

Growing Up Onscreen: The Films of Zhang Yimou in the Classroom

Materials:

Not One Less (一个都不能少, 1999)

Based on Shi Xiangsheng's (施祥生) short story, 'A Sun in the Sky' (*Tian shang you ge taiyang* 天上有个太阳).

Starring Wei Minzhi 魏敏芝, Zhang Huike 张慧科

Happy Times (幸福时光, 2000)

Based in part on Mo Yan's (莫言) short story, 'Shifu, You'll Do Anything For a Laugh' (*Shifu yue lai yue youmo* 师傅越来越幽默).

Starring Zhao Benshan 赵本山, Dong Jie 董洁

Background

Not One Less

- The focus during the 1990s on rural education. Many children were forced to drop out of school in order to work to support their families.
- The rural-urban divide.

Happy Times

- Workers laid off after state-owned enterprises closed down.
- The tradition of favouring sons above daughters. (重男轻女 *zhong nan qing nü*)
- Difficulties of the disabled in China.

Discussion:

'Real People'

Not One Less uses 'real people' rather than actors. Why do you think the director decided to do this? What does it add to the film?

How does *Happy Times* portray attitudes towards those with disabilities? What do you think of the treatment of Xiao Wu in the film?

Film and Fairy-tale

What 'quests' do Wei Minzhi and Xiao Wu set out on?

Discuss the supporting characters in the films; what typical fairy-tale roles can you see?

Money

Discuss the ways that counting is used in *Not One Less*.

Why is the chalk so important in *Not One Less*?

What kind of ice-cream is eaten in *Happy Times*? Why is it important?

Landscapes

What different landscapes can we see in the films? What can we learn about the differences between countryside and city in China?

What other contrasts can be seen?

Happy Endings?

Is the title *Happy Times* fitting? What do you think will happen to Xiao Wu and Zhao?

Further Viewing

Last Train Home 归途列车 (dir. Lixin Fan, 2009) – Documentary following migrant workers returning home for Spring Festival. (See this site for some helpful resources: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/lasttrainhome/>)

The Road Home 我的父亲母亲 (dir. Zhang Yimou, 1999) – tells story of narrator's mother and father, meeting during the Communist period

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress 巴尔扎克与小裁缝 (dir. Dai Sijie, 2002) A coming-of-age tale focusing on two young men 'sent down' to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution

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