To examine new approaches to film study, "Nothing But a Man," which portrays the difficulties encountered by a young Negro in the South, was taught experimentally in three 11th-grade English classes at Cheshire High School, Connecticut. A different method of approaching the movie was used in each class to determine effective teaching methods for varying abilities, materials helpful in preparing film study units, and the effects of films on students, teachers, and the English curriculum. One group viewed it without previous preparation, whereas the other two used study guides and film extracts before seeing the film. Discussions focused on stereotyped roles and attitudes reflected in the movie, on the meaning of the home and the archetypal "wanderer," or on filmic techniques. All approaches proved valuable because they were centered on the movie itself. For the experience of the film to be fully articulated, however, both the film and the philosophy and practices of screen education must be understood. (JB)
4 Feedback

7 What It's All About
by Tony Hodgkinson Guest editorial which suggests a philosophy for screen education.

10 Film Study: Nothing But a Man
by Frank Manchel The film is a primary experience; primary materials must be used in teaching it.

15 Easy as 1, 2, 3, (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 . . .)
by Rod Sheratsky Tips for teachers about to shoot film.

18 The Uses of Film Extracts
by David Powell Sustained and immediate access to film materials is imperative. Extracts are a partial answer.

21 The Instructional Film is Dead
by William Kuhns, S.M. Film which is oriented exclusively to curriculum is mere "celluloid lecture."

24 Film Language: A Student-Made Dictionary
by G. Howard Poteet Defining film techniques with words begs the question. Use film instead!

28 Pick of the (Short) Flicks
by A. Panel Fifty short films (including three Summi awardees) for the classroom.

31 The Martyred
by Robert Geller A great book for kids about to make the dry run in ethics.

33 Critics Out of Vicrots
by Ned Hoopes Discovering critical abilities.

35 Telelog/A Full Page Pin-Up

38 Recommended Shorts: Race Relations
by William J. Sloan Recent and laudable civil rights films for use with students.

41 Imaginative Literature: Economics-Tonic
by Donn McCafferty Literature as supportive material in economics can enliven what is often deadly dull.

44 Pedagogue #1: The Reading Consultant
by Arthur Daigon Who's who in the educational zoo.

47 Newsworthy Paperbacks
by Frank Ross

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Experimental approaches to film study are hard to come by, despite the fact that they are sorely needed. Curriculum-oriented programs (Great Expectations is coming up in the syllabus; let's get the movie to run along with it), while they serve as excellent camouflage for getting films into the classroom, are only a small part of the picture. They tend to relegate the film to a secondary or supporting role and miss the larger picture of film as the primary experience. The see-it-and-react method is fine, so long as it doesn't exist through default, that is, in lieu of an ability to treat film material. Teachers who want to work with film yet who, because of their inexperience, handle it as raw, primitive material without attempting to pre-structure or, for that matter, post-structure it, often resort to this technique.

New approaches (which work off of or use traditional techniques) must be tried, for that is the only way a philosophy and a practice of screen education will develop.

With this in mind, I convinced the principal and chairman of the English Dept. at Cheshire High School (Cheshire, Conn.) to experiment with Nothing But a Man. I agreed to supply study guide materials to three experienced English teachers. In turn the teachers agreed to teach the movie to their 270 juniors—in classes ranging from general to honors.

The experiment made possible the evaluation of a number of important objectives. (1) What approaches work best with different abilities; (2) what effects do movies have on the students, the teachers, and the curriculum; (3) how would a movie like Nothing But a Man (as an example of an entire genre) sit with students in an all-white suburban school; (4) using film as a base, what ways of extending student interest, broadening their experience and widening their knowledge could be discovered. I was interested in two further areas: what materials would be most helpful for teachers in preparing film study units and, secondly, how could movies retain their vitality and not be sterilized by the rigors of the curriculum. The following comments suggest some of our answers.
At our initial meeting, the instructors (Harriette Schilo, Fran McLaughlin, and John Griffin) wanted to know what *Nothing But a Man* was about. I explained that the film portrays—in a highly naturalistic mode—the difficulties that a young Negro, Duff Anderson, encounters in searching for identity and acceptance in a Southern community. The teachers felt that since the role of the Negro in American society had been a major topic in their American Lit. curriculum, there were many possibilities for classroom correlation (general curriculum tie-ins are, incidentally, usually more fruitful than specific ones). We agreed that each teacher would approach the film differently in order that various approaches could be tested. Mr. Griffin decided that he would present no introduction to the film at all. His students would come to the movie "cold." The others agreed to show a film extract prior to the complete screening. Both approaches worked well. Because the school was using a modular schedule, a double period was set aside for the showing of the film to all the juniors simultaneously. The value here is in seeing the entire film.

Four days before the public screening, the two women teachers (who had decided not to use the "cold" approach) received an eleven-page study guide (prepared for Brandon Films by Dr. Dan Ort and myself) and a film extract. The study guide consisted of credits, parts of the shooting script, synopsis, lesson plan, and suggested activities. The following (together with the credits on the first page) is a sample of that material. It is introduced primarily to suggest the kinds of materials the teacher has to become knowledgeable in before actually teaching a film. Without it, film study becomes shadow-play.

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STUDY GUIDE

STORY: As a railroad section hand in Alabama, Duff Andersen enjoys the relative independence and sense of accomplishment that comes with such a job. Yet Duff, unlike his cynical fellow workers, has a capacity for compassion and a dream that he can be accepted as a man. He visits his young son in Birmingham and continues to pay for his support even though he suspects that he may not be the boy’s father. Duff also saw his own father in the city. When only one arm and too often drank, is a wasted man living with his common-law wife, Lee.

Then Duff meets Josie Dawson, the preacher’s daughter, at a church festival. As he courts her, he discovers that even in the Negro community, as represented by Rev. Dawson, he is a misfit. With courage and hope Josie and Duff fall in love and marry, despite Rev. Dawson’s objections. Their love promises to sustain them. But their life is not easy. At the sawmill Duff is accused of trying to organize the Negro workers into a union. Actually he was just encouraging them to stand up to the white man. These cowed workers warn him that he has to act like a “nigger” if he wants to get along. But Duff is too much of a man, and eventually he is fired.

Now marked as a troublemaker, he finds it increasingly difficult to get work. Most of the jobs, like picking cotton and bellhopping, he considers degrading. Finally, with Rev. Dawson’s help he gets a job in a service station. But trouble continues to plague him. Duff is sent out with the wrecker to tow in a white man’s wrecked car. The white man, angry because Duff let his car slip off the chain, thinks the Negro is too cocky, too disrespectful.

Later at the station, four white men drive up to demand that Duff apologize to the owner of the wrecked car who is now seated in the back seat. As Duff remains silent, they intensify their efforts to belittle him. He is noticeably angry, but controlled. When they continue to make sensations remarks about his wife, he threatens them. There is an exchange of threats. The filling station owner, bending under the pressure, fires Duff.Returning home Duff takes out his frustration and anger on his wife by physically abusing her.

Jobless, defeated, he leaves his pregnant wife and goes to visit his father. But when old Will Andersen dies, leaving Lee alone and Duff with a wasted life, he realizes his responsibility. He picks up his son and returns with him to Josie and to the only chance he has of becoming accepted as the man he knows he is.

Both Mrs. Schilo and Mrs. McLaughlin found success in their academic and general classes by discussing cinematic technique and its relation to effective communication. The emphasis for example was on setting, theme, lighting, photography, music, sound effects and direction. Each class was divided into groups, assigned to look for certain technical aspects and asked to report their reactions following the movie. The film extract plus excerpts from the study guide was used in the classroom the day before the movie was shown.

FILM SCRIPT FOR EXTRACT

A gas station at night. Bad Ellis and Duff both approach—Bad from the office, Duff somewhat behind him from the garage.

ELLIS: (to the driver). Yes?

 DRIVER: Like some service from that boy there. (He indicates Duff.) Like the way he takes care of us. (Duff has come up, wiping his hands on a grease rag.)

ELLIS: (to Duff). Okay. (Ellis returns to his office. Duff glances into the car and notices the owner of the car is headed out of the ditch in the rear seat. A third man is sitting beside him and a fourth is up front with the driver.)

 DUFF: (as his guard, but matter of fact. Fill her up?

 DRIVER: No boy. Thirty-eight cents worth of gas. And watch you don’t make it thirty-nine. All of the men are watching Duff. Duff starts the pump. You gonna apologize to our friend here? (Duff says nothing. He watches the pump.) Didn’t he say yes? (Duff turns off the pump.) Did they say yes? where you come from? (The threat becomes explicit.) Boy . . . yes? you hear me?

 DUFF: (coming to the window quietly). That'll be thirty-eight cents.

 DRIVER: (tense. Dummie nigger? You must think you're white! Who do you think you are ? . . . the king of Harlem?

SECOND MAN: (to Duff). How about this windshield, boy? Like a little service. (Duff starts cleaning the windshield. His jaw muscles are tense.)

THIRD MAN: Hell, they're getting too big for their britches.

SECOND MAN: Yeah . . . his wife's getting the same way . . . strutting town like she owns the place. (With a grin), shakin' that little rear end.

THIRD MAN: It's all that education they're getting.

 DRIVER: (twisting. Duff slowly. Real cool ain't he. Just like we ain't here.

 DUFF: (at the window. gruffly. That'll be thirty-eight cents.

 DRIVER: You're in a big hurry, boy.

SECOND MAN: (with a grin). Yeah . . . He's trying to get home.

 DRIVER: (to Duff). But she's pretty hot, huh?

 DUFF: (told quietly, but on the point of being interrupted, looked wasgawret mouth man. (The driver knows that he has Duffs close to breaking. He continues with a grin.)

The assembly period came off well. Here are some typical quotations from short reaction papers written by students in Mr. Griffith's (the "cold" approach) class following the assembly period:

I found the movie to be quite enjoyable different from what I had expected. Actually, I think that both technically and dramatically it was flawless, mainly because it gave such a clear, "raw" (not course, however), and frank picture of the Negro from both points of view, something which I myself had never seen before . . .

When I left the room after seeing that movie I felt
disadvantages of this method:

Her father being a Negro preacher.
He's a man of prominence in the town.
He's willing to be a passive creature
In the act of putting the white man down.
My husband is so different from my dad.
He'll fight for Negro rights until he dies.
Sorrow and trouble is all he has had.
His hatred for the whites shows in his eyes.
Inwardly I feel my husband is right
But because of my father's impression
I am unable to join in his fight.
As a wife this is my transgression.
My husband will always have my respect.
My consolations I hope he'll accept.

In conclusion, let me quote the teachers' evaluations of the units.

Griffin: The racial situation presented in this movie is clearly the source of Duff's dilemma but, as is true in all good works, the lesson Duff learns is relevant and important to all of us. The value in a predominantly white school is not lessened at all by the racial situation. The students are made aware of both the racial problem and also their own worth as humans (i.e., the importance of not sacrificing their own self-respect for the comfort of social stability). I noticed with my low group a high degree of viewing sophistication. They are very well attuned to film experience, and get a great deal out of it.

McLaughlin: Reactions of the group were unanimously positive in classroom situation. Classes agreed that this film is a good one for inclusion in English curriculum, although students admitted they would not go to see this movie on a Saturday night date. Immediate reactions of students after showing of film—unsolicited personal comments: "great," "so real," "terrific," "Wasn't that just a lot of propaganda for the colored."

Schino: Slow learners were definitely helped by the film—first, more was covered in a shorter space of time; second, more literary techniques were introduced because viewing was more vivid and faster than reading, and pictures conveyed so much more. For example, tone and mood were explored more through film techniques of light and dark shots, near and far shots, sound and music, etc. Third, the facial expressions, at times, conveyed more than words.

The value of approaches like these (and, by reflection, of an article like this) is that they are immersed in the materials that surround a film—from credits, to script, to actual film. The moral seems to be that teachers must be prepared for the films they want to teach, otherwise the end of the film might well signal the end of student-involvement. The experience of a film must be articulated: to articulate it, teachers must know where the joints and the bones are.

WHERE TO GET IT

Nothing But a Man (bw, 92 minutes)

Rental: Brandon Films, Inc., 221 West 57 St., New York, New York 10019. $5.00 (INFOCARD 88)