
Conversational English Using Short Films



Film

Film is a powerful story-telling medium, and short films are a great way to spur on contemplation and conversation. For those learning English as a second language, watching films not only gives them an opportunity to hear English dialogue but also gives them a way to practice speaking as they discuss the film.

In this resource, you'll find a list of short films and ideas to use for teaching conversational English. Many of these short films are intended to help spark spiritual conversations, so listen carefully for those who are open to deeper discussion.

Our hope is that you will have some great conversations while building relationships.

Oh, and while you're at it, relax and have some fun!

Short Films

Here is a list of short films with specific discussion questions you can use to help others practice conversational English. Some notes are included just for instructors.

These films (and many others) can be found on the [Jesus Film Project® app](#) by browsing conversation starters, or on the [watch page](#) at [jesusfilm.org](#).

01

Jangled (no dialogue)

A woman steals a bracelet. They multiply on her arm as she tries to hide them. **Duration: 5:55**

- What does the title mean?
- Why do the bracelets keep spreading up her arm?
- Why is she trying to hide the bracelets? Why do we hide things from others?
- What could the bracelet represent in your life or culture?
- What emotions do you see throughout the story?
- How do you think the story ends?

02

Breathe (no dialogue)

A young woman wakes up suffering from an asthma attack, and frantically searches for medicine as she slowly runs out of air. **Duration: 1:51**

- What is wrong with the woman?
- What emotions is she feeling?
- What do you think happened at the end?
- How is hope shown in the film?

03

Vinyl (no dialogue)

A slightly obsessive vinyl record fanatic searches for his missing record. A modern retelling of the parable of the lost coin. **Duration: 4:12**

- What one word comes to mind when you think of this film?
- Why does he care so much about his one record?
- Why does losing something, or being lost, cause such a feeling of panic?
- What have you lost that would cause you to throw a party if you got it back?
- If you were lost, how would you feel if someone searched for you like this?

04

Dying Roads (no dialogue)

A disabled man provides a genuine act of kindness to a stranger in worse shape than he is in. **Duration: 7:02**

- What is happening in this film?
- What is the businessman with the umbrella thinking or feeling?
- What is the man in the wheelchair thinking or feeling?
- How do you think this story ends?
- What is meant by the quote at the end: “Love is a choice you make from moment to moment”?

05

Delight (no dialogue)

A pastry chef labors to put the finishing touches on his beautiful, elegant cake. He presents it to his little girl, who promptly smashes it. **Duration: 1:23**

- What part of the film stands out to you (or surprises you)? What did you think would happen?
- How did the film make you feel? Why?
- Which character do you most relate to? Why? (For less experienced English speakers, you may need to rephrase this question or explain the concept.)
- Have you ever felt loved like that? By whom?

06

La Liberté (no dialogue)

A man in a small windowless cube finds freedom when someone from outside shows him the way out. **Duration: 5:04**

- Where do you think the man’s freedom came from?
- How did the man respond to his situation at first? Why did it change as the film went on?
- Are you more likely to get out of the box yourself or help someone else out?
- Do you think your generation is more free than your parents’ generation-not just politically, but emotionally, personally, spiritually, etc.?
- What do you think the man was going to do at the end of the film? What would you have done?

07

La Búsqueda (no dialogue)

A man and his daughter are estranged in this modern retelling of the prodigal son. **Duration: 6:36**

- What happens to the girl when she runs away?
- What does the tin can represent?
- What are some of the father’s memories of his daughter?
- What does the daughter want in the end? What keeps her from getting off the bus?
- How do you reconcile in your culture?

08

Doll Face (no dialogue)

A satire on the concept of beauty, possibly exposing the realities we live in. A lifelike machine tries to attain an impossible beauty standard. **Duration: 4:13**

- What do you think this film is about?
- What do you think she is really longing for? Is it anything that can ever be reached?
- Who or what pressures you to change who you are? Why?
- Do you think people in your culture are content, or happy, with who they are or what they look like? Why, or why not?
- How do people look for fulfillment, or happiness, in your culture?

09

Flow (no dialogue)

A man has two sources of water, his sink and his toilet. Which one will he choose to drink from? **Duration: 4:03**

- What do you think the water from the faucet represents? What about from the toilet?
- Why does the man use the toilet water rather than the sink water?
- Have you seen people drink “toilet water”? Why do you think they choose to do this?
- How do you get a friend to see they are drinking bad water (doing something that isn’t good for them), when something better is available?

10

Venia (no dialogue)

A man uses index cards to show his father all the ways he has hurt him. Then he forgives his father and they are reconciled. **Duration: 4:34**

- What moment touched you (good or bad)? Why? (Listen well; you can tell a lot from their answer, if they are angry, glad, sad, etc.)
- What are some of the things the son wrote on the cards?
- Why do you think the son waited to write the last card?
- What do you think you would have done in the son’s situation? What would you want him to do if you were in the father’s place?
- Do people in your culture ever say the words, “Do you forgive me” or “I forgive you”? Why or why not?

11

Jätku Leiba (Spoken dialogue in Estonian with English subtitles)

Johanna, a single mom, is reminded of hope as she thinks she has hit rock bottom. **Duration: 7:31**

- The filmmaker is trying to tell a story. When do you think the story turned around?
- Do you agree with the note, “Nothing is broken forever”? Why or why not?
- How do people in your culture/city deal with brokenness?
- What about in your family?

12

Ctrl Z

When a computer malfunctions, an office loner takes full advantage of the chance to magically undo a lifetime of regrets. **Duration: 6:04**

- Every film tells a story. What do you think the filmmaker is trying to communicate?
- What does the title mean?
- Can you relate to the moment the keyboard was being repaired? How? (If appropriate, help them think through moments they wish they could “do over.”)
- Why do most people want to redo things in their lives (regret, sorrow, etc.)?
- How do people in your culture handle regret? (Do they talk about it? Do they ignore it, turn to hobbies, to religion, etc.? Listen carefully. Their answer helps gauge where they are coming from emotionally and spiritually.)

13

B Me

Jane, a young woman who feels unable to cope with life’s challenges, finds “B Me,” a phone app that can change your identity to fit any situation. **Duration: 3:26**

- What does the B Me app do?
- Why do you think Jane keeps using the app?
- When would you want to use the B Me app?
- What do you think it means that she is stuck on the screen in the app at the end?
- What does the word “identity” mean?

14

In Time

The value of time. **Duration: 1:19**

- Are there any words or phrases that you don’t understand?
- What does the phrase “on your plate” mean in this film?
- What is the difference between spending your time and investing your time?
- How do you see others trying to invest their time? How do you invest your time?
- How do you want to make a difference in the world?

15

Rain

A daughter makes a desperate 2 a.m. phone call to reconnect with her parents. **Duration: 5:02**

- What are some important things that the girl and her mother said?
- Why did the girl make the phone call? What did she want?
- What are some things that can cause broken relationships?
- How do you think this story ends?

16

The Rent Check

How far will Xander go to make sure he gets the rent check from his parents? **Duration: 2:40**

- What did the guy mean by “Yeah, I’d buy that”?
- What word comes to mind when you think of this film?
- Why was Xander so excited after the phone call?
- What do you think his parents will do now that they know the truth?
- Why do people hide who they really are from others?

17

The Braverman Account

A man struggles with the decisions he’s made and the calculated risks he has taken. **Duration: 8:01**

- Why is he nervous? What other emotions do you see in the story?
- What challenge did the characters face? How did they respond?
- What do “slow and steady” and “middle of the pack” mean?
- Are you more of a risk taker or do you like to play it safe? Why?

18

Not Evelyn Cho

Sarah serendipitously receives a package for Evelyn Cho. **Duration: 9:57**

- What do you think this film is saying about our needs and desires?
- Why does Sarah change so much during the film?
- How would you respond at the end if you were Sarah?
- What do you think Sarah really wants?
- What kind of things makes you want to change?

General Questions

The following list of questions can be used for any of the short films. They are especially helpful for films with no dialogue. Consider using some of these questions, combining them with the suggested questions for each film and a couple of the activities shared in this resource to create a conversation that is engaging, interactive and meaningful.

- What is this film about?
- What one word comes to mind when you think of this film?
- How did this film make you feel?
- Who are you most/least like in the film? Why?
- Is there anything you did not understand about the film?
- What did you like about the film?
- Are there similar stories in your culture? Tell me about them.

Here are some ideas for using short films in small groups, such as an English club, or one-on-one. Choosing one or two of these ideas will help you to offer variety in your time together by including vocabulary, grammar, writing, or speaking.

- After watching a film together, choose up to five or more advanced words or themes featured in the film. Ask them to define the words or come up with synonyms.
- Ask them to retell the story in their own words. Correct their grammar as needed.
- Rewatch the film, stopping after each scene. Have them describe each scene.
- Have discussions on the five different parts of a story: characters, setting, plot, conflict, and theme.
- Have them choose one character in the story and then retell the film from that perspective.
- For films with no dialogue, have them create their own or describe what the actor may be thinking or feeling.
- If working with a group, role play the different parts of the film.
- Ask them to interview one other person about the film using the suggested questions. This helps them with pronouns, but also indirectly encourages conversation about the topics.
- Choose an idea from this list and ask them to write down their answers. This gives them a chance to practice both spelling and grammar.
- Use the films to teach common idioms or cultural phrases.
- Choose a few idioms from the list below that connect with the specific short film you will be using. Ask if their culture/language has idioms that would relate to that film.

Don't cry over spilled milk
Getting away 'Scot-free'
Under the weather
The ball is in your court
To lose heart
Take it with a grain of salt
Beat around the bush
To have a crush on someone
Ignorance is bliss
Father figure
Deadbeat dad
Brokenhearted
Murphy's Law
That ship has sailed

Forgive and forget
Kiss and make up
To err is human, to forgive is divine
To bear a grudge
Bury the hatchet
Doubting Thomas
To take advantage of
Tip of the iceberg
Saving grace
Willful ignorance
To feel blue
A piece of cake
Change of heart
Catch someone's eye

In a nutshell

Helpful Hints

Keep the level of English experience in mind when planning your time and reword questions as needed.

Watch the short films that you intend to use ahead of time.

Pray for your time together.

Final Thoughts

Did you know that English is the #1 trade language in the world? With about 20 percent of the world's population speaking English, you are uniquely qualified to reach out to the other 80 percent, and this resource can help. We hope that you use it to build deeper, more meaningful relationships with those right around you.

Looking for more films to use?

Check out the short films available through our partner, globalshortfilmnetwork.com.