

Tools FOR SCHOOLS

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS AND LEADERS

REEL IN YOUR AUDIENCE

*Use film clips, stories, cartoons, and quotes
to add impact to presentations*

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

Why is it that quotations, stories, cartoons, and film clips are so often woven into speeches or presentations that are so memorable and so powerful?

In the hands of an unskilled facilitator, such pieces can feel like unnecessary add-ons, plopped into a presentation only to get a guffaw. But recall the moments when a skilled facilitator got everyone in the room closer to a touchy topic by deftly introducing a powerful piece of film, poem, or lyrics from a song.

Parker Palmer, in *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (John Wiley,



2004), suggests that poems, stories, film clips, quotations, photographs, works of art, and pieces of music can be effective because they allow participants to approach often difficult topics “on the slant.”

“In Western culture, we often seek truth through confrontation. But our headstrong ways of charging at truth scare the shy soul away. If soul truth is to be spoken and heard, it must

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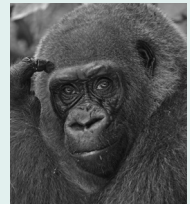
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Reel in your audience with film clips, stories, cartoons, and quotations

“When principals have limited time — and everyone has limited time — how do you quickly get a conversation started? How do you quickly get people engaged in the conversation rather than having them in the back of the room snoring, knitting, or doing a crossword puzzle?”

— Bill Sommers,
veteran principal
and former NSDC
president

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be approached ‘on the slant.’ I do not mean we should be coy, speaking evasively about subjects that make us uncomfortable, which weakens us and our relationships. But soul truth is so powerful that we must allow ourselves to approach it, and it to approach us, indirectly. We must invite, not command, the soul to speak. We must allow, not force, ourselves to listen,” he writes.

Palmer uses the phrase “third things” to describe the artifacts that allow such learning. They are “third things” because they represent neither the voice of the facilitator nor the voice of the participant, he writes. “They have voices of their own, voices that tell the truth about a topic but, in the manner of metaphors, tell it on the slant,” he writes.

Approaching topics “on the slant” using the cover of “third things,” Palmer suggests, allows all those in the room to develop their own understanding about a situation. The “third thing” allows participants to heed their own thoughts and make their own meaning built on their own experiences rather than relying only on the thoughts and words of the leader or facilitator.

Bill Sommers, a veteran principal and former NSDC president, sees the use of “third things” as both a way to inject deeper meaning into staff development and a way to use time more effectively. “When principals have limited time — and everyone has limited time — how do you quickly get a conversation started? How do you quickly get people engaged in the conversation rather than having them in the back of the room snoring, knitting, or doing a crossword puzzle?” Sommers asks.

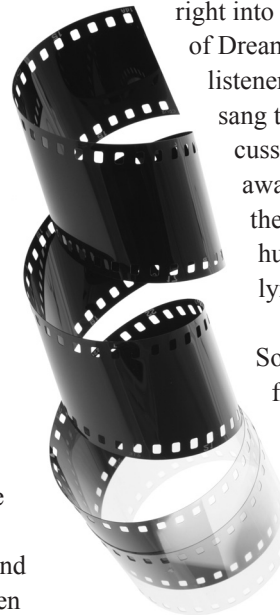
Sommers and colleague Walter (Skip) Olsen have collected dozens of film clips, commercials, and stories that they use in meetings and staff learning times. Together, they have published

two books of video and story collections that other staff developers can use to help in selecting appropriate film clips and stories for learning: *Energizing Staff Development Using Film Clips* (Corwin Press, 2006) and *A Trainer’s Companion: Stories to Stimulate Reflection, Conversation, and Action* (aha!Process, 2004).

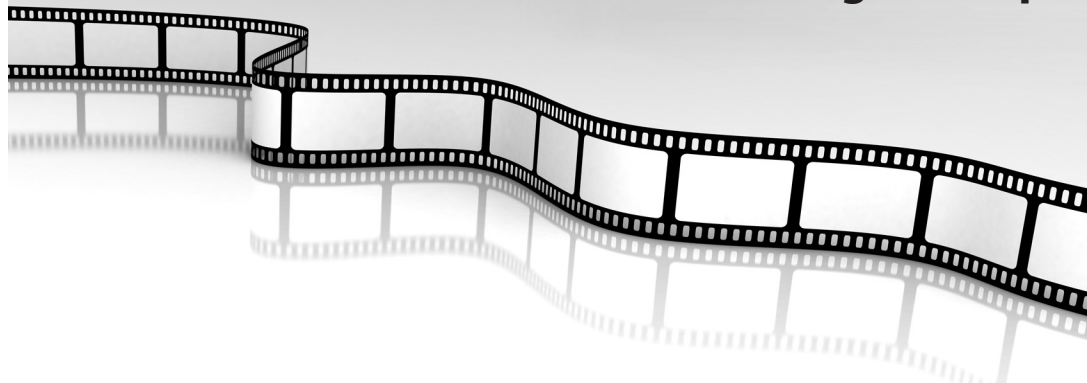
Sommers admits that he was a reluctant convert to using stories, poems, music lyrics, and film clips in staff development. But co-author Skip Olsen convinced him by showing him the difference that the right “third thing” could make. Olsen was launching a discussion about vision in his school. Rather than jump right into it, he played Billy Joel’s “River of Dreams” and passed out the lyrics so listeners could read the words as Joel sang them. “There was such a rich discussion then about vision, it blew me away,” Sommers said. (To download the lyrics for “River of Dreams” and hundreds of other songs, visit www.lyricsdomain.com/.)

Using the right “third thing,” Sommers said principals and other facilitators can get meetings focused within five minutes. “Time is killing all of us. If you can shorten the amount of time that it takes to get to the issues, you can spend more time on the substantive issues. You get to the authentic conversations faster,” he said.

But Sommers cautions that using “third things” — especially regarding difficult topics — requires preparation if staff developers want participants to be reflective after hearing a story or observing a film clip. “You can’t just show a film clip and jump into the conversation. If people are not used to having conversations about touchy issues, then you have to set the stage for that,” Sommers said. ■



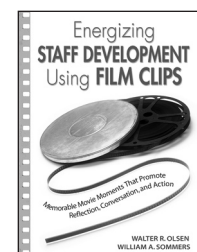
Guidelines for using film clips



- **View the clip before using it.**
- **Introduce the movie that the clip was taken from.** Tell participants the name of the movie, a bit about the characters, the plot, and the context of the clip. You want participants to focus on what you want rather than struggling to understand pieces that you can explain in advance.
- **Tell viewers what to look for.** You may want them to notice how a problem is handled in the clip, for example, or you may want them to focus on how they are responding to what they see. You may want them to connect what they see in the clip to something occurring in their school or community.
- **Warn participants if the clip contains language that some may find offensive.** Err on the side of caution. Being surprised by earthy language, for example, may diminish the effectiveness of the clip.
- **Cue up the clip in advance.** The night before you intend to use the clip, find the spot in the movie where you want to begin. Mark it so it is ready to use the next day.
- **Review the clip again before you use it.** Even if you have used it before, watching it again will refresh your memory and may suggest something you had not considered earlier.
- **Practice being flexible.** The adults who are viewing your clip may have new interpretations of what they see. If you are flexible, you'll be able to extend the discussion further than you anticipated.
- **Debrief.** Viewing the clip is just the first part of the experience. Ensure that you build in time for reflection. Let viewers explore their ideas, wonder out loud, ask questions and respond to the questions of others. This is where the learning occurs!
- **Make notes to yourself.** By referring to your notes later, you will find insights, places where you tripped up, and opportunities to exploit the next time you use the clip. This is part of your learning.
- **Set up a computer file to keep notes about potential clips.** Use a spreadsheet program and set up a file that includes these categories. This will allow you to do a quick search when you need something.
 - Movie/television program
 - Topic (change, resistance, vision, priorities, etc.)
 - Characters
 - When does the scene occur in the movie/television program
 - Describe the action

Source: Walter Olsen and William Sommers, *Energizing Staff Development Using Film Clips*, pp. 137-138. Copyright 2006 by Corwin Press. Reprinted with permission of Corwin Press.

Bill Sommers recommends buying the video or DVD that you want to use in your presentation or your meeting. Show the clip directly from that video or DVD. Do not copy the clip onto another device for your presentation.



Order *Energizing Staff Development Using Film Clips* by **Walter Olsen and William Sommers** from the NSDC Online Bookstore, <http://store.nsd.org>.

“The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower. Attitudes are the real figures of speech.”

—Edwin Friedman

Tell me, I'll forget.
Show me, I may remember. But involve me, and I'll understand.

—Chinese proverb

'I Love Lucy' teaches about change



Film title & synopsis: *Best of I Love Lucy, Vol. 2* (1951). This is the classic Episode 39 where Lucy, Ethel, Ricky, and Fred decide to switch roles. Lucy and Ethel go out and get jobs while Ricky and Fred stay home and manage the households. Though ill prepared and inexperienced for most of what the employment office has to offer in the world of work, Lucy and Ethel finally manage to get jobs at Kramer's Candy Kitchen while Ricky and Fred manage household duties. Disaster occurs in both places so they decide to call the whole thing off and go back to a “normal” life, the way things used to be.

Clip setup: Unsuccessful at a number of the jobs they were assigned in the candy factory, Lucy and Ethel finally wind up on an assembly line, wrapping individual candy pieces. This is their last chance — if one piece of candy gets by them, they will be fired.

Start movie: 00:17:13 as the supervisor walks in the door with Lucy and Ethel behind her and shows them the conveyor belt that the chocolates will move on.

Stop movie: 00:20:17 as Lucy fills her shirt with candies

Approximate length: 3:04

Questions for discussion

1. What observations would you make about the clip?
2. What elements of the situation made failure likely? Having identified the failure-producing elements, explore the possibility that some of the same elements are in your own work place. What are they?
3. How did Lucy and Ethel deal with change? What similarities do you see in your own workplace dealing with change?
4. What might Lucy and Ethel have done to make the situation more successful? How can you be more successful in dealing with change in your school/district?
5. As you think about the film clip and change in your team, school, or organization, what should you keep in mind as you go about your daily work?
6. What factors promote successful change? What factors inhibit successful change? Which of those factors are operating in your environment today? How can you increase your chances of success?

Why we like this clip

- **Portrayal of the organization.** When the supervisor says, “Let ’er roll!” and the conveyor belt does not move. This is a concrete example of parts of the organization not talking to, planning with, or communicating with other parts of the organization.
- **Identifying the cause of the problem.** The supervisor concluded that “somebody’s asleep at the switch,” rather than that the switch was broken or that there was a problem in another department. The clip provides an opportunity for teams, departments, schools, and other organizations to talk about personalizing problems or blaming people rather than looking for a solution to the system’s troubles.
- **False sense that the work will be easy.** Lucy and Ethel assumed the work would be easy and that “we can handle this OK.” But those judgments were based on assumptions that things were going to stay as they were. Soon, however, they realized that change was afoot and the belt started moving faster. They were falling behind. To their credit,

Lucy and Ethel did try new behaviors to keep up — eating some of the candy, dropping some, and eventually stuffing their clothing with candy, all to no avail, for as the belt moved along and they got farther behind, the quality of their work diminished and they could not keep up. What was needed was not the same behavior faster but a different strategy — maybe communicating with the person or the team who was controlling the speed of the conveyor belt or a conversation with the supervisor. The clips offers a chance to talk about the assumptions we make about our comfortable current reality; what possible changes we could make; and how we can best accommodate change.

- **Lucy and Ethel’s reaction to the supervisor.** Instead of telling the truth to the supervisor, they hid their problems, leading the supervisor to conclude erroneously that they were working splendidly — so the line could speed up a little with no difficulty. The supervisor looked at the process instead of the result and drew a flawed conclusion.

“It’s not so much that we’re afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it’s that place in between that we fear . . . It’s like being between trapezes. It’s Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There’s nothing to hold on to.”

— Marilyn Ferguson

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”

—John F. Kennedy

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”

— Charles Darwin

“The role of a leader is ‘to help people face reality and to mobilize them to make change.’”

— Ron Heifetz, *Fast Company*, June 2005

Source: Walter Olsen and William Sommers, *Energizing Staff Development Using Film Clips*, pp. 127-129. Copyright 2006 by Corwin Press. Reprinted with permission of Corwin Press.

Autobiography in 5 chapters

Notes to the facilitator

Change is hard. Our patterns get locked in as our ways of operating seem to work. But as time moves on, things change. Suddenly our standard operating procedures don't seem to work as well as they have in the past, or they aren't working at all. We tend to blame all kinds of causes, most of them external. Of course, when we step back, things are changing and will continue to do so.

This short story is meant to raise our awareness of what we're doing, get us to notice the results we're getting, and maybe show that it could be worthwhile to consider other alternatives.

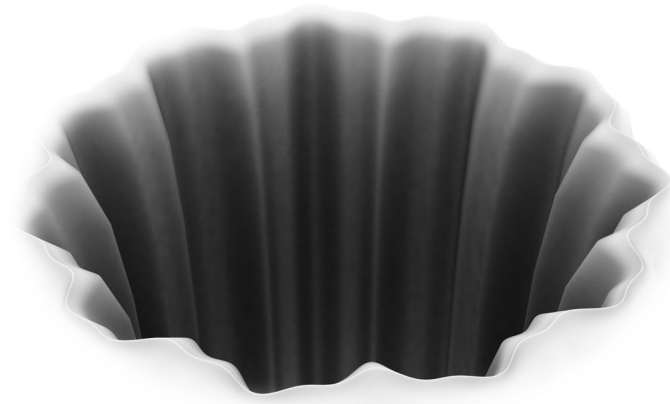
Begin by reading the story yourself. Decide whether you will use the story in your training. Make some notes about how the story does or does not fit with your work at this time. You also might want to expand on the ideas above.

"Humans are not ideally set up to understand logic; they are ideally set up to understand stories."

—Roger Schank

"A quotation at the right moment is like bread to the famished."

—Talmud



1. I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am hopeless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.
2. I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I'm in the same place.
But it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.
3. I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.
4. I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.
5. I walk down another street.

Source: *There's a Hole in My Sidewalk: The Romance of Self-Discovery*, by Portia Nelson. Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing, 1993. Order at www.beyondword.com. Reprinted with permission.

The gorilla story

Notes to the facilitator

Change is irritating. It is confusing, mysterious, unsettling, yet undeniable. It knocks us off balance. It frequently pushes us beyond our comfort zones. We're compelled to run faster and faster just to keep up. And there's no end in sight, no resting.

Because of the nature of things, we have to abandon what isn't working. We must create new ways of being in the world and with each other. This is very demanding, energy-consuming work. We find ourselves reacting to changes proposed or demanded by others — parents, business-people, legislators, boards of education — while the real task, it seems to us, is to proactively create our future together. We react defensively to changes being thrust upon us, thereby creat-

ing a future not chosen, into which we stumble, instead of a future we actively helped shape.

How do we react to change in our setting? Should we navigate a proposed change? If so, how? How do we keep the best of the old, yet be open to creating new responsive and intelligent practices and protocols? Is change inside or outside us? How do we do it best? And who defines change? How do we remain sane and civil while exploring our common future? And where do we find the time (not to mention energy) to investigate, consider, and create?

Begin by reading the story yourself. Decide whether and how you will use the story in your training. Make notes about how the story does or does not fit with your work at this time.

“The telling of stories leads to shared meaning and emotional experience that changes something profoundly.”

— John Kao

“The universe is made up of stories, not atoms.”

— Muriel Rukeyser

This story starts with a cage containing five gorillas and a large bunch of bananas hanging above some stairs in the center of the cage.

Before long, a gorilla goes to the stairs and starts to climb toward the bananas. As soon as he touches the stairs, all the gorillas are sprayed with cold water. After a while, another gorilla makes an attempt and gets the same result — all the gorillas are sprayed with cold water. Every time a gorilla attempts to retrieve the bananas, the others are sprayed. Eventually, they quit trying and leave the bananas alone.

One of the original five gorillas is removed from the cage and replaced with a new one. The new gorilla sees the bananas and starts to climb the stairs. To his horror, all the other gorillas attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs he will be assaulted. Next, the second of the original five gorillas is replaced with a new one. The

newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm.

Next, the third original gorilla is replaced with a new one. The new one goes for the stairs and is attacked as well. Two of the four gorillas that beat him have no idea why there were not permitted to climb the stairs or why they are participating in the beating of the newest gorilla.



After the fourth and fifth original gorillas have been replaced, all the gorillas that were sprayed with cold water are gone. Nevertheless, no gorilla will ever again approach the stairs. Why not?

“Because that’s the way it has always been done.”

Source: *A Trainer’s Companion: Stories to Stimulate Reflection, Conversation, and Action*, by Walter Olsen and William Sommers. Highlands, Texas: Aha! Process, 2004. Reprinted with permission of aha! process. Order at www.ahaprocess.com.

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Advocate for professional learning

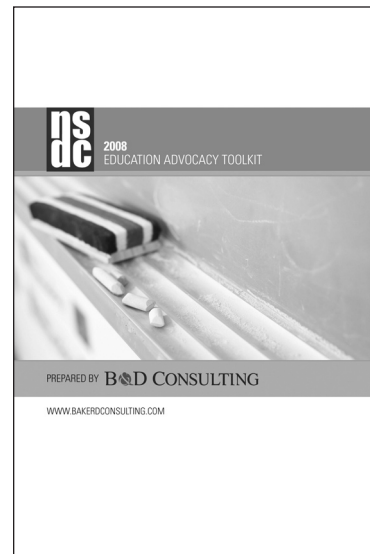
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