Animated Short Films in English Lessons
1 Genre

“Animated movies displayed via computers is one of the modern methods of education, that works on activating the child’s imagination, educates him [or her] and entertains him [or her].” (Eman and Naglaa 2010: 367)

In this term paper, I will show the advantages of animated films, especially animated short films, as a teaching resource and, in the main part, show one example for a lesson based on the short film *The Present*.

The name *animation* "derive[s] from the latin verb, *animare*, which means ‘to give life to’, and within the context of the animated film, this largely means the artificial creation of the illusion of movement in inanimate lines and forms (Wells 1998: 10).

The history of the animated film begins in the early 20th century with two men, who were drawing comics for a newspaper, before they started to experiment with animation (see Smith 1977: 23). J. Stuart Blackton started giving so-called *chalk-talks*, “which are something like slow-motion animation” (Smith 1977: 23) and his film record of one of these talks *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* from 1906 is "usually considered the first animated film" (Smith 1977: 23 f.). The first full animated film was *Little Nemo* in 1911, whose creator is also responsible for the first colour cartoon (see Wells 1998: 16).

Today, animation films are an important and very big film genre, especially for an audience of younger age. However, this does not mean that they are only meant for children. The kinds and topics of animated films vary in a high degree and can deal with easy and funny topics to serve the purpose of entertainment, or they can deal with serious or difficult topics in a very sophisticated manner, like for example the short films *Endless* and *Father And Daughter*. Of course, there are many animated short films of other kinds or with various purposes, too, and this variety makes them a great resource for almost every topic.

For teaching, the animated shorts not only provide a wide range of topics, but also can be used for many different purposes: as introduction, as the focus of the lesson that deals with a specific topic, as reason to let the students talk and discuss, to provoke the pupils or, of course, for training listening and viewing competence.

Animated shorts are, in my opinion, particularly valuable for lessons in which speaking or writing competence is important as they often contain less spoken or written words, but thus seem more mystical and deal with topics in other manners, which is unusual. This provokes the students, and, hopefully, inspires them to talk about the film and discuss the meaning, the emotions, how they have been triggered, which techniques were used or what the producer’s intention might have been. Dolesen already argued that
of all the many short films used in high school classes, cartoons and animated films may be the most provocative. Students accustomed to thinking of cartoons or animated films as pure entertainment – something Disney carried to its logical items – are often surprised to discover that these films can convey serious reflections and ideas about modern man and the problems in his modern world (Doleson 1972: 157).

Furthermore, I think that animated shorts are especially useful for creative teachers as, because of their variety of difficulties, topics and manners to deal with them the possibilities of exercises, topics and methods to embed these films into the lesson are almost endless.

In addition, Josef Champoux gives a list of reasons for animated shorts to be very effective and valuable for teaching:

- The visualization of animation can create strong, lasting images of concepts.
- Animation offers alternatives to live-action scenes that can increase the variety that one brings to the classroom.
- Strong caricature in animated film can powerfully show concepts.
- Exaggeration in animated films help link abstract concepts to visual symbols.
- Borrowing from Roger Ebert’s observation, animations can help us link concepts directly to the mind of our students (Champoux 2001: 81).

The emotions triggered by animated films are very important for teaching. It is well known that information connected to affections is memorized much better than without emotions being involved. Pupils can, in addition, involve their own fantasy and interpretation, as animated films involve a fictional world, often very different from the reality.

Furthermore, Sybil DelGaudio adds, regarding animation especially for documentary purposes, that

“[…]animation serves to create a rupture between the signifier and the signified, thus reinforcing the theoretical nature of the information presented, and foregrounding the aforementioned heightened consciousness’ about its ‘faculty’.” (DelGaudio 1997: 192)

As we can see, animated short films have a lot of potential to be used for education and teaching. For lower classes, the animated shorts contain a considerable potential, as they might like it a lot and, additionally, the language in many of them is very easy or not that important for understanding the film, like in the one I chose for my lesson, The Present. However, the animated short films are also highly valuable for teaching students with intermediate or higher level, as they, for example, can talk and discuss about them in
greater detail. Furthermore, as already mentioned, the range of difficulty and complexity of animated shorts is very broad, so that they can be used for teaching every age.

The film, I decided to design a lesson concept on, could be used for every level. The speech in this film is not particularly complex and it is clearly not needed for understanding the plot and the meaning. I decided to design a lesson for intermediate levels, as I thought that the possibilities to talk about it in English is very restricted for beginners and it might be too easy for advanced level learners, although I would argue that it depends on the material prepared around the film.

2 Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>“The Present”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>A teenage boy is playing video games when his mother arrives with a present: a puppy. The boy is delighted, until he sees the dog’s disability: one leg is missing. He abandons him, but the dog still enjoys playing with a ball and a box in a very clumsy but life-affirming manner, making the teenager smile. Finally the dog’s positivity convinces the boy to play with his new companion. When the boy gets up, the reason for his initial reluctance is seen: he has only one leg. In the end, he goes outside and plays with the dog, visibly happier than before.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competences</td>
<td>Speaking, writing, listening-viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Disability, teenagers, computer games, pets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>2 x 45 minutes</td>
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First lesson

Steps:

A. Pre-viewing (5-7 minutes)

1. Teacher (T) tells the students (S) that they are going to watch an animated short film.

2. T asks what kinds of animated films S know and what they know about the genre.

3. T tells S the name of the film and asks them about ideas what the film is about.

B. While-viewing (15-20 minutes)

1. a) T shows film until 00:06: only a black screen is seen and war sounds can be heard.
b) S guess again what the film is about, knowing only the title and the war sounds; T has S describe the scenery they are expecting to see.

2. a) T shows film until 00:51: The mother has brought in the present and the boy is about to open it.
   b) Everyone writes down one or two idea(s) about the content of the box.
   c) T has S share the ideas with class and discuss reasons for it.

3. a) T shows film until 1:21: The boy is reacting to the dog’s restraint in a very negative manner, throws him down to the floor and kicks him away.
   b) T has S describe the teenager’s reaction and discuss his behaviour and their possible reasons.
   c) Furthermore, S are animated to guess about a possible ending of the film.

4. a) T shows film until 02:45: the boy has changed his mind and smiles at the dog, implying that he is going to play with it.
   b) S discuss about what they think happens in the boy’s mind and why, also guessing what is going to happen next.

5. a) T shows the rest of the film, revealing the unexpected ending displaying the boy’s own handicap.
   b) S are supposed to talk about their feelings and thoughts about the film and if they think the film has a message and what this could be. They also talk and discuss about the boy’s behaviour, which they now see from a different perspective.

C. Post-viewing: Think-pair-share (about 15 minutes)

1. T hands out worksheet (cf. M1: The boy’s thoughts).

2. Seatwork: S fill in the thought bubbles before and after the boy has changed his mind about the dog with a pencil, everyone works alone first.

3. S get together with a neighbour (or, if there is such a system in the class, a learning buddy) and talk and discuss their thoughts and ideas.

4. S read their thoughts in pairs, one reading the first thought bubble, the other one the second (possible solutions: cf. S1: The boy’s thoughts)
5. S are asked about the possible reasons for the change in thought in the boy’s mind.

D. Homework

1. T writes down the homework: Summarize the animated short film in a few sentences. (possible solution: cf. Synopsis)

Second lesson

Steps:

A. First step: Homework and recapitalization of last lesson (about 10 minutes)

1. S read out their homework.

2. Other S can react to the summaries and add pieces of information or tell if some are unnecessary.

3. A few guided questions help S remember the most important things about the short film, if they were not already included in the summaries. If they were already mentioned, they do not need to be discussed again.
   - What did the boy do in the beginning?
   - Why did he stop playing?
   - What happened when the boy first saw the dog?
   - Why did the boy treat the dog badly in the beginning?
   - What happened to change his mind?
   - How did the story end? (possible solutions cf. S2: Guided questions)

B. Second step: Group work (group work: about 15 minutes; acting and discussion: 15 minutes)

1. Let S get together in six groups by letting them count one after another until 4 or 5, depending on the number of pupils in the class and let all the similar numbers go together in one group (-> not always neighbours together!).

2. There are three topics, so that always two groups have the same topic. They have to write something about it, knowing that they later have to act it out (Topics: cf. M 2:...
3. All groups act out their situation, also using the realia.

4. After each group, the S are supposed to give feedback about the content, the ideas and the language.

5. T gives own opinion at the end of every discussion about the individual groups.

C. Homework

1. S have to write down/complete the dialogue in their exercise books (individualization!), which will next lesson be collected by the T and corrected.

3 Materials
M1: The boy’s thoughts

Animated Short Film: „The Present“
Group 1

The mother is worried about her son’s mental state, deriving from his disability. She calls her friend and talks about possible ideas to make him feel better and get out more often. Write a dialogue, which ends with the idea of buying a dog.

Roles: Mother, friend, narrator introducing the situation

Group 2

The boy’s mother thinks about buying the disabled dog for her son. She argues with the other parent about this idea, who is against this kind of present.

Roles: Mother, other parent and narrator introducing the situation
The boy tells his best friend about his day with the puppy, including the negative first impression, how he changed his mind and how his day with the dog was. Mary is interested and asks a lot of questions.

Roles: Boy, best friend, narrator introducing the situation

4 Solutions

S1: The boy's thoughts

**In the beginning:**

My mum is making fun of me, just like everyone else! Such a stupid dog, crippled like me. He is disgusting! He reminds me of my own disability and I hate it! Nobody wants such a dog or such a friend. I am so angry, my mother always wants me to be okay with my leg, but I'm not, I hate it! And this dog is the same and reminds me of it! I'll tell her to throw it out when she comes back!

**In the end:**

Maybe it’s not that bad to be handicapped. It doesn’t mean that I can’t have fun anymore. This puppy also misses one leg, but it’s lively and happy as any other puppy. And it’s so much fun watching him play. He will be a good friend for me, I am sure. He already helps me open the door! Now I have a reason to go out again and probably all my friends want to play with my dog, too.

Annotations: There are a lot of possibilities about what to write. There are no right or wrong answers as long as the thoughts in the beginning are more negative and the later thoughts more positive, both concerning the dog and the boy’s own handicap.

S2: Guided questions
What did the boy do in the beginning?
He was playing video games sitting on the sofa in the dark living room with all the blinds shut.

Why did he stop playing?
The mother came home, opened the blinds and placed a present on the table in front of the boy, telling him that the present is for him. Therefore, he wants to open it and stops playing.

What happened when the boy first saw the dog?
He was delighted until he saw the disability.

Why did the boy treat the dog badly in the beginning?
At the moment when he saw the injury he abandoned the dog. In the film, it is not yet known why, but at the end of the film, the boy’s handicap gets visible, which is the reason for his behaviour. He does not want the dog, because he is unhappy with his own disability and does not want to be reminded of it or displays his hatred about himself in the behaviour towards the dog.

What happened to change his mind?
He sees the dog being not bothered by the disability and being happy and lively. He does not give up and enjoys playing and living, which reminds the boy that his life could be alike.

How did the story end?
The boy goes outside to play with the dog and is probably going to be happier than before.

Annotations: All solutions are also possible to be in the present tense, depending on the tense of the question. The last three question are very interpretative and can vary from pupil to pupil. Of course, every answer should be acknowledged as long as it makes sense. There does not need to be one solution for everybody, but a general understanding of the meaning of the film.
S3: Possible solutions for group exercise

Group 1
**Introduction:** Billy's mother Cassie is worried about her son. He never goes out and has almost no friends. He sits in the living room all day, playing video games, since he had the accident where he lost his leg. Cassie calls her best friend Bob, asking for advice.

**Bob:** Hey Cassie, how are you? Nice to be hearing from you.

**Cassie:** Hey Bob, I'm not very good today. I'm really worried about my son Billy. Since he had this accident, he is not the same person anymore. He just hides inside, doesn't meet any friends and hardly goes out. I don't know what to do about it…

**Bob:** Hm, I'm sorry to hear that. I know, it's not easy for your son, since he was a good football player and had a lot of friends in the football club. Maybe he just needs more time?

**Cassie:** It's already three months now since he got out of the hospital! I would really love to see him smile again and go out, live is not lost just because he only has one leg now.

**Bob:** I know, I know, I think he needs something that drags him out a bit. What about a new club where he doesn't need his leg? Maybe swimming or archery or something.

**Cassie:** No, I already talked to him about it, he doesn't want to do anything else…

**Bob:** Hm, what about travelling with him?

**Cassie:** Good idea, but I have to work a lot right now, I can't travel now. I need to give him something that helps him enjoy his life again.

**Bob:** Oh, now I have a great idea: what about buying a dog for him? He would be forced to go out and a pet always makes life happier.

**Cassie:** What a marvellous idea! Yeah, a dog would be such a good present for him! Tomorrow I'll go to the pet shop and look for a puppy for him. Thanks, Bob, you are the best!

**Bob:** Ah, Cassie, I'm always glad to help you. Call me and tell me how he reacted!

**Cassie:** Oh, yes, I will! See you, Bob!

**Bob:** Bye!

**Annotations:** This solution is just one possibility, for sure the students will have a shorter dialogue with less ideas and discussion in it, but the teacher is looking around during the exercise, helping the students with ideas and also encouraging them to have a proper ending and beginning, like in a real dialogue and also discussing about other ideas than just the dog. They are also allowed to mention how the boy lost his leg or add ideas about
the boy’s character. What is really important in this part is that the mother and the friend have a real dialogue and that they decide to buy the dog in the end, because this connects to the next group’s topic.

**Group 2**

*Introduction:* Billy’s mother Cassie had the idea to buy a dog for her son, who lost a leg in an accident some months ago and since then, doesn’t go out anymore and becomes more and more depressed. She went to the pet shop and saw a nice little puppy with also only one leg. She thinks, this is the perfect present for her son, but wants to talk about it with her husband Kyle first.

_Cassie:_ Hey honey. I had a great idea to fight Billy’s depression!

_Kyle:_ Really? Wow, I would love to hear about it!

_Cassie:_ I thought about getting him a dog, so he has to go outside again and has something to be glad about.

_Kyle:_ Great idea, I think that will help a lot!

_Cassie:_ Yeah, I know, and I already went to the pet shop and found the perfect puppy!

_Kyle:_ Oh great! Do you have a picture?

_Cassie:_ Yes, here it is! Isn’t he nice? (shows him the picture of the puppy with only three legs)

_Kyle:_ Oh… I don’t think that this is a good idea, honey.

_Cassie:_ Why not? He will like him, because they are alike.

_Kyle:_ No, I think he will hate him, because he hates what happened to himself and hasn’t accepted his own disability yet. He will probably abandon him.

_Cassie:_ I don’t think so. You haven’t seen the puppy, he is so lively and enjoys playing around and...

_Kyle:_ Billy will think we want to make fun of him...

_Cassie:_ No way! Maybe he will not like him when he first sees him, but as soon as he sees him playing around and having so much fun, not being bothered by his missing leg at all, he will see that life can go on and that it is still wonderful, even if you are disabled.

_Kyle:_ Hm, you’ve got a point there. Maybe you are right.

_Cassie:_ I know it, because I saw the dog, he is really joyful and will cheer Billy up!

_Kyle:_ Don’t you think that the other kids will make fun of him with this dog?
**Cassie:** I think that he will protect his puppy from the others’ laughter and so he will learn not to be bothered by it himself. I think it will all go great.

**Kyle:** Okay, then let’s try it. If he doesn’t like him, we have to give him back, but it’s worth a try, I guess.

**Cassie:** Great! Then I’ll go and get the dog tomorrow!

**Kyle:** Okay. I’m really keen to see what happens!

**Annotations:** Again, this solution is just one possibility, for sure the students will have a shorter dialogue with less ideas and discussion in it, but the teacher is looking around during the exercise, helping the students with ideas and also encouraging them to have a proper ending and beginning, like in a real dialogue. The father could also be against a dog in general or the arguments can be different. In the end, it is important that they have a real dialogue and that they end up agreeing on buying the dog.

**Group 3**

**Introduction:** Billy hasn’t gone out since days. This morning, he received a present from his mother. It was a god with only three legs. Billy is also missing a leg, so first, he didn’t like the dog, but later plays with him and really enjoys the day outside. In the evening, his best friend Mary visits him and Billy tells her about his day.

**Mary:** Hey Billy, how are you?

**Billy:** Hey Mary! I’m supergreat! Look at this! (He takes the dog and shows it to Mary)

**Mary:** Woooow! What a lovely little fellow! (She pets the dog) Where did you get it from?

**Billy:** My mother gave it to me today! Isn’t he really cute?

**Mary:** Oh, yes, he is. What's his name?

**Billy:** Marshmallow.

**Mary:** Oh, what a cute name! But what about this leg?

**Billy:** Yeah, it’s missing. I know, first, I really thought my mum wants to make fun of me, buying a disabled dog.

**Mary:** Oh, I don’t think she would do that!

**Billy:** No, I know now, but when I saw him, I hated him, because he was disabled like me and I hate my own disability. But then he played around and had so much fun that I really couldn’t look away.
Mary: Yeah, I can imagine, puppies are very lively. Did you change your mind then?

Billy: Oh yes. And while he was having so much fun, he didn't even care about his missing leg. When he fell, he stood up again, just over and over again, he wasn’t even angry about it.

Mary: Mhm, he enjoys life! And then, what did you do?

Billy: I couldn’t hate him anymore, it was just so much fun watching him play! So I went out!

Mary: Really? You haven’t been out for a long time!

Billy: I know, but then we played in the garden the whole day, he didn’t get tired and I always had to go after him. It was so much fun!

Mary: How do you feel now?

Billy: I’m really tired and my arms hurt, I haven’t moved so much since a very long time, but I feel great!

Mary: Whoa, that’s great! I’m really happy for you. Are you going to go out with him again tomorrow?

Billy: Yes, for sure! He needs a lot of running and playing! Do you want to come with us?

Mary: Yes, of course! I’ll visit you tomorrow at 11 a.m., is that okay?

Billy: I need to go out with him early, but we’ll be back at about nine, I think, and then we can go out again at 11. So, okay!

Mary: Cool, then see you tomorrow! And you, little Marshmallow!

Billy: See you!

Annotations: Again, this solution is just one possibility, for sure the students will have a shorter dialogue with less ideas and discussion in it, but the teacher is looking around during the exercise, helping the students with ideas and also encouraging them to have a proper ending and beginning, like in a real dialogue. In this part, it is especially important that the friend is talking, too, because the boy tells a lot, but the friend has to ask questions and somehow react to it. Other possible information included in the dialogue are details about his day with the dog, other thoughts he had when he first saw it, duties he has from now on etc. The most important aspect is that it is a real dialogue with both parties speaking and reacting.

5 Bibliography


