This paper discusses the use of francophone films produced in French-speaking areas outside France in the second-language classroom, using several films from African countries and Canada as examples. The idea is that such films give students more than an abstract idea of a francophone region outside France, and represent large views of language and culture, encouraging students' use of contextualized skills. A synopsis and viewing guide for "La Vie est belle" and a lesson outline based on it are appended. (Contains 29 references, including Internet resources and film distributors.) (MSE)
Francophone Films in the Classroom

Introduction:

The topic of my presentation today, francophone films, is vast and complex, so do not expect a one-hour presentation to do more than barely scratch the surface. The handout [Appendix 1], though, which has been distributed, includes, among other items, a list of film titles and useful resources that can be a guide to help you explore the topic in greater depth. I hope to reserve some time at the end of the presentation for you to ask questions, but feel free to interrupt me at any time.

The main purpose of this presentation is to provide information on francophone films and to suggest some ways for using them in the classroom. By "francophone" I mean films produced in a French-speaking region outside of metropolitan France. As all French teachers know, there has been an increase in emphasis on la francophonie over the last decade or so to give our students a more realistic picture of the French-speaking peoples of the world today and also to broaden the base of French studies. Hopefully, la francophonie will help convey the message to students that French is still an important language and worthwhile of their study. For many of us, la francophonie has meant going back to the books to learn about something we need to keep up in the profession. And la francophonie can be overwhelming because it requires a
global perspective and an acquaintance with a wide range of cultures and events.

Film is one of the important resources for learning about and teaching la francophonie. Film can help students - and teachers - appreciate the diversity of the French-speaking world and can help them experience a francophone region in a way that no other medium can. Film is an ideal tool in any language class but can also be difficult to use. I have included in the handout some comments about using film in the language class and some suggestions for choosing a francophone film. I have also included a list of resources for using films in the classroom and I have brought along a variety of examples you might want to examine.

Francophone Films:

The handout starts with a list of selected francophone films from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Antilles, and Canada. These are film titles that are available for purchase or rental. I have indicated the name and address of the distributors of these films which are on videocassette unless otherwise noted. The history of film in the various francophone areas of the world is complex, so the list is far from complete, but these titles are at least somewhat representative of major film movements and styles. I should add that not all of them are suitable for the classroom because some of these films deal with remote issues or are too explicit.
Sub-Saharan Africa and the Antilles:

This first list is of selected francophone films from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Antilles. These are films from Senegal, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Togo, Burkina Faso, and La Martinique that represent major themes. These films tend to be socio-political because the film medium has often been used as an instrument of social and political progress. I have listed the films chronologically to give you a sense of development, but they can be grouped into three broad thematic categories: (1) colonial, or neocolonial confrontation, (2) social realism, and (3) cultural identity. The comments after each title give you an idea of where each film would tend to fall, whether it’s about alienation, exploitation, conflicts with the West, gender issues, or the search for heroes and myths in the pre-colonial past.

Just about any of these films can be used in a French class. How they are used depends on the students and the course. A film excerpt of a few minutes might be enough for what the teacher wants to accomplish; or an entire college course can be built around francophone film titles. For this presentation I thought I would aim at the intermediate level of college or about the third year of high school. Since I cannot talk about or show all the films in the list, I selected a few titles for this presentation and thought I would simply let one play while I talk about it so you will be able to form some impressions of the film.
The first is *La Vie est belle* which generally fits into the category of social realism and it is one of the most entertaining films of this group, that is, it offers interesting characters, comedic action, a rags-to-riches story, and a lot of music. What I do for each film that I want to use in the classroom, and what I have done for *La vie est belle* [Appendix 2], is to summarize the information about the film: director, date, synopsis, background, topics, and resources. This gives me a way to organize and structure the information. The next step is to develop a viewing guide, if none is already available, for students to use while watching the film. Viewing guides can vary a lot, from easy to complex, depending on the course and the students, but the idea is to keep it as simple as possible and yet keep students on track and give them a way to organize their work with the film.

I have for demonstration purposes the the first few pages of a sample viewing guide designed for *La Vie est belle* [Appendix 3] that could be used for a third-year high school or an intermediate-level college course. The guide starts with general information about the country, where it is on the map, the population, and some historical background from the Europeans' first contact with the area to recent events, that is, the successful takeover by Laurent Kabila. The guide provides some notes and exercises. I have borrowed techniques from other guides, for example, Mettez dans le bon ordre, and the Visual Organizer. I don't have time to be too creative, and besides, the viewing guide is to keep students focused and active, not to test.
La Vie est belle is a good choice for a francophone film because students could easily understand and appreciate the film on different levels and they are familiar with this kind of story line. In addition, there are many African cultural themes to be explored, such as tradition vs. modernity, the role of the sorcier, polygamy, and women’s place in society. In other words, the film can provide as much or as little study as is needed depending on what the teacher wants to accomplish.

In addition to La Vie est belle, I also have a copy of Rue cases-nègres, a more famous francophone film by the Martiniquaise director Euzhan Palcy. Rue cases-nègres is about an 11 year old boy, José, growing up in a colonial Martinique. The film incorporates many colonial themes and issues, but it’s mainly about José’s coming-of-age adventures and the sacrifice, commitment, and devotion of his grand-mother M’man Tine. Many teachers are familiar with Rue cases-nègres but few know that several instructional materials are available to help them use the film in the classroom: There is a 54-page, 8-lesson study guide from FilmArobics that includes questions, exercises, instructional and culture notes. A script of the film is part of a book by Sylvie César entitled “La Rue cases-nègres” du roman au film. Etude comparative. There is the novel by Jospeh Zobel upon which the film was based. And there are support articles such as Gerald Macdonald’s “Third World Films: A Strategy for Promoting Geographic Understanding” and Marie-Angèle Kingué’s Kingué “L’Afrique francophone: pédagogie et méthode.”
Québec:

The second list of films in your handout includes francophone films from Canada that seem to be representative of French-language film production. Some of them could be used for classroom instruction, depending on the course. Canadian or Québécois films are often socio-political, like their counter-parts from Africa, that is, they treat social and political issues, but the context is very different.

Québécois films, like all Canadian films, have a difficult time competing with Hollywood and with American culture in general. Québécois films are very not well-known in the United States, even among French teachers. Still, Québec film has a long complex history and some of the films are world-class. The comments after each title in the handout will give you an idea of content. Many of these films treat aspects of Québec history, cultural roots, harshness of life in this northern province, conflict with anglophones, and many treat social issues such as problems of the family, abuse, decadence and other aberrations in society. Québécois films tend to be more psychological than African films. Québécois films strike me in general as dark, pessimistic, and somewhat socio-pathic in the choice of subject and treatment of themes, and thus, choosing appropriate Québec films for the classroom is difficult because of the frequent explicitness of language and content.
Two films that are often identified for use in French classes are *Maria Chapdelaine* and *Mon oncle Antoine*. *Maria Chapdelaine* is based on a novel by Frenchman Louis Hémon. The story itself has become something of a legend and has formed stereotypical impressions of Québec for millions of French readers. This film, though, is difficult to find, except for rental.

Another, and perhaps better choice is *Mon oncle Antoine*. This film has many of what would be considered Québécois themes, and at the same time, is a cinematic achievement. *Mon oncle Antoine* is a coming-of-age, rites-of-passage film that takes place just before Christmas in a small asbestos mining town in Québec during the late 1940's. Benoît is an orphan, taken in by Antoine and his wife who are proprietors of the general store. In the first part of the film we participate in the local culture, the church, the store, the mine, a farm, and we meet various people of the community. We see the wintry scenes and preparations for Christmas. The second part of the film turns pessimistic. Benoît becomes disillusioned with those around him as he witnesses their weakness and foibles, particularly with Antoine, his uncle, whom he accompanies on a harrowing sleigh ride to bring back the corpse of a 15-year-old boy. (Antoine is also the undertaker.) The film is pessimistic but is not without humor and it provides a lot of material to learn about Québec and Québécois issues.

Moreover, there are ample materials to help adapt *Mon oncle Antoine* for instruction, including the scenario by the director Claude Jutra, an article on using the film for language and culture instruction in the *French Review,* and
analyses of the film as a social document and as a work of art. If you only have
time for one Québécois film, *Mon oncle Antoine* is the best choice.

**Conclusion:**

There is a lot I would like to add in my descriptions of these and other
francophone films, but an hour is hardly enough time. So, I'd like to emphasize
again that films are an excellent resource for the French classroom because
they give more than an abstract idea of a francophone region and people:
Students come away with a real feel for a francophone culture. We probably
would not want to use films to teach only grammar and vocabulary. We have
other, better tools for that. Films are better presenting larger contexts, where
students experience larger chunks of another language and culture and exercise
their contextual skills. But, at the same time, films are most effective when used
with discretion, and when they are carefully prepared to support what the
teachers aim to accomplish.
Appendix 1

Francophone Films in the Classroom

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
Annual Meeting, November 23, 1997

Russell G. Rose
UNC Charlotte

Selected Francophone Films: Sub-Saharan Africa and the Antilles

Twenty-minute fictional film about a cart driver in Dakar which critiques life in a neocolonial setting. Sembene's first film. Narrated in French. [Facets Multimedia, PAL]

*La noire de...,* directed by Ousmane Sembene, 1966, Senegal.
About a mistreated domestic who cut off from her cultural roots commits suicide. From one of Sembene's short stories in *Voltaique*. [New Yorker Films, 16mm.]

*Mandabi*, directed by Ousmane Sembene, 1968, Senegal.
Film version of Sembene's *Le Mandat* in which Dieng, who receives a money order from France, is victimized because he is unable to read. Recognized as Sub-Saharan Africa's first full-length feature film. Two versions, one in French, one in Wolof. [New Yorker Films, 16mm.]

*Rue cases-nègres*, directed by Euzhan Palcy, 1984, La Martinique.
Engaging story about the adventures of a young boy, José, with themes of oppression and alienation in colonial Martinique. Based on the novel of the same title by Joseph Zobel. [Facets Multimedia]

*Visages de femmes*, directed by Désiré Ecaré, 1985, Côte d'Ivoire.
Two stories filmed ten years apart. A completely African film, according to Ukadike, except for lengthy explicit scene in first story. [Facets Multimedia]

*Camp de Thiaroye*, directed by Ousmane Sembene and Faty Sow, 1987, Senegal.
Massacre of Senegalese soldiers waiting to be repatriated after WW II. Based on actual 1944 event. [New Yorker Films, 16mm.]

*La Vie est belle*, directed by Ngangura Mweze and Benoît Lamy, 1987, Zaire/Belgium.
Musical comedy with elements of social commentary. Kuru, the lead character is played by the popular Zairian musician and singer Papa Wemba. [Facets Multimedia]

*Sango Malo*, directed by Bassek ba Kobhio, 1991, Cameroon.
A new teacher arrives in the village of Lebamzip and upsets the status quo. [California Newsreel]

*Afrique, je te plumerai*, directed by Jean-Marie Teno, 1992, Cameroon.
A documentary-style film that examines the cultural and economic effects of colonialism in Cameroon. [California Newsreel]

*Ça twiste à Poponguine*, directed by Moussa Sene Absa, 1993, Senegal.
A coming-of-age film which takes place just before Christmas in 1964, about the adventures of two groups of young people, the Inseperables and the Kings. [California Newsreel]

*Femmes aux yeux ouverts*, directed by Anne-Laure Folly, 1994, Togo.
Portraits of contemporary African women. [California Newsreel]

A three-part study of the celebrated Martiniquais author. [California Newsreel]

*Le Bouillon d'Awara*, directed by César Paes, 1995, France.
About multiculturalism in the backcountry in French Guyana, an overseas department on the northeastern edge of South America. [California Newsreel]

A revisionist perspective of Albert Schweitzer. [California Newsreel]

Selected Francophone Films: Canada (Québec)

La vie heureuse de Léopold Z., directed by Gilles Carle, 1965. Comedic film in which Leopold, a snowplow driver in Montreal, borrows money to buy his wife a fur coat for Christmas. [Vedette Visuals]

J. A. Martin photographe, directed by Jean Beaudin, 1971. Rose-Aimée accompanies her photographer husband as he makes his rounds through the countryside. Atmosphere of turn-of-the-century Québec. One the ten-best on a 1984 Canadian film poll. [Vedette Visuals]


Les Bons Débarras, directed by Francis Mankiewicz, 1980. An introspective film about tensions of unwed mother and her twelve-year-old possessive daughter Manon. Québécois in its social setting and emotional impact. Third-best Canadian film, according to the 1984 poll. [Vedette Visuals]

Le Chandail, directed by Sheldon Cohen, 1980. Famous animated film based on story by Roch Carrier about a young boy having to wear an opposing hockey team's jersey. [Vedette Visuals]

Maria Chapdelaine, directed by Gilles Carle, 1983. A film that captures traditional Québécois past and provides an introduction to traditional culture of the province. Based on the novel by Frenchman Louis Hémon. [Vedette Visuals, rental]

Le Matou, directed by Jean Beaudin, 1985. Emile, a street-urchin, helps a couple against their arch enemies. Based on the novel by Yves Beauchemin. [Vedette Visuals]

Pouvoir intime, directed by Yves Simoneau, 1985.
Described as a psychological thriller, this film is about an armored truck heist gone awry. [Vedette Visuals]

Internationally-know film, somewhat in *The Big Chill* vein, in which a group of young professionals gather at a lakeside chalet. Portrays suicidal bent, despair, promiscuity, greed, selfishness, superficiality, etc., all reflected in witty dialogue. [American Scholastics]

Six-part television series that follows the lives and fortunes of of three families, the Lamberts, the Roussels, and the Fontaines, in the early part of the century. [American Scholastics]

*Jésus de Montréal*, directed by Denys Arcand, 1989.
A complex transposition of the story of Jesus into a modern setting. [Facets Multimedia]

A rather bizarre account of the dream world, sexual awakening, and disfunctional family of an adolescent, Léo, who ultimately becomes comotose. A cinematic achievement, but entirely too explicit for any but the most advanced students. [Facets Multimedia]

A much ballyhooed Québécois film with its own World Wide Web address. [American Scholastics, formally Bonjour America]

**Using Francophone Films in the Classroom:**

**Suggestions for choosing a film:** (1) The films selected should be authentic cultural products of the French-speaking region, and not touristic, stereotypical, or otherwise misleading accounts of a people, events, and issues. (2) The aspects of *la francophonie* such as geography, history, customs, and language should be accessible. (3) The story line and themes should be of interest to students. (4) There should be little or no explicit language or scenes (perhaps by editing) that would prohibit using a film in the classroom. (5) There should be supporting materials when possible, a scenerio, the book the film was based on, and instructional materials, or at the least the film should be adaptable to the classroom with a minimum of preparation.

**Suggestions for using a film:** Exploit advantages of the medium: Film offers authentic language and culture, a story line, characters, action, decor, costumes, background. Be aware of disadvantages: Complex language, rapid speech, length, usually little pedagogical support. Some general approaches and
techniques: Establish specific goals, adapt activities to students, use (simple) viewing guides to organize activities, list key vocabulary and grammar points, use films for general comprehension to develop contextual skills.

Selected Resources for Using (Francophone) Films in the Classroom:

Books:


Articles:


Guides:


**Selected Internet Resources:**

African and Caribbean music: http://www.ina.fr/Music/

Canadian film festivals: http://www.cs.cmu.edu/Unofficial/Canadiana/CA-filmfests.html

Festival International du Film Francophone: http://www.ciger.be/namur/

Festival Panafricain du Cinéma: http://www.fespaco.bf/

Francophone Inks: http://www1.appstate.edu/dept/f11/francophone.html

International Movie Database: http://us.imdb.com/
Video Flicks film rental and purchase: http://www.videoflick.com/

Video Vault film rental and purchase: http://www.videovault.com/

**Selected Film Distributors:**

- **American Scholastics**
  116 Consumer Square Ste. 258
  Plattsburgh, NY 12901
  Phone: (514) 499-9499

- **California Newsreel**
  149 Ninth Street / 420
  San Francisco, CA 94103
  Phone: (415) 621-9196

- **Facets Multimedia**
  Order Department
  1517 West Fullerton Ave
  Chicago, IL 60614
  Phone: 1-800-331-6197

- **FilmArobics**
  Birmingham Place
  Vernon Hills, IL 60061
  Phone: 1-800-832-2448

- **New Yorker Films**
  16 West 61st Street
  New York, NY 10023
  (212) 247-6110

- **Vedette Visuals**
  4520 58th, Ave., W.
  Tacoma, WA 98466
  Phone: (206) 564-4960
Appendix 2

La Vie est belle

Directors: Ngangura Mweze and Benoît Lamy
Date: 1987
Scenario: Ngangura Mweze
Country: Zaire/Belgium.

Synopsis: A film about the adventures of a musician/singer called Kuru who leaves the countryside and goes to Kinshasa, the capital of Zaire (Congo), to make his fortune. The star is Papa Wemba, a legendary musician/singer. Kinshasa is commonly known as the music capital of Africa. Kuru meets Kabibi who has just become the second wife of Nvouandu. Scenes of urban landscape that contrast with traditional rites and rituals. Several selections of popular music.


Resources: Film is available on video from Facets Video. A section in Library of African Cinema, A Guide to Video Resources for Colleges and Public Libraries by Mbye Cham is devoted to La Vie est belle. The film is also the subject the brief article by Brent Pitts in the AATF National Bulletin, volume 19, number 3, January. 1994, page 15.
La Vie est belle

La Vie est belle est un film dont l'action se déroule au Zaïre, un pays de l'Afrique centrale, connu depuis peu comme la République Démocratique du Congo. Les pays voisins sont l'Angola, la Zambie, le Mozambique, la Tanzanie, le Bé réundi, le Ruanda, Le Soudan, la République Centrafricaine, et le Congo. Le Zaïre, ou le Congo, est d'un superficie de 2,345,095 km². La capitale du pays est Kinshasa.

La population est 37 000 000 environ. Les habitants sont de plusieurs groupes ethniques: les Kongo, les Baluba, les Mongo, et les Malunda, parmi d'autres. La langue officielle du Zaïre/Congo est le français, mais on y parle plusieurs dialectes africains. On entend souvent un de ces dialectes, le lingala, dans ce film.

Leçon 1: Activités

De la campagne à Kinshasa (11 minutes)

Notes:

L’économie du Congo (Zaïre) est en mauvais état depuis longtemps. La pauvreté est soulignée dans plusieurs scènes du film, d’abord dans la campagne, et puis dans Kinshasa, la capitale. Notez les contrastes: vêtements, voitures et camions, quartiers, maisons. Comment gagner la vie? Comment faire la fortune? Comment est-ce que les personnages principaux du film y répondent?

Il y a des coutumes bien éloignées de celles des pays de l’ouest représentées dans La Vie est belle. Le sorcier, par exemple, est toujours consulté par les uns, et la polygamie, où il est permis d’avoir plus d’une épouse, déroute un peu le spectateur européen ou américain.

La langue parlée dans La Vie est belle est pour la plupart le français, mais on entend aussi le lingala, dialecte du groupe bantu.

Exercises de compréhension:

Mettez dans le bon ordre:

1. Kuru voir Kabibi pour la première fois.
2. Kuru quitte la campagne.
5. Nvuandu consulte le sorcier.

Questions:

1. D’où vient Kuru?
2. Comment est-il vêtu?
3. Quelle sorte d'instrument Kuru, joue-t-il?

4. Comment savez-vous que Kuru est bien connu?

5. Pourquoi a-t-il de la difficulté d'aller à Kinshasa?

6. Comment arrive-t-il?


9. Voyez-vous des influences de la culture américaine?

10. Les membres de l'orchestre rient à Kuru. Savez-vous pourquoi?

11. Qui est le patron de la boîte de nuit?

12. Kuru a trouvé de l'emploi. Où? Qu'est-ce qu'il fait?
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