

Engaging Students Through Visual Media: Incorporating Film Adaptations of *The Blue Umbrella* by Ruskin Bond in the Classroom

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Abstract

If pedagogy is to be made effective and interesting in the classroom, different strategies and techniques are to be adopted in the teaching learning process. To teach literary text, we have many ways and methods and we have many texts on which film and video versions are available. So teaching through film adaptations is one of the best ways for effective classroom teaching. Here in this paper an attempt is made to understand how the integration of film versions of texts can make our teaching learning process more effective and interesting. Here we try to understand how the novella *The Blue Umbrella* by Ruskin Bond and the filmy version of this text by Vishal Bhardwaj can be integrated in the classroom for the outcome of effective result by enjoying literary text and filmy version. The paper also focuses on language learning aspects keeping in mind that through film adaptation can encourage students to make their English language learning easy. It also helps to understand and absorb the language to the subconscious mind. Students find the visual forms more engaging and interesting. So with this method we can harness this interest for language proficiency through visual art. This paper also talks about the teacher's role to bridge the gap between visual art and literary art. Teachers can make literary text more engaging and interesting using films. *The Blue Umbrella* belongs to children's literature. So it's comparatively quite easy and understandable for any student and the filmy version of this text makes the teacher's task easier. Students can absorb everything very easily be it story or characters, language and style of the writer. Teacher's role here is just a helper. Whenever students find anything difficult, the teacher can help them with regard to language and story. So with this integration we can focus more on other aspects of literary and visual art. Students can understand and differentiate various art forms. They can easily compare different art forms and with this artistic bent of mind can be developed among students.

- **Key Words :** Film adaptation, Visual art, Language learning, Children's literature , Teacher's role , Visual art and literary art

Full Paper

In the era of AI and technology, the world is transforming rapidly. So also academic concepts and methods of delivery. To keep pace with these, we have to adopt the changes and have to update ourselves with these transformations. To make our teaching and learning methods more engaging, effective and interesting, we have to adopt new methods and manners. The new generation is more accustomed to and exposed to digital and visual media. They are digital natives. Marc Prensky used the term 'digital natives' in his article *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* and defined digital natives as individuals who have grown up with digital technology, such as computers, the internet, and mobile phones, from a young age. They are well acquainted and comfortable with all these new technologies. Technology has been an integral part of their daily lives since birth. Prensky contrasts digital natives with 'digital immigrants,' who were not born into the digital world but have adopted and adapted to technology later in life.

What should we call these “new” students of today? Some refer to them as the N-[for Net]-gen or D-[for digital]-gen. But the most useful designation I have found for them is Digital Natives. Our students today are all “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet. ¹

So to cope up with and to cater the needs and their familiarities we have to make certain transformation to our traditional teaching learning methods. We have to drop some obsolete methods and adopt new strategies to achieve our desired academic goals. So incorporating film adaptations is one of the ways to engage our students through visual media.

According to psychological studies integrating multiple sensory modalities during teaching can yield positive outcomes. It can be retained in the mind for longer duration. The visual media plays an important role, particularly films, in making learning more engaging and accessible.

As we know very well the new generation is comfortable and exposed to the screen, they can consume visual content easily. So film adaptation has many advantages with regard to classroom teaching. Film adaptations largely span around two to three hours, so for the students it would be easy to grasp the text within a short period of time. They can later connect with the text easily. For them text reading becomes an easy task because many concepts of the text are clear for them now like: story, characters, settings, themes and dialogue etc. They can now read and digest the text very easily.

Ruskin Bond is a common name in Indian English literature. He has won numerous prestigious awards including Sahitya Akademi and Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan for his significant contribution to Indian English Literature. The story of *The Blue Umbrella* by Ruskin Bond is simple, easy, and engaging. The straightforward story makes it easy for students to follow and enjoy. The language and style of Ruskin Bond makes the novella captivate anyone to read and enjoy.

The whole story revolves around the central main character Biniya, a mountain girl of nine years living in the Garhwal mountain region of the Himalaya. She encounters picnickers from plains and manages to get a rare, small, dainty, colourful umbrella from them in exchange for her leopard claw pendant, a lucky charm which keeps evil spirits away from her. This rare piece of beauty, the blue umbrella creates joy and envy among the villagers. Some want it and some feel the excitement of seeing it. Ram Bharosa, the other equally important character in the novel, craves for this beautiful umbrella from Biniya. His tea shop on the Tehri road selling sweets and toffees was only a mile from the village. Ram Bharosa was astonished to see Biniya's blue umbrella. His passion for umbrellas has become an obsession. How passionate and crazy Ram Bharosa is after the blue umbrella can be clearly observed in the conversation between Ram Bharosa and Rajaram.

“What’s the matter, Babuji?” asked the boy.

“Oh, nothing,” said Ram Bharosa. “It’s just a sickness that has come upon me. And it’s all due to that girl Biniya and her wretched umbrella.”

“Why, what has she done to you?”

“Refused to sell me her umbrella! There’s pride for you. And I offered her ten rupees.”

“Perhaps, if you gave her twelve ...”

“But it isn’t new any longer. It isn’t worth eight rupees now. All the same, I’d like to have it.”

“You wouldn’t make a profit on it,” said Rajaram.

“It’s not the profit I’m after, wretch! It’s the thing itself. It’s the beauty of it!”

“And what would you do with it, Babuji? You don’t visit anyone—you’re seldom out of your shop. Of what use would it be to you?”

“Of what use is a poppy in a cornfield? Of what use is a rainbow? Of what use are you, numbskull? Wretch! I, too, have a soul. I want the umbrella, because—because I want its beauty to be mine!” ²

Out of his obsession he hires his servant Rajaram to steal it, but his stealing becomes open to everyone in the village. As everyone knows in the village that Ram Bharosa had tried to get the umbrella stolen, people stopped buying things from his shop and talking to him. Now no one trusts him and children are teasing him. The children taunted him, twisted his name around. From “Ram the Trustworthy” he became “Trusty Umbrella Thief”. His situation became more and more pathetic as village people ignored and outcasted him socially. Biniya as a girl child observes all these and starts feeling sorry for Ram Bharosa. She now feels that due to her and her umbrella Raja Ram is suffering. She is feeling guilty for Raja Ram and decides to give an umbrella to Raja Ram. She showed empathy to the old man and touched the readers’ emotions.

The Film adaptation of *The Blue Umbrella* by Vishal Bhardwaj gives new charm and colours to this excellent novella by Ruskin Bond. Students have the added advantage of enjoying both literary and visual art. With these advantages students can comprehend the holistic picture of the text. The movie, released in 2005, was directed by Vishal Bhardwaj and starred Shreya Sharma as Biniya and Pankaj Kapur as Nandu, a shopkeeper, in the leading roles. The movie has won many awards and was well received by the audience. It does not run with the text line by line as it adopts the different mediums and methods. Both text and movie have their own unique identity and they touch different faculties of the mind. They have

so many things in common here - the story, character, theme and so many other things. Overall the movie is also successful in rendering the author's thoughts, motifs, intentions and delivery.

*The story unfolds masterfully, at a languorous pace with the plot revelations serving to bring up issues of ostracism, loss, longing and loneliness, without ever becoming too heavy. The film, slow in the beginning, works magnificently on the whole*³

Movie version here is not meant for the study in the classroom teaching but it can help to obtain effective outcomes of the text. We can leverage the natural interest students have in films to enhance their engagement with the text. So with the help of the movie version we can achieve our goals. It targets multiple sensors like visual and audio so it creates a lasting impression in the mind. So with this lasting impression our task as a teacher in the classroom becomes easy and the students can comprehend the text as a whole. We have to prepare students with an introductory discussion about the author, text, summary, plot, character, style, theme, motif and settings. Once the students are familiar with the text, plot and character, they can now easily absorb the movie without much trouble. Teacher can make them understand and help them whenever he finds necessary with small movie pauses. Now students can visualise settings, characters, and events described in the book. After viewing the movie we can facilitate discussions to compare and contrast the book and its film adaptation, focusing on thematic and narrative differences. Students can give their feedback and keeping in mind their feedback we can extend the discussion on untouched areas.

The movie version of *The Blue Umbrella* is in Hindi. Students who have difficulties in text language English, the movie makes their task very easy. So after enjoying the movie, students can now grasp the text very easily. With this multilingual experience students can understand English and can enrich the language. So adopting the movie version for textbook teaching in the class is a way to learn a language whose English is the second language. So this way film adaptations can be an aid in the learning of new vocabulary and language structures. *The Blue Umbrella* by Ruskin Bond is written in easy, lucid and straightforward language and style. This is the best opportunity for students that by studying the text they can master the language. Students can subconsciously absorb language patterns and idioms through repeated viewing and reading the text. So with this practice language learning becomes easy.

Students are to be encouraged to discuss the difference between movie and text. Different art forms have their unique storytelling techniques. Teachers can connect the visual elements of the film with the literary aspects of the novella. They are asked to share their experiences of viewing the movie and reading the text. Such discussions boost their learning experience and with discussion they can easily retain different aspects of the text easily. We teach vocabulary with the help of synonyms and antonyms to differentiate and understand them properly one by one. The same thing can be applied here. When we place one experience with another with them they can easily differentiate and understand different forms and can contextualise one in relation with the other which ultimately boost their learning and can enhance critical thinking by analysing the differences between the text and the film adaptation.

Movie has comparatively a larger scope to present cultural aspects by creating a local visual background with cloth, settings and local environment and many more. The film *The Blue Umbrella* provides the mountain culture of Himalayan region and historical context, enriching students' understanding of the novella. Incorporating the film adaptation of *The Blue Umbrella* by Ruskin Bond in the Classroom, here the teacher's role plays an important role. The teacher's role is to guide and support students as they navigate the film and the text. To assess the outcomes students are asked to write a film review and encouraged to write a comparative essay on film and text. An MCQ test also can be arranged to test their experience and teacher can plan further according to their outcomes

Integrating film adaptations into the classroom, particularly for teaching literary texts, offers a dynamic and engaging approach to pedagogy. This method is especially effective with texts like Ruskin Bond's novella *The Blue Umbrella*, whose simplicity and engaging narrative are enhanced through Vishal Bhardwaj's film adaptation. The film version, with its vivid portrayal of the picturesque Himalayan setting and the cultural nuances of the local community, enhances students' understanding and enjoyment of the story. This dual engagement with text and film helps students develop a holistic appreciation of the narrative.

In conclusion, integrating film adaptations like *The Blue Umbrella* into the classroom can significantly enhance the teaching and learning process. It not only makes literary texts more accessible and engaging for students but also enriches their language learning and critical thinking skills. This method exemplifies how traditional pedagogy can evolve to meet the needs of digital natives, ensuring that education remains relevant and effective in a rapidly transforming world.

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