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## Kurz und Gut Macht Schule II: Animation

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***Kurz & Gut macht Schule II: Animation.*** Project Dir. Detlef Gericke-Schönhagen. Goethe-Institut e.V., 2012. DVD [11 films]. 102 Min. \$20. PPN: 378162500.

Website with further information and teaching materials: [www.goethe.de/filmschule](http://www.goethe.de/filmschule).

*Kurz und Gut macht Schule II: Animation* is a useful and creative resource for instructors and learners of German. The DVD is a compilation of eleven animated short films ranging from four to fifteen minutes in length, which is a perfect amount of time for use in a classroom setting for learners of German as a foreign language. According to the Goethe-Institut website and the accompanying DVD pamphlet, this particular collection was chosen from a larger set of films by high school and college students. The films selected were those which students found to be the most visually and contextually engaging. The DVD was produced by the Goethe-Institut Munich with support from the Auswärtiges Amt (*The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs*). Detlef Gericke-Schönhagen (Director of the Goethe-Institut Boston) and Carola Ferber (Project Manager) were largely responsible for assembling the compilation.

As there are no English subtitles available for the films, students are required to listen intently rather than to rely on translations for comprehension. That being said, over half of the films do not actually contain any dialogue, and German subtitles are provided for each of the films that do have dialogue. The stories are mostly open-ended and leave the continuation or conclusion of the story up to the viewer, providing a multitude of possibilities in a German as a second language classroom with high school, college or adult learners. The films provide an additional approach for German language instructors to address the four key areas of foreign language proficiency: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

The Goethe-Institut collaborated with instructors from all over the world to come up with appropriate activities for learners of German as a foreign language. The accompanying website provides lesson plans and suggestions for instructors, which include recommended time per task, themes for discussion, and activities for the learner. Students are provided with various ways in which to engage with the films and are encouraged to utilize different skills for each film, including listening, reading, observing, writing, brainstorming and theorizing. In addition to the aforementioned worksheets, the Goethe-Institut's website also provides film transcripts. There are many possibilities for both teachers and students to be creative with the films; the website also offers enough tasks to make using the films relatively easy for the instructor and students. Although a higher level of German language skill might be needed to understand most of the films, other titles in the collection can be used at all levels, beginning with level A1,<sup>1</sup> since the activities can be used to target particular skills the instructor is hoping to practice. For instance, in an A1 course, the films without any dialogue, such as *Tomcat (Kater, 2005)*, provide an opportunity for students to focus on the visuals and extract vocabulary they are already familiar with while also figuring out unfamiliar vocabulary through context. Students could also fill out an identification worksheet of the different items or characters they see throughout the film. Alternatively, students can focus on the audio as opposed to the visual, since there are many

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<sup>1</sup> The levels of proficiency used here are based on the Europäische Referenzrahmen (European Framework of Reference for Languages), which divides language learners into the following categories: A1 refers to a beginning learner with no prior knowledge of the language; the A2 level refers to a basic user with elementary skills; B1 refers to a learner with intermediate skills; learners at the B2 level have a better understanding of more complex language (upper intermediate); C1 is advanced proficiency, meaning the learner can communicate with some fluency and C2 is mastery of the language.

sound effects that are used in everyday life, such as the ticking of a clock, drinking or slurping and the sound of rain falling. At the A2 level, students can be asked to come up with words and adjectives to describe cats or write short sentences about a cat they know, as is suggested on the Goethe-Institut website. At the intermediate level B1, students are able to summarize what they watch and in a B2 course they can write their own reaction to the story. In a C1-C2 setting, the students are able to analyze the film, for example by discussing the symbolism of the passport-like stamp book which personifies the cat's nine lives and receives a stamp with every life the cat loses. They could discuss the relationship between the tomcat and the other characters such as the bunny, the white cat and the black cat, or go deeper by discussing whether or not his actions were moral. Instructors could also integrate film analysis by talking about the different shots, lighting, or music associations.

While all of the films have their didactic uses, some of the more appealing films, both visually and contextually, are *Balance* (1989), *The Wheel* (*Das Rad*, 2001) and *Our Man in Nirvana* (*Unser Mann im Nirwana*, 2005). The DVD begins with *Balance*, which sets a thought-provoking tone for the entire collection. As the film has no dialogue, it would be appropriate to use at any language level. The film begins with five figures standing in a circle on a floating surface; all are nameless and indistinguishable from one another aside from the numbers on their backs. Each person appears equal, as they all cooperate to keep themselves in balance on the floating surface on which they are standing. This equilibrium is interrupted when one of the figures catches a chest while fishing off the side of the surface. Curiosity and desire take over and the balance and cooperation that existed between the figures begins to diminish. This short film allows for open interpretation and is therefore an excellent springboard into speaking exercises and student discussions. Since there is no speaking in this film, students are able to create their own dialogues or focus on the visuals and sound effects while watching rather than the text.

Some of the recommended tasks on the Goethe-Institut website for *Balance* are good examples of the types of assignments instructors can expect to find among the supplementary materials. Instructors are able to pick and choose which tasks are most appropriate for their level. The first few activities for this film require students to describe what they see and hear throughout the film. No vocabulary is provided, so these tasks are more appropriate for an intermediate class unless the instructor chooses to provide the students with vocabulary. After they have viewed the film, students can complete an activity which involves writing captions for still images from the film in addition to thought bubbles for the characters. For an intermediate level activity, students are required to formulate opinions and interpretations about the film. The activities become increasingly difficult, and the more sophisticated tasks ask students to think of the film as a parable in one activity ("What is a parable?" or "Why could this film be a parable?"), and to create symbols and their meanings in a second activity. The last activity on the worksheet asks students to relate the film to their own lives, which provides for a larger discussion about interpersonal relations with others. For a short animation film without any dialogue, there are many options for deep discussion in addition to the more basic tasks for a lower proficiency level.

The films that actually contain German text are suggested for higher proficiency learners, as the texts are relatively complex and the characters speak at a tempo appropriate for native speakers. Fortunately, transcripts are available on the website, which could be especially useful

in a high school or college language classroom, although they would be appropriate for adult learners of German as well. One such example is the short film *The Wheel*, in which two stone beings observe and comment on the world as it develops and changes around them. While everything around them changes, they remain essentially the same. This film provides opportunities for discussion and comparison of human and natural worlds in relation to time and its passing. This theme is repeated throughout the course of this short film and also occurs in other films in the collection such as *Delivery* (2005), in which an old man receives a package that calls his existence into question, and the visually stunning *Our Man in Nirvana*, in which the main character considers the choices we have and make as humans.

Not all the films, however, are meant to be viewed so seriously. For example, *Our Wonderful Nature* (2008) tricks the viewer into initially thinking it is about the courting rituals of water shrews, but quickly turns into a *Matrix*-like slow-motion battle for the affections of the female. In addition to being entertaining, the film's theme provides substantial opportunities for identification and practice of common vocabulary, such as the setting (trees, water, animals) and context (love, fighting, and competition). *Our Wonderful Nature* would be a great tool for students because it is produced in the familiar style of a nature documentary. The familiar formula of a narrator discussing a particular animal or habitat helps students follow what is happening, even if they do not understand exactly what is being said. After the film changes direction from nature documentary to furious battle, the viewer no longer knows what to expect but can still easily follow the visual action. Instructors could ask students to compare and contrast an actual nature documentary they may have seen to the animated short film. The film catches the viewer's attention with the complete change in style, which makes it exciting and fun for students.

While there are many potential benefits to the short films, some may be easier to implement in the classroom than others. In *Annie & Boo* (2003), for example, the language is complicated and fast (the voices are native speakers), making it too difficult for beginners and probably even intermediate students. Additionally, the suggested tasks for the film from the Goethe-Institut website are not as engaging as those of the other films. The true/false questions might be too advanced for a lower-level learner if they have a difficult time following the story. The same can be said of the suggested communicative activities, such as the interviews. Focusing on the idea of coincidence, as suggested, could be useful but is more appropriate for an advanced German class. I found the film itself to be challenging to relate to and felt that the relationship between the characters Annie, the young girl, and Boo, the personification of coincidence, fell flat. Due to this lack of spark between the characters, it is difficult to become invested enough to want to know how the story ends. Still, this film could be used to spark a discussion about what coincidence is, how it exists in this filmic reality, and what its role is in relation to other people.

These short films are thought-provoking and remind the viewer that animation and cartoons are not only meant for children, but rather for viewers of all ages. The possibilities for classroom use of these short films are limited only by the imagination and creativity of the viewer. It is recommended that the instructor preview all of the films and materials before implementing their use in the classroom to ensure that they are appropriate for the age and language proficiency of the students. The films are most appealing because of their multi-faceted potential in the classroom. Once again, the Goethe-Institut has provided students and instructors

with materials that inspire creativity, fun and a deeper cultural understanding. *Kurz und Gut macht Schule II: Animation* is highly recommended for teachers of German at any level.

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