Video Dictogloss and Restaurant Role-play

Film: As Good As It Gets (adaptable for other films)

This exercise uses the first restaurant scene in the film where Melvin (Jack Nicholson) frightens a couple away from his favourite table and then puts his foot in it by making a derogatory remark about Carol’s (Helen Hunt) son. From “How much you gotta eat?... (Melvin to the people at his table) to “Ok. I’ll get your order.” (Carol to Melvin after their confrontation.)

Stage One – Pre-viewing task: Ask your students some food questions like “What food can you order from a typical American restaurant?”, “Do you like American food?”, “What do you like?”, “What don’t you like?” Make lists.

Stage Two: Watch the scene(x1). Students watch the scene answering some orientation questions like:
- Do you think Melvin’s strange?
- Why?
- What did Melvin order?
- Why was Carol angry?

Stage Three: Watch the scene (x2). Divide the class into 2 groups, instruct one group to concentrate on what Melvin says and ignore Carol, the other group does the same with Carol, ignoring Melvin. Each group watches the scene again writing down key words or short phrases that their character says. (It would be useful here to remind your students not to write down entire phrases as the characters speak too fast. They only need to write down key words) At the end of this viewing students compare notes within their group.

Stage Four: Watch the scene (x3). Just before watching the scene again tell the students that later they will take turns to act out the scene in class. Students watch and add to their list of short phrases and key words. Then compare within their group.

Stage Five: Pre-task preparation. Pair each student off with a member of the other group, they will then work together to re-write the script incorporating each character. They have to use their imagination to make up any parts of the script that they think are missing. They have complete artistic freedom to write what they think was said. This is a good opportunity for grammar work.

Stage Six: Task. Students from each group take turns to act out the scene, (one Carol and one Melvin). The teacher can provide any props that could make the surroundings look more authentic.
Stage Seven: Cooler. Students watch the scene again comparing their scripts with the original (If your copy of the video has English subtitles this works really well.) Analyse the dialogue. Lots of good American vocabulary and expressions here!

This material could be adapted for lower levels by:

- Watching the scene more times at the beginning with students answering a different gist or specific information question each time. The dictogloss part could also be repeated more times.
- Providing a cut-up version of the script which the students could order while they listen.