

# Halloween Drama Contest: A Didactic Approach to English Language Teaching in a non-Bilingual School

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This article presents an action research project developed in Mayor de San Bartolomé School in 2007, when the authors' teaching practice took place. The observation of 38 eighth graders, between 13 and 14 years old, highlighted their lack of motivation towards the English class. In the coming semester after the observation, the drama activities carried out in the English class made the students more eager to participate in the class activities and to use this language to communicate with their peers. The *Halloween Drama Contest* consisted of drama activities along with reading comprehension, writing production, vocabulary exercises and phonetics practice. Students were asked to prepare scripts of six horror movies to be performed on Halloween.

*Key words:* Drama, motivation, class participation, English learning, teenagers,

Este artículo presenta un proyecto de investigación-acción desarrollado en el Colegio Mayor de San Bartolomé en el 2007, cuando las autoras realizaron su práctica docente. La observación de 38 alumnos de octavo grado, entre los 13 y 14 años, visibilizó poca motivación frente a la clase de inglés. En el semestre posterior a la observación las actividades de actuación desarrolladas en la clase de inglés aumentaron el deseo de los estudiantes de participar en las actividades de la clase y usar dicho idioma para comunicarse con compañeros. El *Concurso de Teatro de Halloween* comprendió actividades teatrales, de comprensión lectora, producción escrita, vocabulario y fonética. Los estudiantes debían preparar seis películas de terror que presentarían en *Halloween*.

*Palabras clave:* Teatro, motivación, participación en clase, aprendizaje de inglés, adolescentes

## **Introduction**

This article reports an action research project developed in 2007; it highlights the role of motivation in language learning. Students need to have a sort of stimulus to learn a foreign language as everything outside the classroom happens in their native tongue. Therefore, they do not perceive the foreign language as relevant. Students need to feel involved in the classroom so they can find value in learning the target language. Using drama activities as a method for teaching a foreign language enhances students' self-confidence when speaking English because students work as teams and they learn that everyone has something to teach and something to learn from others. Consequently, when making mistakes students do not fear correcting each other, neither to be corrected. They work cooperatively as they know that the success of their performance depends on everybody's commitment. The more they work together, the more their staging will be organized, clear and appealing for the audience.

In order to motivate eighth graders to speak English with their classmates and therefore to improve their pronunciation and fluency, an action research project was carried out. The project, called Halloween Drama Contest, aimed to help students feel involved in the English class through drama activities. Students presented a dramatization based on six horror movies and their performance was recorded. They had six classes in which to prepare their presentations. Besides the oral rehearsals and the acting drills, students made a scrapbook based on the movie they dramatized. Students worked in groups of six and seven. They worked together to make the scrapbook, which included four different writing tasks. Once a week, students were assigned a task.

This project proposes a set of helpful activities for teachers who want to explore and innovate their way of teaching English. Drama activities invite teachers to explore arts as a method for teaching language. These activities encourage teachers to consider how theatrical activities can help students to improve their language proficiency and to explore their own personality at the same time. The activities proposed in this project constitute a guide for language teachers. Through drama activities students can improve their level of proficiency in the English language and develop their social skills as well.

## **Finding a Solution to Motivational Problems in the Classroom**

Since February 2007, eighth grade English classes were observed in Mayor de San Bartolomé School by three assistant teachers from Javeriana University. A particular

group of 38 eighth graders captured the attention of the observers since most of the time students were playing with their cell phones, or talking with their partners instead of participating in the class activities. Sometimes, students even refused to do the activities they were asked to do by the English teacher. These English classes were usually the last classes in the academic schedule of these eighth graders, just before lunch-time. Thus, the adolescents checked their watches, and yawned several times before the bell announced the ending of the class.

The class observed was composed of 38 eighth graders from Mayor de San Bartolomé School. They were female and male teenagers between thirteen and fourteen years old, very dynamic and extroverted. These students had a basic proficiency level, and they worked with the Longman textbook *Energy 3* for learning the target language. Students were assessed in the English class on three different aspects. The first one was comprehension, which involved listening and reading skills. The second one was production, which was related to speaking and writing. And the last aspect was class work, which not only involved class participation, but also included a revision of their notebooks and class folders having extra photocopies with reinforcement activities. Students had 2-hour English classes three times one week, and two times the following week, getting six hours of English class one week and four hours in the coming week.

Several questions crossed our minds as assistant teachers once we noticed several influential factors affecting students' motivation and performance. In the first six months of the year, students said they did not feel involved in the class activities, which were mainly focused on writing and reading skills. According to them, the listening exercises were very frustrating since they got lost and understood little. Besides, they were way too shy and self-conscious which made them avoid any class participation because they felt exposed speaking a foreign language in front of their classmates. Nevertheless, the most successful activities in the class were those involving performance, role playing and constant interaction. After analyzing the successful and not so successful activities carried out in the English class during the first semester of observation, we concluded students liked to be in the spotlight, so they misbehaved and stopped working when they did not get the attention they wanted from the teacher and peers. We also identify a constant trait in the students: they all seemed to be very competitive and feel discouraged when their personal abilities were not highlighted in front of their classmates.

This finding made us think about performing and acting as a didactic approach to motivate the teenage students to participate actively in the English classes. However, it was also clear that the class activities should not neglect the development of other communicative skills besides listening and speaking, and that is why the *Halloween Drama Contest* we proposed included other activities in reading and writing. *The Halloween Drama Contest* was the result of an action research project whose main research question was *How can drama activities help eighth graders at Mayor de San Bartolomé School to feel involved in the English class?* Thus, the research objective consisted of determining how drama could boost teenage students' motivation towards their English class. Additionally, this project had the following five pedagogical objectives: 1) to improve intonation and pronunciation by self-monitoring drama drills; 2) to teach new expressions and vocabulary; 3) to develop general comprehension skills by analyzing the content and the context of a script; 4) to develop social skills by doing cooperative work when preparing a play; 5) to boost students' self-confidence to speak English in public by doing drama drills and performing a role in a play.

### **Drama in the Classroom, not the First Time**

The Halloween Drama Contest was inspired by similar pedagogical approaches exploring arts as a method for language teaching. Drama activities were implemented in Lincoln High School, in Seattle in the 40s, and there are several studies proving drama activities motivate students, build self-confidence, and promote interaction in the classroom. Edna Sterling, in her study *The Play Goes on* (1940), remarked on the fact that a great number of schools in the United States have already integrated drama activities in the classroom. For instance, Lincoln High School, in Seattle, Washington, introduced an expanded course in drama into its English program (p. 325). Some skeptical teachers may say that students find acting activities irrelevant in contrast to discipline-center activities on academic subjects such as math, chemistry, or history. However, Lincoln students have said several times that acting is a serious business (p. 326).

Despite these successful experiences in the English classroom when using drama, Gladys Veidemanis (1962) says drama is still the Cinderella in most educative institutions (p. 544). This frequent reluctance for drama did not discourage us, but made us aware of the importance of re-examining the way teaching drama could be adapted to the specific needs of the language class we observed. Kirkton (1971) mentions that when teaching drama to teenagers, teachers must consider the way

theatrical activities help students to explore and discover their own identity, and to become more sensitive to human relationships (p. 533). In fact drama activities in the English classroom did not only improve students' level of proficiency in the language, but affected students' personal and social life positively since they developed the emotional intelligence and social skills necessary to work as teams, even overcoming previous negative experiences they had at school with their peers.

A recent study developed by Barbara and Carroll Izard has shown the relevance of implementing drama in the classroom as a means for developing healthy individuals (Izard & Izard, 1977, p. 215). Drama promotes students' active participation in the class since it encourages them to express their emotions and feelings freely. The *Hallowing Drama Contest* success among the students was based on the way they felt personally and emotionally involved in the activities; the drama drills and rehearsals challenged them to overcome their shyness and fears of speaking English in public. Students became more respectful when listening to their partners' interventions and learnt to value their peers work in the rehearsals. According to Barbara and Carroll Izard, "drama is an excellent vehicle for the integration of emotion, thought and action", and by integrating emotions drama is a great motivation booster (1977, p. 215).

The observed classes in the first semester 2007 made us aware of the many groups of students coexisting in the classroom. Some of their members did not interact openly with the other groups; the shy teenagers were usually isolated from their classmates. The *Halloween Drama Contest* was based on team work and allowed students to share most of the class time with the classmates involved in the same movie presentation. There was a more relaxed atmosphere since students with one of the assistant teachers worked in small groups, reading the scripts, developing vocabulary exercises, writing in a team scrapbook every week about the movie and the characters, practicing pronunciation, listening to the previously recorded scripts, watching the trailers and some scenes of the movie, and rehearsing for their final presentation. According to Ronke (2005), drama activities create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom as students do not feel anxiety to learn (p. 88) and to understand the language. On the contrary, they feel they can express their feelings, exchange their ideas and use the target language as well. Students do not have to worry about the grammar as they can understand better the language based on drama activities such as role-plays, improvisation and monologues in which the target language is used for specific purposes (Ronke, 2005).

Having this in mind, the *Halloween Drama Contest* was developed to enhance students' self-confidence when speaking and to get them aware of the fact that their mistakes were not obstacles in their learning process, as they could learn from their partners' feedback. The drama activities were based on Language Community Learning methodology; students worked cooperatively since they knew that the success of their performance depended on everybody's commitment and effort.

Besides the low anxiety benefit of drama activities, the constant performance boosted students' communicative use of the language. According to Ronke (2005), drama itself provides students with real obstacles and challenges similar to the ones they will face in real communication. By facing unpredictable communicative twists, students gain self-confidence and develop sociolinguistic abilities that will help them decode messages, identify the context of a conversation, choose useful icebreakers, and close conversations politely. Performing "prepares learners for the unpredictable nature of real-life communication, teaches appropriate language use, and boosts self-confidence" (p. 86). During the rehearsals, students were forced to improvise and produce logical lines in the foreign language; they also adapted the scenes to make them more eye catching and interesting for their future audience. Therefore, drama activities prompt students' natural use of the English language in a real communicative context.

Astrid Ronke (2005) states that drama and theater can be understood as a new method for teaching that helps students use both hemispheres of the brain (p. 83). Through drama, students can develop logical-abstract thinking and creative functions. In other words, drama can help students learn a language holistically as they develop thinking skills and creativity at the same time. Through drama activities, for example, students can use the target language in a creative and realistic way as they interact with their classmates and express themselves; instead of "analyzing" language, students "use" it (Ronke, 2005, p. 83). Drama activities also help language learners develop their intelligence as most of them require students to solve problems while they are communicating with their partners. Drama activities make learning a student-centered process (Ronke, 2005, p. 86), and that is exactly what happened in the English classes. Once we started the *Halloween Drama Contest*, students developed autonomy and responsibility; they even rehearsed after classes and on the weekends. They were so involved in the process that they designed the scenarios and clothes used in their performance incorporating sounds and visual effects to make their performances even more powerful. Besides, students participated actively and came

up with new ideas to make drama activities more fun because they knew they were the ones going on the stage.

Moffett (1967) has stated that drama activities, whether they are individual or group, allow students to develop self-realization as they involve feelings, thoughts, and experiencing, which makes it easier for students to retain knowledge because there is a relationship between them and the acquisition of that knowledge. Moreover, dramatization makes students face new challenges, and in that way they learn to cope with real situations that arise in normal communication. Additionally, students can learn about language, literature and composition by writing plays, acting, interpreting and creating drama (Moffett, 1967). According to our experience in Mayor de San Bartolomé School, drama activities motivated students to use English in real contexts and to master structures by using repetition and memory; this is, by learning their lines by heart but in association with their performance and the context given by the movie's plot. Moreover, drama gave each student the opportunity to participate actively in class. According to Lytle (1943), the dramaturgic method increases students' ability to read dialogues aloud effectively, to visualize scenes mentally, to link scenes with scenes and to acquire concepts very efficiently.

### **Drama: Try It Yourself**

Several activities were developed in the framework of the *Halloween Drama Contest* during eight sessions of class. Before starting the drama activities, students were told what the *Halloween Drama Contest* was about and six movie scripts were assigned randomly to six teams. There were six to seven students on every team. The following week, students were supposed to work on their lines; for this reason there were some rehearsing activities prepared. However, we must clarify that some of the planned activities were not carried out due to a lack of time and external factors affecting the class schedule. Besides the class rehearsals, students worked on writing and reading activities related to the movies they were preparing. Each team, or crew, made a scrapbook in which they drew or included pictures of the characters they were going to play on stage. Each student described his character's physical appearance, personality and behavior patterns. Additionally, students were asked to choose different scenarios from the movies, draw them and described them. Some reading comprehension exercises were also developed such as paraphrasing the movie's plot, identifying the main ideas in movie summaries, and answering questions about the movie's scenes and characters.

During the first session students read the script aloud and tape recorded their lines. Later they listened to themselves. The teacher helped students identify mistakes in pronunciation and intonation. Later students prepared the first and second scene of the movies. Students watched movie trailers and scenes corresponding to the ones they were preparing in class. By doing so, they got familiar with their roles and could identify particular traits of their characters to be incorporated into their performance. In order to emphasize emotions, students were asked to present lines from one scene having an emotion in mind. Their classmates had to determine if this emotion was clear in the performance. This was done by all the students. These presentations were video recorded.

In the second session students watched videos from their previous performance to self monitor their body language, pronunciation and intonation, as well as the overall performance. Later students repeated the exercise from the previous session reading aloud their whole scripts with their crew, focusing their performance on a particular emotion of their characters. We wanted students to rehearse their lines in front of mirrors so they could self-monitor their performance by focusing on their own movements, gestures and way of articulating sounds. In coming rehearsals, students were asked to incorporate new features in their performances based on movie trailers and drama drills performed in class. In addition, students received cassettes with the recorded scripts to use as models in individual study practice. Some colleagues from Javeriana University read the lines of the scripts and recreated the scenes with sound effects for the students to have good pronunciation models to imitate. In order to boost students' memory and command of their lines, we asked them to work in pairs and organize a set of disarranged lines from the whole script that they put together in the right order. We expected students to be able to arrange those sentences in logical order and to identify the logical sequence of the scenes. Another exercise for helping them memorize their lines was asking them to read their lines as they threw a ball to their crewmates to take turns. In this way, students could remember who was first in the scene and who followed.

There were three different activities prepared for the third session. The first one consisted of a game in which students danced around a set of chairs arranged in a circle. A chair was missing. When the music stopped, students had to sit. The one standing up should describe one of the scenes from the movie. A second activity was based on teamwork. Students participated in a *Soccer Match*. In this game, they were expected to say all their lines in the correct order. An eraser was placed on the soccer

field to represent a soccer ball. A student from one team said his lines. If the student said his lines correctly, the soccer ball advanced one space (one player) closer to the opposing net. If the student made a mistake then the ball moved one space closer to his own net. The third activity prepared for this session aimed the internalisation of the lines. A student wore a blindfold and said his lines aloud in front of the group while his partners were saying their lines aloud too. The objective of the exercise was to help students remember their lines without letting external distracting factors affect their performance.

In the fourth session, students sit around a spinning bottle placed on the floor. The students facing the bottom and the rim of the bottle had a *face-to-face duel*. Both students said their lines in front of their classmates having in mind the features of their characters. Their classmates determined who best portrayed those features in his performance. This activity was done until all the students had performed their characters. Another activity suggested for this session was having students play with a balloon. The student who dropped the balloon would introduce himself as the character he was going to perform in the movie. In order to do so, he would improvise and move around his classmates playing his role.

In the fifth session students participated in a reading comprehension workshop based on a Batman movie. The idea was to prepare them for the coming reading text they would have on the movies they were performing. The questions for the test, as well as the model, were multiple choice ones. The test helped us check the students' comprehension on the content of the movie plot. In the following class, the sixth session, students took the reading comprehension exam based on their movies. The reading test was divided into three parts. The first part of the test assessed students' general comprehension on the synopsis of the movie they had been working on in class. The second part of the test demanded students go back to the synopsis to identify what some words referred to. The third part of the exam assessed students' skills for identifying main information. In this third part students were asked to identify the four sentences that best summarized the movie and to write them. The reading in the test was actually a synopsis of the movie they were going to play on Halloween. The text was adapted to avoid the overuse of adjectives that could make it difficult for the students to understand its content. By the time students were already familiar with the movies, they were asked to complete their scrapbooks as teams. The scrapbook was handwritten; it had drawings and pictures of the movies, descriptions of the characters, scenes and scenarios of the movies. Besides, the scrapbook

included a set of questions in order for the students to get familiar with the context in which the movie story took place. These questions were the following: Where does the story take place? When is the story developed? How does the story develop? What is the genre of the story? How do you know that? How is this genre reflected in the story?

The last session before the final presentation, the seventh session, was mainly focused on the final rehearsal. Finally, the day of the presentation students were assessed on their performances and language proficiency. The best performances were rewarded by the students: the winners in the categories of best female and male performance, secondary actor and actress, as well as the best villain, received beautiful masks. Finally, to evaluate the Halloween drama contest students answered a survey consisting of two questions about students' reactions towards acting and their willingness to repeat the experience of acting in English class.

## **The Halloween Drama Contest Development and Evaluation**

The *Halloween Drama Contest* aimed to motivate students to feel involved in the English class and to enhance students' communicative abilities. Students presented a staging based on horror movies. *Scream* (1996), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) were the six horror movies adapted for the students' performance. Students were assigned the movie they were going to play at random and in groups of six and seven.

Students had six class sessions in which to prepare their performances. Besides the oral rehearsals and the acting drills, students made a scrapbook based on the movie they were assigned. Furthermore, they worked together to make the scrapbook. This scrapbook included reading and writing tasks. Once a week, students were assigned a task. Every Friday teachers checked the scrapbook to verify that the task had been accomplished by the group. If so, the group got five points. They also got five points for their rehearsals in class. The final presentation was scored with a possible 20 points. Finally, the group having the highest score was declared the winner.

In order to define the students' interests and expectations in the English class, we developed three surveys. The first one determined what students thought about their English class before starting the project. The survey was composed of four different

questions and was conducted on October 3, 2007, at the beginning of the English class. The first question was designed to identify the types of activities students preferred for the English class. Students were given nine options that included activities such as text-book based workshops, grammar drills, interactive activities, individual activities, oral activities and activities related to other fields of knowledge. The second question was designed to determine the frequency students preferred their teacher to speak English during the class. Students were given four options. The first option was that they preferred their teacher to speak English all the time no matter if they did not understand totally what she said. The second option was that students preferred their teacher to speak English all the time except when she noticed students did not follow her. The third option was that students preferred their teacher to speak English all the time, but she should explain grammar and give instructions in Spanish. The last option was that students preferred their teacher to speak Spanish during the whole class. The third question was designed to identify the types of activities that motivated students to work in class. Students were given seven options. The first option consisted of activities allowing students to practice their previous knowledge of the English language. The second option consisted of activities allowing students to acquire new knowledge. The third option consisted of activities allowing students to express themselves freely. The fourth option consisted of activities allowing them to be in the spotlight in the class. The fifth option consisted of activities allowing them to work in groups. The sixth option consisted of activities allowing students to express their doubts without being mocked by their classmates. And the seventh option consisted of activities allowing students to choose their partners when working in groups. Thirty-four students answered this survey.

In relation to the first question, 20% of the students said they preferred textbook-based workshops; 62% of the students preferred grammar drills; 88% of the students preferred interaction activities; 38% of the students preferred individual activities; 59% of the students preferred activities allowing them to be in the spotlight; 29% of the students preferred easy to do activities; 62% of the students preferred activities demanding them to use their knowledge critically to solve real life problems; 20% of the students preferred activities related to other fields of knowledge; and 68% of the students preferred activities allowing them to interact orally with their classmates. In relation to the second question about the frequency students preferred their teacher to speak English during the class, 9 % of the students

said they preferred their teacher to speak English all the time, even if they did not understand totally what she said; 41% of the students answered they preferred their teacher to speak English all the time except when she noticed students did not follow her; 59% of the students said they preferred their teacher to speak English all the time, but to explain grammar and to give instructions in Spanish; and 20% of the students said they preferred their teacher to speak Spanish during the whole class. For the third question about the types of activities that motivated students to work in class, 82% of the students said they preferred activities allowing them to practice their previous knowledge of the English language; 76% of the students preferred activities allowing them to acquire new knowledge; 59% of the students preferred activities allowing them to express themselves freely; 20% of the students preferred activities allowing them to be in the spotlight during the class; 82% of the students preferred activities allowing them to work in groups; 59% of the students preferred activities allowing them to express their doubts without being mocked by their classmates; and 73% of the students preferred activities allowing them to choose their partners when working in groups. In relation to the fourth question about the types of activities students would suggest for the English class, 35% of the students suggested using movies for the class; 23% of the students wanted to work in places different from the classroom; 12% of the students suggested using songs to improve their listening skills; 6% suggested receiving individual tutoring and developing practical activities during the class; and 3% of the students suggested activities helping them improve their pronunciation, gain more vocabulary; also the same 3% suggested the use of computer technology in the class.

Through this first survey, students' expectations and interests for the English class were identified. Students suggested activities that focused on oral skills and interaction; besides they said they were interested in working with movies and computer technology. This is why the Halloween Drama Contest proposed drama drills in which students could interact with their classmates by playing a role and being in the spotlight while performing on the stage, watching movie trailers, and interacting with video cameras. By watching trailers and scenes from the movie they were performing, students were able to improve their pronunciation and fluency. As students prepared their lines listening to cassettes having their movie script read by other English teachers, their pronunciation was improved systematically.

In order to determine how students felt about the drama activities included in the class, a second survey was conducted on October 24 at the beginning of the English

class. The survey consisted of an open question about how students felt in the English class. Through this question students could express their attitudes towards the English class, as well as their views on the activities proposed by the assistant teachers and the methodology of the class. Thirty-two students answered this survey consisting of an open question. The results were very impressive since 87% of the class described the drama activities as fun, facilitating learning, methodologically appropriate and varied.

Finally, on November 7 a third survey was conducted to determine how students felt about acting. This was a multiple choice survey. Thirty-four students answered the survey about the impression of the drama performance and the impact of the drama drills on their speaking ability. The first question was designed to determine how students felt performing their characters. They were given two options. The first option was that students thought acting was enjoyable and they would like to repeat that experience. The second option was students would not be willing to repeat the experience again. The second question was designed to establish how acting had helped students to improve their speaking skills. Students were given four options. The first option was that students had improved their pronunciation. The second option was that students had learnt new vocabulary and new expressions. The third option was that students had gained self-confidence when speaking English. The last option was that students had wasted their time because of the drama activities. This last survey showed that 59% of the students enjoyed acting and were enthusiastic about doing it again. Twenty-six percent of the students, who said they still felt nervous, admitted they enjoyed acting. In addition, all the students claimed to have improved their English language proficiency on two different levels: 59% in pronunciation and 56% in vocabulary and new expressions. Furthermore, 59% of the students said they gained self-confidence when speaking English. Therefore, the drama drills and the final presentation motivated students to continue learning English and to use it mainly to communicate. The surveys showed that students enjoyed the drama drills and were interested in giving a great performance the day of the final presentation. Their participation in the class increased when working on their lines and their characters' features. In addition, students were enthusiastic about rehearsing after class and even on weekends; they brought costumes and props to the classes. Students used objects such as paper made trees, telephones, pillows, blankets, and flashlights for the rehearsals. During the process students worked together and

helped their classmates; they suggested different ways of playing their roles and were eager to see their classmates' presentations and to perform for the whole class.

### **Drama not the Cinderella of the Story: Final Thoughts**

Drama activities truly transformed the class environment in Mayor de San Bartolomé School and students' perception of the English class and their capabilities. After doing the drama drills students gained self-confidence when speaking English using their current basic level. They recognized they could express emotions and feelings successfully on the stage, and they were proud of their progress. By the time the final presentation took place, students had learnt their lines by heart and had included new drama elements in their performance. Therefore, on the day of the presentation they acted wonderfully. Students took pictures of the presentations, which indicated these presentations were meaningful for them. In addition, they gave awards for the best performances. The best main character, secondary actor, secondary actress, villain, victim and the best costume were awarded the day after the presentation. The awarded students felt their work in the drama activities was recognized, and they were motivated to continue working on their English for future drama activities. Since most of the students said they were motivated to act again in English class, it seems that this project was successful. After the *Halloween Drama Contest* students expressed that they liked their English class and thought of this class as an opportunity for them to do new activities, explore their artistic abilities, and share their talent and knowledge with their classmates. Evidences are shown in the following pictures:

#### Halloween Drama Contest Pictures



**Figure 1.** Students presenting *Scream* (1996).



**Figure 2.** Adapted scene from *Scream* (1996).



**Figure 3.** The Exorcism of Emily Rose (2005).



**Figure 4.** Scene from The Silence of the Lambs (1991).

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## Appendix:

### Adapted Movie Plots and Scripts

Six horror movies were adapted for students to perform in the Halloween Drama Contest. The following is a sample of the script adapted from the movie *Scream 1*.

**Plot:** A teenage girl, her boyfriend, and her parents are brutally slaughtered by a mysterious killer. A week later, the murderer attacks again. This time, the killer attacks an elegant receptionist from the Tequendama Hotel. Her body is found on the counter slashed. The killer wears a mask to hide his identity, but he likes to approach his victims by calling them first in order to talk with them and get some personal information. Once he has established an emotional connection with his victims, he is ready to kill.

#### Scene 1

Setting: Casey's home at night in the kitchen.

**Characters:** Casey, Casey's mother, Casey's father, Steve, Man in the mask  
[Casey is preparing pop corn and the phone rings]

Casey: Hello.

Man in the mask [hiding in the garden]: Hello... Who is this?

Casey: Who are you trying to reach?

Man in the mask: I don't know.

Casey: I think you have the wrong number.

[She hangs up the phone and it RINGS again]

[Casey grabs the portable]

Casey: Hello.

Man in the mask: I'm sorry. I guess I dialed the wrong number.

Casey: So why did you dial it again?

Man in the mask: To apologize.

Casey: You're forgiven. Bye now.

Man in the mask: Wait, wait. Don't hang up. I want to talk to you for a second.

Casey: They've got 900 numbers for that. Seeya.

[Casey hangs up, and the phone RINGS again]

Casey: Hello.

Man in the mask: Why don't you want to talk to me?

Casey: Who is this?

Man in the mask: You tell me your name, I'll tell you mine.

Casey [shaking the popcorn]: I don't think so.

Man in the mask: I like the smell. Are you making popcorn?

Casey: Yeah, how did you know?

Man in the mask: I only eat popcorn at the movies.

Casey: I'm getting ready to watch a scary movie.

Man in the mask: Do you like scary movies?

Casey: Uh-huh.

Man in the mask: Who are you going to watch the movie with?

Casey: I'm watching the movie by myself.

Man in the mask: Oh, really? Do you have a boyfriend?

Casey: No.

Man in the mask: You never told me your name.

[Casey smiles, twirling her hair]

Casey: Why do you want to know my name?

Man in the mask: Because I want to know who I'm looking at.

[Casey spins around looking for the man]

Casey: What did you say?

Man in the mask: I want to know who I'm talking to.

[Casey scared hangs up. She hears some noise in the kitchen]

Casey: Who's there? I'm going to call the police.

[The phone rings before she can dial]

Man in the mask: I want to see you; I want to see your insides.

Casey: My boyfriend will be here any second and he'll be pissed when I tell him...

Man in the mask: I thought you didn't have a boyfriend. His name wouldn't be Steve, would it?

Casey: How do you know his name?

[Casey, terrified, finds Steve tied and terribly wounded. He is unconscious]

Casey: Oh Godddd...

Man in the mask [still on the phone]: What door am I at?

[Casey recognizes her parents coming home]

Man in the mask: I got you.

[The man in the mask cuts her throat with a long knife and disappears]

[Casey's parents approach the door]

Casey's father: Jesus... Casey? Casey? [He holds her daughter who is bleeding on the floor]

Casey's mother: Oh my God, call the police...

Casey's father: The phone's dead.

[Noises coming from the garden]

Casey's mother: Did you hear that? Someone is here.

Casey's father: Don't worry sweetheart. I'll use this knife.

Casey's mother: Someone's coming. Careful, he is just behind you.

[Casey's father raises the knife ready to attack, but he realized the man behind him was Steve]

Steve: Sir. Do you know where Casey is?

Casey's mother: Oh, my dear. You are so wounded. Are you alright?

Steve: Yes, I'm ok. But where is Casey?

Casey's father: She is dead.

[The masked man turns off the light and kills Casey's father, when the lights are turned back on, Casey's mother finds his corpse and screams]

Steve: What happened?

Casey's mother: We are the only ones remaining here.

Steve: We have to...

[The phone rings]

Casey's mother: Hello?

[The light fade, there is only darkness]

## Scene 2

Setting: Counter of a hotel. The receptionist is checking the hotel's book.

**Characters:** Receptionist, Man in the mask.

Receptionist: I'm exhausted; I have been working all day long. I hope not to get any more calls for today.

[The phone rings]

Receptionist: Oh, damn it! Thank for calling Tequendama Hotel. My name is Vanessa. How may I assist you today?

Man in the mask: Hello, Vanessa.

Receptionist: May I help you?

Man in the mask: Don't be so formal Vanessa. I just want to talk with you...

Receptionist: Sir, you are calling Tequendama Hotel, is there anything I can help you with?

Man in the mask: Yes, I want to play a game with you. I want you to tell me where I am and what I am about to do.

Receptionist: Sir, would you like to be registered in our hotel?

Man in the mask: Yes... I'm fact, I already got in, and I like what I see. You are a beautiful woman, quite elegant and sophisticated. I like how you look in your red suit.

[The receptionist hangs up, she is very nervous. Then, the phone rings again].

Receptionist: Thank for calling Tequendama Hotel. My name is Vanessa. How may I assist you today?

Man in the mask: Why did you hang up, Vanessa? Are you scared?

Receptionist: Thank for calling Tequendama Hotel. My name is Vanessa. How may I assist you today?

Man in the mask: I'm really upset now...

[The light fades, and in the darkness the receptionist is killed by the man in the mask]

### **Reading Comprehension Exams Based on the Movie Plots**

Six reading exams were created to test students' reading comprehension on short texts based on the plots of the six horror movies. The following text is only one sample of the reading exams designed; all of them, however, followed the same structure and type of questions.

#### ***Part I. Read the summary of the movie you are going to perform***

##### **The Blair Witch Project Summary**

The Blair Witch Project is a horror film. This film was released in 1999 and was directed by Daniel Myrick. The story takes place in Birkettsville woods. The story is about five friends who get lost in Birkettsville woods while filming a documentary about an urban legend. Josh, Mike, Sally, Heather and Peter go away for a weekend to make a documentary about the myth of the Blair Witch which had haunted some woods in Birkettsville and supposedly killed children many years ago. They interview the Birkettsville Forest Ranger to collect some information about the Blair Witch.

When spending a night in the woods, the five friends hear strange noises in the forest. Three of them are killed that night. At the end of movie, the two remaining friends leave the forest and go to the Blair Witch's abandoned house. There, they are killed as well. The movie is considered to be scarier than Michael, Jason, and Freddy put together.

***Part II. Based on the reading, answer the following questions choosing the right answer. You can use a dictionary if needed.***

1. What is the movie about?
  - a. \_\_\_\_ A teenage girl who is murdered with her boyfriend and her parents by a psycho who always wears a mask.
  - b. \_\_\_\_ A young girl who dies after undergoing an exorcism carried out by a priest.
  - c. \_\_\_\_ Four teenagers that on their way to the beach hit a pedestrian and dump the man in a river. One year later, the man comes from *the dead* to plot revenge.
  - d. \_\_\_\_ Five friends who get lost in Birkettsville woods while filming a documentary about an urban legend
  - e. \_\_\_\_ A vicious psychopath that is murdering women and a prisoner who can help the F.B.I. to find the women's murderer.
  - f. \_\_\_\_ Cole, an isolated boy who sees dead people, and a psychologist who tries to help him.
  
2. Where does the story take place?
  - a. \_\_\_\_ In the midwest of the United States
  - b. \_\_\_\_ In North Carolina
  - c. \_\_\_\_ In Birkettsville woods
  - d. \_\_\_\_ In British Columbia
  - e. \_\_\_\_ In California
  - f. \_\_\_\_ In Philadelphia
  
3. What are the names of the characters of the movie mentioned in the text?
  - a. \_\_\_\_ Cole, Cole's mother, Dr. Crowe and Dr. Crowe's wife
  - b. \_\_\_\_ Julie, Ray, Barren, Helen, a pedestrian and Julie's mother
  - c. \_\_\_\_ Emily, Emily's best friend, Emily's mother and a priest
  - d. \_\_\_\_ Hannibal Lecter, Buffalo, Jack Crawford and Clarice Starling

- e. \_\_\_\_ Josh, Mike, Sally, Heather, Peter and the Forest Ranger
  - f. \_\_\_\_ Casey, Casey's boyfriend and Casey's parents
4. What happens at the end of the movie?
- a. The pedestrian murders Julie in front of her friends.
  - b. The two remaining friends leave the forest and go to the Blair Witch's abandoned house and are killed as well.
  - c. Buffalo is captured by the FBI while Dr. Lecter escapes from prison.
  - d. Dr. Crowe finds out he is dead.
  - e. The priest goes on trial for her death and is sentenced to life imprisonment.
  - f. The murderer kills an elegant receptionist from the Tequendama Hotel.
5. When was the movie released?
- a. \_\_\_\_ In 1999
  - b. \_\_\_\_ In 1991
  - c. \_\_\_\_ In 2006
  - d. \_\_\_\_ In 1997
  - e. \_\_\_\_ In 1996
  - f. \_\_\_\_ In 2005
6. Who directed the movie?
- a. \_\_\_\_ Wes Craven
  - b. \_\_\_\_ Jim Gillespie
  - c. \_\_\_\_ Daniel Myrick
  - d. \_\_\_\_ Scott Derrickson
  - e. \_\_\_\_ M. Night Shyamalan
  - f. \_\_\_\_ Jonathan Demme
7. How is the movie considered to be?
- a. \_\_\_\_ A movie with great acting, great directing and a great plot twist.
  - b. \_\_\_\_ The movie has a catching opening scene but as the story goes on it turns out to be boring.
  - c. \_\_\_\_ This movie is overwhelming and one of the best ever made.
  - d. \_\_\_\_ This movie is one of the most suspenseful and amazing movies of cinema history.

- e. \_\_\_\_ This movie is an interesting melange of metaphysical horror and mystery.
- f. \_\_\_\_ The movie is scarier than Michael, Jason, and Freddy put together.

*Part III. Match each word from column A with the right word from column B*

Column A	Column B
1. Director ( )	a. the Forest Ranger
2. Release ( )	b. Birkettsville woods
3. Character ( )	c. Daniel Myrick
4. Place ( )	d. 1999

*Part IV. Rewrite the four sentences of the text that best summarize the content of the movie.*