category of the national standards includes Connections to other disciplines. The most obvious connection that students would make in a language course that focuses on German short film is to the discipline of film studies. Students have the opportunity in such a course to examine the technical, economic, and artistic side of production of film in contemporary German society while gaining a better understanding of film history and the

influence of media. Students also learn new vocabulary in order to describe cinematic elements like camera angles, color, perspective, and lighting. Other connections could be made to fields such as marketing, in the case of the short film festival that students organize, as well as sociology and economics, whereby students examine the financial issues that influence film production and the societal attitudes towards independent films vs. blockbusters at the multiplex. Moreover, as part of the Connections Standard, students should also learn to “acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures” (9). The study by the AG Kurzfilm provides invaluable information for students to learn to branch out and find other sources of information as it presents a wide range of views on the short film and its history, production, and consumption. As a result, students gain a unique understanding of these perspectives at the same time as they explore the films as cultural artifacts.

A course such as this also meets the standard of Comparisons in a number of ways. The Standards emphasize comparison of the students’ language and culture to the second language and culture. It is clear from a course in which students have the opportunity to view numerous short films in German that they can focus on a wide range of linguistic elements and compare them with the grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation of their native language. With the aid of transcripts or subtitles, teachers can cater their lessons to the level of their students. Moreover, a course on “German Short Film” allows for a number of comparisons between cultures. For instance, students might compare the short film scene in German-speaking countries with that of the US; alternatively, students could compare the pressures of Hollywood to create blockbusters with the artistic innovations and political messages of student short films in Germany; other general comparisons might be of the attitudes towards movie-going in the US vs. those in German-speaking countries or the opinions of filmmakers in Hollywood to those of German-speaking directors, actors, or producers.

Communities, the last of the five national standards, could also be emphasized in a course such as this. The Standards encourage students to use language both within and beyond their academic setting, becoming life-long learners who make use of their language skills for “personal enjoyment and enrichment” (9). In a course on the German short film, student groups might have the opportu-

nity to design and edit their own film and make it available online or at a local short film festival that they help organize. Thus, students are reaching beyond the walls of their classroom to the community, using their familiarity with the cultural, technical, and artistic aspects of short film to communicate with others. Moreover, students might aspire to travel to German-speaking countries to take in some of the short film festivals during studies abroad or at a later point in their lives if they have the opportunity to travel in the future.

In sum, all of the Standards’ 5 Cs could be met by a course that focused entirely or partially on various aspects of the German short film. This course draws on a wide variety of authentic materials, including the short films themselves, along with articles, bios, podcasts, videos, essays, and interviews that shed light on numerous aspects of the short film scene in contemporary German-speaking countries. Such a topic enables teachers to focus students’ attention to linguistic elements of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse in the short films while introducing them to the cultural impact that these films have on viewers, filmmakers, and the media in the German-speaking world.

## Conclusion

For German language teachers in various institutional settings, short films can fulfill a number of instructional and curricular needs. Because of their brevity, innovation, compact storytelling, and open-endedness, they provide instructors with a unique medium with which to engage students in various communicative modes. Such a medium of instruction clearly fits the changing needs of students today. With shortened video clips on the internet as part of many students’ daily lives, they are used to dealing with smaller bundles of language and image that convey often profound messages. Many young students of the digital age are used to the processing of shortened, intense video stimuli and able to handle the technical aspects of their production and distribution. Moreover, because of the wide range of subject matter and themes addressed in German short films, teachers can tailor their selection to the interests and needs of their students. As previous sections of the paper have shown, these films lend themselves well to a variety of activities for students from different levels of a language program.

In addition, as interesting authentic cultural artifacts that are relevant in contemporary Ger-

man-speaking society, short films also provide teachers with new opportunities in instructional design that emphasize the five C's of the national standards. This article proposes that a course or a thematic unit could be centered on the topic of German short film. As a course at the secondary or post-secondary level, students could analyze historical, economic, artistic, and sociological aspects of the short film at the same time that they experience these films firsthand in class. By reading online articles, listening to podcasts with interviews, creating a short film as a group, or organizing a mini short film festival in their local community, students gain new insight into the phenomenon of the short film in German (and American) culture.

Such a course underscores the importance of using authentic instructional materials to promote intercultural learning. Both teachers and students can be engaged with the products of German-speaking culture, focusing on important themes, views, and values expressed in short films that are created by and for native speakers. As outlined above, the topic of German short film gives students the opportunity to compare and contrast cultures while they build new confidence in their language learning skills. When situated within the parameters established by the Standards, a course such as this might enable learners to move beyond the subject matter covered in their textbooks to gain insight into intercultural similarities and differences. Thus, students explore new perspectives in German-speaking culture through short film at the same time that they communicate their own feelings, opinions, and experiences in viewing and studying film. In sum, short films function as both the means by which learners become more familiar with German language and culture and the object of their study.

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## Appendix A. Sample Activities Using the Short Film "Fanny"<sup>a</sup>

### Vor dem Film

#### Thema: Alte Freunde

- Warum verlieren Freunde manchmal den Kontakt zueinander?
- Haben Sie den Kontakt zu einem guten Freund verloren? Warum?
- Wie bleiben Leute in Ihrer Altersgruppe heutzutage in Kontakt miteinander?

### Während des Films

Wie beschreiben Sie die Figuren im Film? Was hat jede Figur mit den anderen im Film zu tun? Was machen die Figuren im Film?

<sup>a</sup>Thanks to Colleen Neary-Sundquist for her suggestions in working with the film *Fanny*.



	<i>Persönliche Eigenschaften</i>	<i>Beziehung zu den anderen Figuren im Film</i>	<i>Was macht er/sie im Film?</i>
Al	freundlich, sympathisch..	hat sich in Fanny verliebt, ist ein guter Freund von Max...	verliert die Telefonnummer von Fanny, wartet auf Fanny im Park...
Fanny			
Max			
Nora			
Jean			

## Nach dem Film

### A. Fragen zum Film

- Was glauben Sie—wie haben Fanny und Al sich kennengelernt?
- Warum haben sie den Kontakt verloren?

### B. Gruppenarbeit: Zusammenfassungen

Schreiben Sie fünf Sätze, in denen Sie den Film zusammenfassen. Erzählen Sie die Geschichte aus der Perspektive *einer* Figur im Film (Fanny, Al, Max, Nora oder Jean). Benutzen Sie dabei das Plusquamperfekt.

*Beispiel:* Nachdem Fanny und Al den Kontakt verloren hatten, haben sie einander zufällig im Park getroffen.

### C. Gruppenarbeit: Die Geschichte weiter erzählen

Was glauben Sie—wie geht die Geschichte weiter? Seien Sie kreativ und schreiben Sie eine Fortsetzung!

- Was ist mit Fanny und Al passiert?
- und mit Max und Nora?
- und Jean und der Frau im Park?

### D. Partnerarbeit: Telefonieren in Deutschland

Sind Telefongespräche in Deutschland anders als in Ihrem Land? Wie? Spielen Sie jetzt diese Szenen mit einem Partner/ einer Partnerin! Benutzen Sie dabei die folgenden Ausdrücke!

*Szene 1:* Al ruft Fanny an. Nora antwortet das Telefon.

*Szene 2:* Max ruft Nora an. Fanny antwortet das Telefon.

Hier Name.

Kann ich bitte \_\_\_\_\_ sprechen?

Ja, Moment bitte.

Sie ist leider nicht da.

Kann ich ihr/ihm etwas ausrichten?

Ich sage ihr/ihm Bescheid.

## Hausaufgaben

### A. Befehle geben

Al ist sehr vergesslich. Was soll er machen, wenn er eine von diesen Sachen vergisst? Geben Sie ihm Rat!

Al hat seine *Hauschlüssel* vergessen.

Geldtasche

Handy

Hausaufgabe

Deutschbuch

Kuli

Papier

### B. Der Film heutzutage

Könnten die Ereignisse des Films genauso heute passieren? Warum oder warum nicht? Wie wäre der Film heute anders? Schreiben Sie eine Zusammenfassung des Films, als ob der Film heutzutage stattfinden würde.

## Appendix B. Selected Short Films and Availability

<i>Film Title</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Availability<sup>a</sup></i>
<i>Abhaun!</i>	Christoph Wermke	2004	Germany	<a href="http://www.kurzfilmverleih.com">www.kurzfilmverleih.com</a>
<i>Alles für den Hund</i>	Birgit Lehmann	2000	Germany	<a href="http://www.arte.de">www.arte.de</a>
<i>Auf der Strecke</i>	Reto Caffi	2007	Germany, Switzerland	iTunes
<i>Der Ausreißer</i>	Ulrike Grote	2004	Germany	<i>A Collection of 2005 Academy Award Nominated Short Films.</i> (DVD compilation)
<i>Dufte</i>	Ingo Rasper	2001	Germany	<i>Kurz &amp; Gut macht Schule</i>
<i>Fanny</i>	Andreas Schmid-Thomae	1996	Germany	<i>Short Films for Example</i> (Inter Nationes, VHS compilation)
<i>Fraktur</i>	Hans Steinbichler	2009	Germany	<i>Deutschland 09</i> (DVD compilation)
<i>Kleingeld</i>	Marc-Andreas Borchert	1999	Germany	<i>Kurz &amp; Gut macht Schule</i>
<i>Das Rad</i>	Heidi Wittlinger	2001	Germany	<a href="http://www.youtube.com">www.youtube.com</a>
<i>Die Rechnung</i>	Peter Wedel	2009	Germany	<a href="http://www.germanwatch.org">www.germanwatch.org</a>
<i>Schwarzfahrer</i>	Pepe Danquart	1993	Germany	<i>Kurz in Berlin</i> (DVD compilation)
<i>Spielzeugland</i>	Jochen Alexander Freydank	2007	Germany	iTunes
<i>Tag der Freiheit</i>	Leni Riefenstahl	1935	Germany	<i>Short 8-Vision</i> (DVD compilation)
<sup>a</sup> <i>Kurz &amp; Gut macht Schule</i> can be ordered through the Goethe Institut Boston. Other DVD compilations listed here are available through most commercial media outlets ( <a href="http://amazon.de">amazon.de</a> , <a href="http://amazon.com">amazon.com</a> )				