

INVASION OF THE SPACE LOBSTERS

Invasion of the Space Lobsters

Study Guide

What Is It?

Invasion of the Space Lobsters, is it pure entertainment or a learning tool? In fact, it's both. This charming animated tale can stimulate critical thinking about communication and language. The film has a sense of humour and carries several important messages about clear communication, diversity and conflict resolution.

In the film, the aliens' translation machine doesn't work because it speaks a jargon that many of us find obscure, dull and meaningless. The space lobsters can't make sense of the assembly instructions for the barbecue, while the arrogant lawyer, enjoying the power of language that leaves most of us out, spouts legalese.

The space lobsters stand in for the rest of us. We too have trouble with the unclear language of technical manuals, tax forms, contracts or complicated directions in a strange city.

Everyone appreciates clear, precise language, yet we hardly give a thought to what makes it successful. An encounter with a helpful sales assistant in a computer store makes the message clear. Similarly, a misunderstanding with a friend or family member may be overcome with open and clear communication.

Language, ethnicity, gender, age, education, occupation — are these barriers to understanding where you live, study, work or play? Many of today's biggest communication challenges arise across cultures, as the film demonstrates between the space lobsters and humans. Communities and workplaces are diversifying, and all of us face the need to communicate with people of different cultures and belief systems.

Communication is an issue between fluent speakers but it is even more important in situations with people learning our language. Communication, then, touches on diversity and immigrant settlement.

Clarity in communication is essential, and nothing detracts so much as the use of unfamiliar words. As one of the ancients said, "The language of truth is unadorned and always simple."

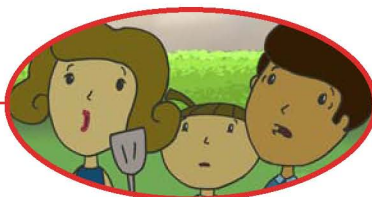
Who is the film for?

ALL AGES

You can simply enjoy this film in your living room. But it is also a natural workshop or classroom training tool. For teachers, presenters or workshop leaders, *Invasion of the Space Lobsters* is relevant wherever communication is an issue.

Themes

Invasion of the Space Lobsters would be an important tool for exploring the themes of COMMUNICATION, CONFLICT RESOLUTION and DIVERSITY. The film is a natural warm-up for training, conference events, community meetings and classrooms of all kinds. This could be followed up in a workshop or other training event with a case study approach, where teams ? after an initial exposure to clear language principles ? are asked to improve documents or critique an oral presentation style.



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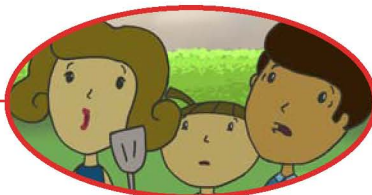
Film Discussion Topics

What is the communication problem in the film? How is it resolved? (The solution comes when the humans get past their fear of the aliens and successfully decode the jargon and gibberish the translation machine is spouting).

- ★ Is everyone equal in the film? Who has the power (lawyer, police, etc.)? What are the power relationships in the film based on?
- ★ Jargon. What is it? When is it ok to use it? When is it not?
- ★ What is legalese? Is legalese necessary to communicate what is in the law?
- ★ Space aliens are a fun way to look at being in a strange place. Is it part of your experience? Have you ever needed a “translation machine”? How does it feel to be an ‘alien’?
- ★ If you arrived as an alien in your community, how would you like to be treated?
- ★ Make a list of the 10 things an alien would need to learn about human communication.
- ★ Make a list of the 10 things humans need to understand how “others” communicate.
- ★ What is clear language? What is straight talk?
- ★ How can we make sure language is understood by the listener?

Discuss these quotes

1. “The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.” Hans Hofman
2. “Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific term or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.” George Orwell
3. “Easy reading is damned hard writing.” Nathaniel Hawthorne
4. “There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it.” Dale Carnegie
5. “Two monologues do not make a dialogue.” Jeff Daly
6. “The finest language is mostly made up of simple unimposing words.” George Eliot
7. “The only way to entertain some folks is to listen to them.” Kim Hubbard
8. “He can compress the most words into the smallest ideas of any man I ever met.” Abraham Lincoln
9. “Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood.” Freeman Teague Jr.
10. “Never use a 5-dollar word when a 10-cent word will do.” Mark Twain
11. “A man who uses a great many words to express his meaning is like a bad marksman who, instead of aiming a single stone at an object, takes up a handful and throws in hopes he may hit.” Samuel Johnson, English lexicographer
12. “I am sorry this is such a long letter, but I did not have the time to write a short one.” Mark Twain



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ROLEPLAY

This is a variation on charades.

Find someone present who speaks a language nobody else understands.

Divide the group into teams of three or four.

Everyone thinks of a simple task, such as cooking a common dish or making a photocopy. Each player writes the task on a piece of paper without revealing it to anyone.

The speaker of the mystery language selects a task from the hat. Then the person explains the task in the strange language to one of the groups. As soon as they correctly guess the task, they get points. Use a timer to move things along.

CASE STUDIES

Brainstorm solutions to these communication problems.

You work in a small hardware store. A colleague is impatient with some customers, especially people from other cultures. This person is a long-time employee and is otherwise good at his work but you feel his attitude is hurting the store. The store owner asks your advice about the situation.

You are caught between two friends. Pat comes to you and complains about another close friend, Adrian. Pat feels Adrian has turned against her. But Adrian has told you in confidence that Pat is a bad listener who asks advice and doesn't pay attention to the answers. Adrian feels Pat likes the sound of her own voice too much. As it happens, you agree with Adrian although you want the three of you to remain friends.



If you liked this film, you will also enjoy these NFB titles.

HOME SECURITY & OTHER VIDEOS OF MASS DISTRACTION
2004, 30 min 49 s

These five films go from the ridiculous to the sublimely ridiculous, illustrating how people who have surrendered critical thinking and a healthy dose of doubt can be taught to fear differences and even make war on one another. This compilation is a lively way to encourage students to think critically about the media that constantly bombard them.

Includes **Balablok**, **Duel, E**, **Watching TV** and **Home Security**.

WHAT ON EARTH!
1966, 9 min 35 s

This film shows what many Earthlings have long feared—that the automobile has inherited the Earth. This animated film shows life on Earth as one long, unending conga-line of cars. The Martian visitors judge them to be the true inhabitants of Earth, while we seem to be parasites infesting the autos.

Clear Language Links on the Web

There is a worldwide movement promoting clear language that provides great resources on the Internet. You can find many of these sites by visiting The National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) at <http://www.clear.nald.ca>.

