

Lights! Camera! Action!

Workshops are good way to teach specific reporting skills. But effective journalism training requires more. We must provide inspiration if we expect our colleagues in developing countries to embrace the principles we preach. How do you motivate someone to be brave, or savvy, or objective? Show them a movie! In countries where reporters understand English, American feature films can be excellent teaching tools.

Hollywood loves larger-than-life characters and situations with intense conflict, so there are plenty of movies that feature journalists as characters and journalism as the theme. Not every film shows reporters at their best, but several movies offer an educational look at how journalists do the job.

My top picks:

Up Close and Personal A fictional romantic story of a young television reporter and the seasoned news editor who helps her find her voice and guides her to the top of the news business.

The Insider An intense journalism thriller based on a true story. An investigative television reporter persuades a former tobacco executive to reveal that chemicals are added to cigarettes to increase the effects of nicotine. Will his TV show broadcast the interview or will Big Tobacco successfully intimidate network executives?

Absence of Malice A fictional story of a journalist who is used by police in a plot to fight organized crime. Investigators leak to a reporter an untrue

story that ruins an honest man's reputation. The journalist reported what police told her. Is her paper liable for damages?

Broadcast News A love triangle set in the changing landscape of television news. Will the woman producer choose the stupid-but-handsome male presenter or the brilliant-but-ugly male reporter? A cleverly acted metaphor for the tension between style and substance in television journalism.

All the President's Men A true story



of White House corruption.

Two young reporters won't let go in a behind-the-scenes film about investigative journalism. Despite the odds, they break the Watergate story, which forced U.S. President Richard Nixon to resign and sent his closest advisors to jail.

Cry Freedom The true story of South African black activist Steve Biko and the white journalist, Donald Woods, who risked his own freedom to tell the story of Biko's murder by police.

I've shown movies in the evening during week-long workshops as an entertaining way to keep the group together without losing our focus on journalism. I've even organized a journalism film festival, open to all reporters. Judging by comment cards that I distributed at screenings in Malawi, the response was overwhelmingly positive.

"The movie was absolutely great," wrote Madalitso Chauluka of the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation after seeing *The Insider*. "It has taught me the importance of putting the public interest

first and taking risks in the profession."

"I have learned that perseverance and determination are the backbone of journalism," student Macneil Kalowekamo said after seeing *All the President's Men*.

"It was interesting to see the budding reporter grow in her field and mature," Rehana Surtee Nyamilandu-Wanda from Television Malawi said about the film *Up Close and Personal*. "I now can tell the difference between just another reporter and really telling the story."

Hilda Ngomano of Capital Radio also liked *Up Close and Personal*: "It gave me courage to go on and report even in a difficult situation."

Student Dorothy Vanessa Kachitsa identified with the strong female news producer in *Broadcast News*: "I think we need to empower more

women to work like her."

"As a training means, it takes you from the theoretical classroom situation to the practical field to show you how daring and persevering a journalist you need to be to get your story," Amos Gumulira of Malawi's *Daily Times* said about *Cry Freedom*. "I liked Mr. Woods' (the journalist) objectivity and persistence."

Many other movie titles can prove equally useful, including *The Paper*, *The Pelican Brief*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Network* and *Citizen Kane*. All are easy to obtain from online retailers.

Finally, a technical note: I used VHS tapes instead of DVDs. That's because most DVDs purchased in the United States are encrypted in a way that prevents them from running on players overseas. American computers do not always interface with non-American televisions, so using an American laptop as a DVD player overseas is not a reliable option. Modern VHS video players outside the United States accommodate NTSC and PAL tapes.