

The differences between novels and films

—Enhance literature teaching by using films

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Abstract: Many films are based on novels. However, each of them uses different ways to tell the similar stories. The paper discusses the differences from several aspects in terms of their nature, ways of narration, as well as the effect they bring about. It mainly focuses on the special benefits of using films in English language teaching. Finally, a sample film-based activity which could be used to enhance language classroom is illustrated.

Key words: novels; films; English language teaching

In the twentieth century, there are two culturally dominant ways of experiencing fiction available to us: the visual forms of film and the prose forms of novel (Montgomery, et al., 1992, p. 191). Indeed, these two different media have gained millions of fans all over the world. Many literary masterpieces have been represented through films. Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Ann Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) are all based on novels. Quite often, people like to compare the novel with the film that tells the same story, and many people are inclined to agree with the opinion that films could hardly defeat the novels in telling the same story. Presumably, on one hand, this is mainly because of the fact that it is the novel that introduces the story to the readers first. Therefore, whatever the author writes in the story occupies the readers' mind and become the only "correct" way of telling a certain story. On the other hand, the paper conceives that the differences between novels and films by their very nature decide that these two forms of media will never create the same effects on presenting stories.

1. Important differences between films and novels

1.1 Formal differences: Visual image vs. verbal sign

The philosopher C. S. Peirce used the terms **sign** and **icon** to explain the relationship between two things when one thing can represent another (Montgomery, 1992, p. 193). The term sign refers to the arbitrary relationship between two things, for example, a word "flower" can be a sign of a flower; also, a picture of a flower can be an icon of the flower which shows a less arbitrary relationship between the two. Obviously, a picture of a flower is much closer to a flower than the word "flower" (Monaco, 1981). As mediums of representation, film is made of icons, while prose is made of signs (Montgomery, 1992, p. 193). In other words, the images in the film have more direct and immediate relationship to what it describes, while the words seldom do. Additionally, the sound in the film could greatly enhance the audiences' understanding. Therefore, it is true that film's grasp of

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