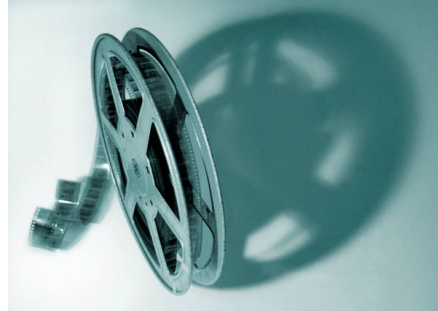


The Power of Movies



Ellen Summerfield, an intercultural film specialist, shares with Culturosimy readers the advantages and dangers of films in helping us understand and learn about other cultures.

Film Can...	But Film Can Also...
Increase our knowledge about our own and other cultures	Misinform, distort, and lie
Raise awareness; awaken interest in and curiosity about our own and other cultures	Provide superficial experiences
Allow us to "experience" other cultures	Provide superficial experiences
Enhance our cross-cultural skills (e.g. empathy, listening, mindfulness)	Cause us to fear, dislike, or minimize human differences
Develop critical thinking	Oversimplify; lull critical skills
Develop media literacy	Encourage passive reception
Speak to and evoke emotions	Desensitize
Make communication patterns (verbal and non-verbal) visible	Perpetuate negative patterns of communication
Make intercultural concepts visible (e.g. culture shock, assimilation)	Trivialize or domesticate human differences
Make visible and challenge our values; reduce ethnocentrism	Reinforce ethnocentrism
Bring to light multiple perspectives	Reinforce a single perspective

Film Can...	But Film Can Also...
Give voice to the voiceless; allow new voices to be heard	Establish the "voice of authority"
Expose and undo stereotypes	Create or reinforce stereotypes
Give us permission to talk about sensitive and controversial issues; create common basis for discussion	Cause a dispute or blow-up: create hard feelings; cause us to feel hurt / offended/ angry
Reveal our common humanity; create bonds	Incite fear and hatred; reinforce notions of "enemy"
Create hope	Create feelings of hopelessness
Provide positive role models	Provide negative role models
Advocate for peace and justice; promote responsible action	Cause us to feel immobilized; promote irresponsible action
Leave lasting positive images	Leave lasting negative images

Do the films you watch generally fall on the left or right side of this chart? Look for films that will create a positive experience and allow you to grow and prosper. After you see a film, compare it to this list. If you find a movie has left you with negative messages, reinforced stereotypes you have, or presented a single viewpoint, be weary of taking its message to heart. ✧



*Ellen Summerfield has served for nearly thirty years as a faculty member and administrator in international education at three institutions—Middlebury College, Kalamazoo College, and Linfield College. She received her B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania and her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut. Her books include *Crossing Cultures through Film*, *Survival Kit for Multicultural Living*, and *Seeing the Big Picture: Exploring American Cultures on Film* (co-authored with Sandra Lee). She speaks German, rusty French, and passable Spanish. She recently retired from her position as Director of International Programs at Linfield to become an independent consultant, facilitator, and researcher—and she has become interested in teaching classes online, including intercultural communication.*