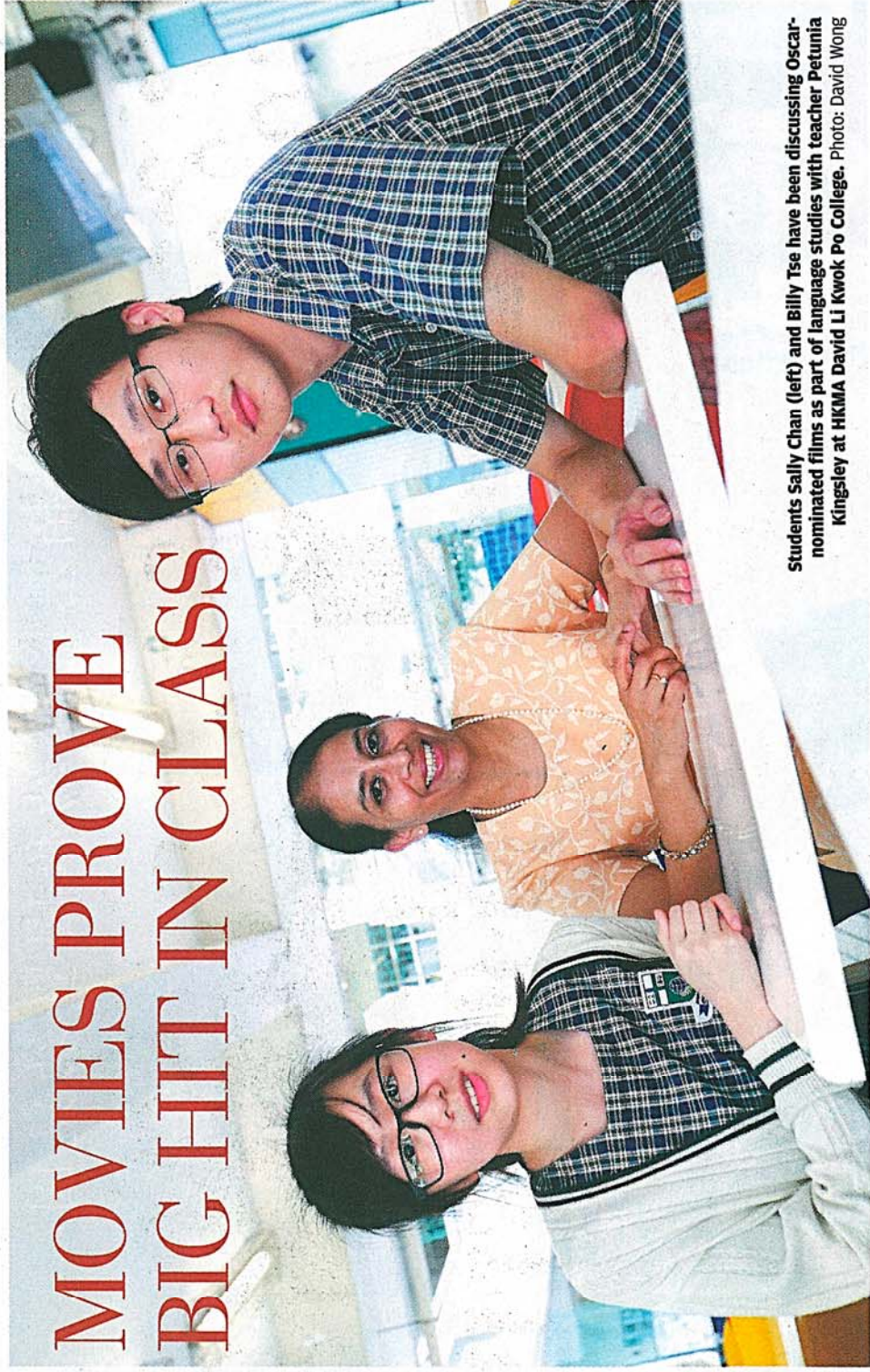


MOVIES PROVE BIG HIT IN CLASS



Students Sally Chan (left) and Billy Tse have been discussing Oscar-nominated films as part of language studies with teacher Petunia Kingsley at HKMA David Li Kwok Po College. Photo: David Wong

School projects using film screenings and reviews are helping to motivate students to learn English and provide a greater perspective of the world, writes **Mabel Sieh**

Sally Chan Sze-cheuk and Billy Tse Chun-chak have learned about some great films that were nominated for Oscars at this year's American Academy Awards.

Their Form Five class at HKMA David Li Kwok Po College had to make presentations about films featured in the ceremony in their English class.

The two 16-year-olds say it proved a fun and meaningful learning experience. Sally's team chose to present the science-fiction drama *Gravity*, about two astronauts, played by Hollywood stars Sandra Bullock and George Clooney, lost in space. "*Gravity* got so many Oscar nominations we were curious about what made it so successful," Sally says.

"It's not something that teenagers would normally choose to watch in cinema.

"I'm amazed how the film used music to help make the story really interesting. And just like the astronaut in the film, I've learned never to give up."



Movies add another dimension, and also make language learning fun

PETUNIA KINGSLEY, ENGLISH PANEL CHAIR

Billy's all-boy team chose *Lone Survivor*, a war film about a group of American commandos sent to Afghanistan on an abortive mission to capture a Taliban leader.

"It's a very good film," Billy says. "I was so touched when one of the

characters, Danny, died so that he could save the others. I've learned what it means to be a 'band of brothers'. During research, I also looked online for news clippings and videos and learned more about terrorism and related issues like the rules of engagement for military action."

In their 10-minute presentations, each group gave an outline of their film's storyline, talked about special effects, analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the plot, shared their favourite parts, suggested what they would change, and discussed the social issues reflected in their chosen films. All students were required to take part in the presentations.

The project about the Oscars was designed by Petunia Kingsley, the school's English panel chair, as

part of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum, which aims to promote students' all-round development and encourage learning beyond textbooks.

Many teachers have been using films to teach the language arts module, "Learning English through popular culture" or, as in Kingsley's project, the module "Learning English through social issues.

"Our teachers have been using movies as part of our curriculum for years. Apart from preparing students for school-based assessments under the new curriculum, where students need to watch and discuss a documentary, we've also used them as summer assignments, where students have to write film reviews," says Kingsley, who has taught English for 30 years.

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Carlos Soto takes a class about Bollywood films at CMA Choi Cheung Kok Secondary School. Photo: Felix Wong

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Kingsley says there are many advantages to using feature films to teach in the classroom. "Movies add another dimension apart from making language learning fun," she says. "Students can learn so much about the cultures and issues in different countries. They open doors to connect students with the outside world."

"The challenges are trying to make the students understand they learn much more through the process than just doing examination practice papers or worksheets. In Hong Kong, students are under pressure to get good grades but have the false notion they could achieve it by rote learning."

"But using movies can also benefit students – in this project they learn to discuss, analyse, critique, present and write a report, which can all be assessed," she says.

"The students say they learned many things from the project, in addition to improving their English language skills."

"We can learn more from a movie than from a textbook," Sally says. "From the story and characters, we've learned how people live and lessons for life. After hearing another group's presentation on the Indian film, *The Lunchbox*, I got so interested that I went and watched it in my own time."

Billy says: "We don't like lectures. We learn better when we enjoy the lesson. I think using films is a good way to help us enjoy learning English because we like watching movies. It also helped me improve my presentation skills when I could present something I'm actually interested in."

Films are also among a range of contemporary tools used by schools to capture students' interest in learning English and other subjects.

The CMA Choi Cheung Kok Secondary School, in Tuen Mun, uses music, films and documentaries from around the world.

Yu Kwok-lun, a teacher at De La Salle Secondary School, in Sheung

I want to enhance students' level of aesthetic quality and film appreciation

YU KWOK-LUN, TEACHER

Shui, uses cinema in the Secondary Five classroom as part of the arts curriculum.

In the Chinese-medium school with lower ability students, Yu wants to provide more resources for students by designing a complete module on the history of movies, the success of Hollywood, the use of special effects and discussion of the messages and issues in different movies.

"I've used *The Matrix* to talk about creativity and shown students how the director used the telephone in an innovative way, and how the concept of Zen has been adopted cleverly in a Western film," Yu says. "In another movie, *Hero*,

directed by Zhang Yimou, I've talked about the use of colours as the film is divided into four parts in four colours, each retelling the same story in a different way."

Yu, who has taught for 16 years, and specialises in arts education, geography and liberal studies, admits to being a big movie fan and voracious reader on the subject of the film industry.

"What I'm trying to achieve is to enhance our students' level of aesthetic quality and appreciation of films by teaching them the elements used in making a film."

Yu finds most of his students are interested in films, but lack the language and skills to understand or talk about them. He spends a great deal of time tailoring his lessons, by editing relevant parts of various movies and turning them into PowerPoint presentations for the class, and believes the efforts are worth it.

"Movies are more powerful than words. The visual and sound effects, and the human values embedded in the story are very rich."

"After watching the movie *In Time*, directed by Andrew Niccol, we discussed the issue of rich against poor and the meaning of human values in a materialistic world."

"It's more effective to talk about these things using a movie than lecturing them. Students also feel free to discuss their views without having to worry about giving a right or wrong answer."

In terms of assignments, his students must write a 400-word film review and a short script of two pages, but the outcome isn't always satisfactory.

"Their work isn't very creative; some text is copied from existing scripts," he says. "It's hard to expect them to write a good piece of work. But that's not really the point anyway."

"It's more about offering students an experience, and letting them realise the effort and pain behind a piece of creative work. So next time, when they watch a film, they will be able to appreciate the art form more and be stimulated to see something new."