

BBC Learning English

Talk about English

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About this script

Please note that this is not a word for word transcript of the programme as broadcast. In the recording process changes may have been made which will not be reflected here.

Anna: Hello, I'm Anna Jones

Callum: I'm Callum Robertson

Anna: And this is Talk about English, live from London. – the last in our series on the topic of film. And in today's programme.....

Callum: We'll be talking to a film reviewer from Empire magazine

Anna: We'll be hearing about the kinds of films that you enjoy

Callum: There'll be tips on how watching films can help you understand difficult English books

Anna: And we'll announce the winner of our film review competition.

Callum: All that and more in today's Talk about English.

Anna: Our guest today is Helen O' Hara who is the Reviews Editor at Empire magazine. Hello Helen

Helen: Hello

- Anna:** Can you tell us what kind of magazine Empire is and who it's for?
- Anna:** And you're the reviews editor at the magazine? Does that mean you watch films all day?? What's a typical day like in the life of a film reviewer?
- Anna:** And is there one film that you've reviewed that stands out for you as one of the best of all time?
- Anna:** Well we'll be hearing more from Helen throughout today's programme and a little later she will be starring in a quiz to show us how much she knows about films. But first let's look at how watching films can help you to enjoy reading difficult books in English. Here's Amber Barnfather with some advice which is based on ideas by teacher trainer Martin Parrott.

Many works of fiction are also available on film. We can watch **classics** (from Shakespeare's plays to passionate 19th century novels such as Charlotte Bronte's 'Jane Eyre'); we can watch **blockbuster thrillers** such as Dan Brown's 'The Da Vinci Code'; and we can watch films of modern popular novels like Nick Hornby's 'About a Boy'.

And when we talk about films, nowadays, these are often available on video or DVD, for watching at home or in the classroom.

And, how exciting to hear the original text of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' while watching the wild and wonderful film of the play directed by Baz Luhrmann and starring Leonardo DiCaprio. It's a **visually stunning movie**, and the **striking sets** and the fast action, together with the **bold soundtrack**, make it very easy to understand the gist of Shakespeare's language. You get swept up in the famous story of the star-crossed lovers.

So if watching the film of a Shakespeare play may seem a bit daunting, remember the visual support and evocative music can help you understand the words and prepare you for reading the text. Try it!

Anna: And we'll be hearing more from Amber about how films can help you improve your English a little later in the programme. But first let's take a closer look at some of the language of film we heard there. Can you help us out with some of the language, Callum?

Anna: And Helen – are these the kinds of words that you would regularly use when you write a film review?

Anna: OK, well now it's time to hear some more advice from Amber about how films can help you improve your English. She starts by talking about films with subtitles in different languages.

Many films are available with **subtitles** in other languages. For example, the Oscar-winning film of Jane Austen's witty novel 'Sense and Sensibility' - directed by Ang Lee and starring Emma Thompson (who wrote the **screenplay**) – is available on DVD with subtitles in more than 10 languages.

Watching a film with subtitles in your language is an excellent way to get used to the rhythms, patterns and sounds of English, while still understanding in detail what is going on. And in Ang Lee's film of 'Sense and Sensibility' there are period songs to help you understand the feelings of the characters.

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Many films may be available **dubbed** into your language – in other words the original script has been translated, and actors have re-recorded it. These dubbed versions are perhaps not as useful as subtitled versions, but they can still help you with reading the book later on - you can absorb important information about the setting, plot and characters.

So, that's a look at different *types* of film. But how can we *use* them to help our reading? Watching the film through from start to finish is the obvious way. But if the novel has a **twist** at the end, or if there is some kind of mystery, you may want to stop the film before the end so that you can have the satisfaction of discovering this from the book!

You might also want to watch the film in short sections. You can read the part that you have watched, and then watch a bit more. Or instead of using the film to make your reading easier, you might want to use it as a check: read a section first and *then* watch the film. The film might be different from the book and you can have fun trying to spot the differences!

And finally, we usually read privately, on our own. But if you're going to watch a film, why not invite a friend and discuss what you've understood and enjoyed afterwards!

Anna: Some useful advice there about the ways to improve your English through watching films. And Amber used some common film terms there Callum – can you explain them for us?

Anna: Well we heard there that watching a film with subtitles in your language is an excellent way to get used to the rhythms, patterns and sounds of English, while still understanding in detail what is going on. Listen now to Max Polya-Vitry who was brought up in Belgium with a French mother and British father. On the telephone to me he explains how watching films as a young child, especially funny films, in English was much more enjoyable fun for him than learning in the classroom. He says he learned English from watching the films without even realising it.

Anna: And what kinds of films did he watch to help him learn English?

Anna: Well Max says that he learned comedy sketches from a British TV series called "Monty Python" off by heart – he learnt them word for word. Callum in your experience as a teacher did you have students whose English improved by watching films?

Anna: And of course repeating or copying scripts word for word might sometimes get you into trouble as Max found out.

Anna: So Max was told off by his parents for using swear words which he he'd learned by watching films and thought would be cool to copy and use himself.

Anna: Now its time to hear some comments – we asked you to write in with some of your memories of your favourite films.

Anna: You're listening to Talk about English, live form London. I'm Anna Jones and with me are Callum Robertson and the film reviewer Helen O Hara. Before we continue our topic of film, here's Callum with news of some changes to our programme next week.

Callum: Yes – nest week there won't be a webcast at all as we are all going to be on the road travelling around the UK meeting learners and teachers. If you want to follow us in our travels around the north of England you'll be able to do so by following the road show links on our webpage.

Anna: Well now it's time to hear from BBC Learning English colleague Jo Reffin. She's got some interesting information about the composer John Williams. – he's composed or written music for lots of famous films.

Now writing music for films is no easy job – you have to make sure the music represents the pictures the audience sees and creates the right mood for the film. Listen to this piece of music – do you recognise it?

Jo: That is the scary theme music to the film 'Jaws'. The music to a film can be called either the soundtrack or the theme music. A theme is basically a main topic or idea so the theme music represents the main idea of the film. 'Jaws' was a famous film in the 1970s – it's a film about a shark, a very large fish

with big teeth, which attacks lots of people. It's a scary film so the music is frightening. So how do you begin to compose a famous piece of music like that? Here's John Williams – which musical instruments does he talk about?

John Williams

Well I sat with Steven at the piano and began to play an idea for jaws that was just two notes, and then eventually a third note played at the lower end of the piano and he said, do you think that can really work something as simple as that and as mindless as that is? And I remember saying to him that when it's presented by the celli and basses of the orchestra that it will have a very ominous and threatening kind of feeling.

Jo: So John talked about the piano and the cello. A cello is basically a very large violin that you play sitting down usually in a classical orchestra. John also mentioned the word 'bass', the lower notes played in a band or orchestra. He mentioned these instruments as plurals though – so more than one cello, celli and lots of bass instruments, basses. The word 'celli' however is rather formal and quite unusual. You are much more likely to hear the word cello or cellos.

He says he sat with Steven, that's Steven Spielberg – the famous film director – who decides how the film is made – and he played just two notes. A musical note.

Jo: Then he played a third note at the lower end of the piano.

Jo: He wondered if something so mindless would work. Here mindless means simple. However, John Williams thought if they used cellos and bass instruments it would sound ominous and threatening. Ominous and threatening are very good words to describe a film about a scary shark attacking people. If something is ominous it means you feel worried that something bad is going to

happen – a shark attack maybe? And threatening means something very similar, giving a warning that something bad is going to happen.

Anna: And that was Jo Reffin with the first part of her report about film music.

Anna: And now its time to test Helen and Callums film knowledge against the clock. Now Callum is a bit of a film buff – he knows a lot about films and as we’ve already heard, Helen spends her working life watching and reviewing films. So now’s the time to put their knowledge to the test. Our colleague Carrie Dunton is here to ask the questions and to explain the rules. Hello Carrie.

Carrie: Hello. Well as you said each will have 60 seconds to answer as many questions as they can correctly. Now if you really don’t know the answer say “Pass” and I’ll move onto the next one. OK? Now I’m going to start with Callum and on the count of 3 the clock starts ticking and the quiz begins. So 1, 2, 3...

Anna: Well done. Now its time to return to Jo and her special report about film music. She goes on to talk about the techniques that composer John Williams uses for writing film music. He talks about using melodies or tunes to identify a character or a place in a film. Here’s Jo. again

Jo: John told us more about his techniques for writing film music. He says he uses the technique of melodic identification. A melody is another word for tune – so it’s his job as a film composer to identify a melody for a character, a person in the film, or a place. He says repetition is good – repeating music again and again in the film. When you see a film, you usually only see it once and John says you will be distracted by the visuals. That means you will be focused on the pictures rather than the music. Visual is something you can see. He says the more stunning the visuals become – the more beautiful and impressive they become the more deaf we become. If you’re deaf you can’t hear, so he’s basically saying we don’t often take much notice of the music in a film because we’re looking at the pictures and following the story, so the music has to be just right to match what we are seeing.

John Williams

The technique of some kind of melodic identification with a character or a place is basically how film music works. Why repetition is good is because the viewer will see the film only once and he or she will be mainly distracted by the visuals, and the more stunning they become visually the more deaf we become.

Jo: So John has written many film soundtracks – here’s just a couple more you might recognise.

Jo: Yes the theme music for Star Wars and something more recent?

Jo: Yes it’s the music from the Harry Potter films. So next time you watch a film you might just want to ‘be distracted’ a little by the music and think about how it matches the story and people in the film.

Anna: Now its time to hear some comments – we asked you to write in with some of your memories of your favourite films.

Anna: Thanks Callum and we’ll have some more comments a little later.

Anna: This is Talk about English live from London. I’m Anna Jones.

Callum: I’m Callum Robertson and also with us is guest Helen O’ Hara.

Anna: And today we’re continuing our focus on films and we’ve looked at the importance of film music to the success of a film. Now here’s Yvonne Archer with this week’s Songlines with the American band REM with their song “A Man on the Moon.” The song featured in the 1999 film of the same name which was directed by Milos Forman..

Anna: Now we all enjoy going to the cinema or watching a film on TV but have you ever thought about how the idea for a film begins? How do you begin to write the text or “screenplay” for a film? Helen what tips do you have for aspiring screenplay writers?

Helen: (Good story line/ write about something that is familiar and you know a lot about.etc etc. – Please give examples of well known films which are well written)

Anna: And once you’ve got your idea which you know a lot about and feel passionate about – what do you do then?

Helen: Well you’d write what’s known as a treatment which is quite a detailed outline of the plot and characters which is used as a guide when writing the screenplay...

Anna: The famous French film maker, Jean Luc-Godard said, "All stories should have a beginning, a middle and an end, but not necessarily in that order." Would you agree with that? How would you go about structuring a screenplay?

Anna: And once you’ve got your idea and structure how important is it to bring the characters alive and make them real.?

Anna: And how long does this process take – do you have to rewrite several times?

Anna: Have you ever thought about or attempted to write a screenplay, Helen?

Anna: And what about you Callum?

Anna: As we promised at the beginning of the programme, today we are going to announce the winner of our film review competition.- and that lucky person will be receiving an MP3 player. We've had a very high standard of entries and it was a very difficult decision to make. So over to Callum to announce the winner,

Anna: Congratulations to Rajveer for his winning entry to our film review competition.....Any more comments about favourite films, Callum?

Anna: Well that's about all we have time for today. Don't forget that next week there won't be a webcast but you can follow us on our journey around the north of England meeting teachers and learners. And if you have any comments about today's webcast please email us at: talkaboutenglish@bbc.co.uk, that's talkaboutenglish@bbc.co.uk