

MVFF EDUCATION



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 6-12

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Instructor Resources

A Letter to Educators	ii
Discussion Questions	iii
Interpretive Essay Prompts	iv
About CAFILM	v
Standards	vi

Student Handouts

About the Film	1
Contextual Information	2
Viewing Activities	3
Extension Activities	10
About Film Festivals	16



Dear educators,

Thank you for attending the 47th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of *Out of My Mind*. We are excited to return in our 2024 fall season with a combination of both in-person screenings for local schools and online screenings for those of you joining us from afar.

As media educators, we support film as the literature of the twenty-first century. This powerful medium sits in a critical part of human culture, at the intersection of art, industry, technology, and politics. It is a universal language that lets us tell stories about our collective hopes and fears and gives us the opportunity to make sense of the world around us and the people in it. This year, our film selections for school screenings continue to focus on increasingly relevant issues of global empathy and active citizenship, and we believe this film will be a powerful and engaging text to use in your classroom. These curricular materials are designed to get students to engage deeply with the film by the common-core aligned skills of developing an evidence-based interpretation of a text both orally and in writing.

The discussion prompts have been crafted to offer students the opportunity to grapple with questions of ethics and social justice through representations of culture in film. They offer a variety of options for fostering small-group or whole-class dialogue by addressing the film industry in general and this film in particular. If your students are already familiar with a process of writing evidence-based interpretive essays, consider using the suggested essay prompts for a short writing piece, or consider the film review format as an alternative. Additionally, student handouts for a variety of thinking routines are provided for before, during, and after viewing the film with a particular emphasis on social-emotional learning. Extension activities offer further creative opportunities for students to consider the cultural impact of the film as both an art form and a political platform. We have also included a handout that provides some context for the film festival experience, which may help to introduce

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The film opens with a powerful discussion about the power of words and language. How does this capture the viewer's attention? How does the film ultimately reveal that what someone has to say is more important than how they say it?
2. How does *Out of My Mind* offer insights into a world that audiences seldom see? Why do you think this world has been under-represented or mis-represented?
3. In a world that doesn't seem to work for her, what seems to cause the biggest frustrations for Melody? Is there anything worse than wasting the time of a hyperactive, bright, and creative mind?
4. With a rare, yet powerful, glimpse into the real-life experience of Melody Brooks (played by Phoebe-Ray Taylor, a girl living with the same condition as her character in the film), how does *Out of My Mind* educate its audiences while also entertaining its viewers?
5. What is the moral of the story? Does the story affirm or subvert common values?
6. What is the central conflict of the film? Does the ending of the film resolve the overall conflict? Or, does the ending of the film raise more questions?
7. What is the film's central theme? How is the theme developed and emphasized throughout the story? Is the central theme expressed in a fresh, unique way?
8. What are some of the other key themes in the film? How are these themes related to the context surrounding the film?
9. Describe a moment or a scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about the scene that was especially notable or compelling?
10. How would different people view this film differently based on their social location, lived experience, or worldview?
11. If you could require one person, or group, to view this film, who would it be? What would you hope their main takeaway would be?
12. How does the film make a case for the advocacy and inclusion of differently abled people?
13. Explain the title of the film. What are the possible, and multiple, interpretations of what it means to be "out of my mind?"
14. Thinking back on what you discussed, what new insights do you have about the film, the world in which it was made, or the process of storytelling and filmmaking? Is *Out of My Mind* responding to a moment in history? What social or cultural influences can you detect within the film?

DISCUSSION NOTECATCHER

Directions:

Use this notecatcher to record what you take away from discussing the questions above.

IDEAS I HEARD DURING DISCUSSION

MIND-POP IDEAS

Ideas that came to my mind during discussion.

ONE IMPORTANT THING I LEARNED DURING DISCUSSION

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. On one level, *Out of My Mind* conveys the universal struggle of teens who are trying to follow a set of rules on a predetermined path while also attempting to map out their own individual life journey. Write an essay in which you argue the importance of finding and following your own path in life, regardless of social expectations, personal limitations, or cultural conditions.
2. *Out of My Mind* reflects on self-acceptance and self-advocacy. Write an essay in which you argue the importance of both when coming-of-age in a world that is often difficult to understand and navigate.
3. "Why do we study the past? To prepare for the future!" Largely excluded from the conversation, the main character in *Out of My Mind* shows us that what someone has to say is more important than how they say it. Write an essay in which you argue the importance of giving voice to those who are affected by the past and trying to shape the future.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Out of My Mind Movie Interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk17XZhdamw>

Phoebe-Ray Taylor Made the Seasoned Cast Better Actors

Inclusive Schools Network

<https://inclusiveschools.org/resource/the-importance-of-inclusion-in-play-for-children-with-cerebral-palsy/>

The importance of inclusion in play for children with cerebral palsy.

Cerebral Palsy Foundation

<https://cpresource.org/education>

Just Say Hi in Schools. Working to improve inclusion of students with disabilities, The Cerebral Palsy Foundation (CPF) launched CPF's "Just Say Hi" campaign in the schools in 2016 focused on furthering the inclusion of students with disabilities in schools. The program uses CPF's "Just Say Hi" campaign as an innovative starting point for creating discussions about inclusion and for developing effective approaches to creating an inclusive and effective learning environment.

What is AAC?

<https://www.assistiveware.com/learn-aac/what-is-aac>

An introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). What is AAC and who is it for? What are the different types of AAC? What are the benefits of AAC?

Americans with Disabilities Act

<https://www.ada.gov/>

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects people with disabilities from discrimination.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

ABOUT CAFILM

The nonprofit California Film Institute celebrates and promotes film as art and education through year-round programming at the independent Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center, presentation of the acclaimed Mill Valley Film Festival and DocLands Documentary Film Festival, as well as cultivation of the next generation of filmmakers and audiences through CAFILM Education programs.

Follow the California Film Institute on social media



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STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards ELA-Literacy

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the texts says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.



Name: _____



ABOUT THE FILM

Melody Brooks, a sixth grader with cerebral palsy, has a quick wit and a sharp mind, but because she is non-verbal and uses a wheelchair, others often view her with pity and discomfort. With typical teenage dreams beyond her means, Melody wants what most kids have access to without even trying. Though she has fierce advocates in her parents, Melody yearns to be seen and heard by the world around her. When a young educator notices Melody's untapped potential, she encourages Melody to participate in mainstream education. Against numerous odds and challenges, Melody leads her school's quiz team to success. Along the way, Melody uses her newfound voice to inspire courage in her family, her principal and peers, an eccentric neighbor, and even the family goldfish. Based on the best-selling novel by Sharon M. Draper and directed by Amber Sealey, *Out of My Mind* stars Phoebe-Rae Taylor as Melody, alongside Rosemarie DeWitt, Luke Kirby, Judith Light, Michael Chernus, Courtney Taylor, and Jennifer Aniston (as Melody's inner voice).

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER AMBER SEALEY

Amber Sealey is an award-winning filmmaker whose most recent film, *Out of My Mind* (Disney/Participant/Big Beach), premiered at Sundance 2024 to multiple standing ovations. She has been supported by Sundance, Film Independent and Women in Film. She is a fellow of the AFI Directing Workshop for Women and has written scripts for Duplass Brothers/Donut Productions. She was selected for Ryan Murphy's Half Initiative, the NBCUniversal Directors Initiative, the WeForShe DirectHer Program, and Film Independent's Directing Lab and their Fast Track Program.

Her short film *How Does It Start* world premiered at Sundance and (among other awards) won Best Narrative Short at the Sarasota Film Festival and is being turned into a feature film. Her feature *No Light and No Land Anywhere* was theatrically released by Factory 25 and won a Special Jury Award at the LA Film Festival. Her second feature, *How to Cheat* won Best Performance at LAFF and both Best Narrative and Best Acting at BendFilm. Her first film, *A Plus D* was released by IndiePix. Projects she has in development include two of her original scripts, the comedy feature *Coming of Age* and the romantic comedy *Bodice Ripper*.

Sealey has a BA in theater arts and modern dance from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and an MA from The Central School of Speech and Drama in London. She studied Shakespeare at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. She was born in England and lives in Los Angeles with her family.

THE GENESIS OF THE STORY

Out of My Mind originated as a popular young adult book by Sharon M. Draper about a spirited girl called Melody who had so much to say but didn't have the voice to say it. In addition to the universal acclaim, fans of the book clamored for the movie version. "Every time I talked to a school group, they all said, "How come this book isn't a movie?" And I said, "Well, I don't know anybody who does that yet," laughs Draper.

It wasn't long before producers Dan Angel and Peter Saraf approached her with the idea of a film adaptation. Saraf explains, "My daughter read *Out of My Mind* when she was in the fourth grade. It was one of the first books that really sparked her imagination, and she told me she thought it would make a great movie. It turns out the book wasn't the only reason that Saraf knew this story had to be told. As fate would have it, Saraf's children attended the Manhattan School for Children (MSC), a New York City public school that ran a pioneering inclusion program where children of differing abilities were integrated into one classroom. Through MSC, Saraf met the Ellensons, the family responsible for starting the inclusion program at the school. Their son, Thomas, has cerebral palsy, uses a wheelchair and is nonverbal. As the two fathers became friendly, it was the natural next step to join forces on Saraf's new project, and Richard and Tom Ellenson became an integral part of the development process.

When author Sharon Draper set out to write the book, she recognized the need in the YA literary space for stories centered around children with differing abilities, and drawing on her own experiences as the parent of a child with cerebral palsy, she strove to represent the community fairly and to bring authenticity to her work. Acknowledging the importance of bringing this story to the screen, the filmmakers recognized the need to expand the production team to include members of the cerebral palsy (CP) and disability communities.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

AMBER SEALEY

Directing this film has had a profound impact on my life in so many ways — the most pronounced being that it has expanded my comprehension of humanity and our capacities for empathy, connection, and growth. I felt keenly that this was a story that was about a tween like any other — someone who longed for acceptance, love, friendship, and joy. Just like all of us do. What was special about Melody was that she was just like me, and my daughter, and other girls and women I know, despite our lives being so superficially disparate. I felt a strong pull to tell this story, despite knowing that I had a steep learning curve ahead of me in understanding disability, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, and disability portrayal on screen. I welcomed that process, and the evolution that followed.

It was really important to me to fill the cast with actors of all abilities and neurodiversities. We were going to explore in real time what it was like to make the first mainstream movie about a kid with a disability played by a kid with that same disability. We had actors who were hearing impaired, visually impaired, Autistic, had Down Syndrome, and more. Phoebe-Rae Taylor, who plays Melody, had never acted before and the experience of helping her see what she can do on screen was magical. We formed such a close bond, I would use an earwig and microphone to speak to her privately during takes and give direction. Her sharing with me that the TV show *Friends* held special significance in her life is what led me to putting that in the film. If Phoebe's safe space was watching *Friends*, then Melody's inner voice could be Jennifer Aniston.

It was important to me that each character in the film be fully human. There is no obvious antagonist. Sure, Mr. Dimming and the Principal act selfishly with ignorance and out of fear. But they are not all evil. Mr. Dimming is actually a teacher who cares and tries hard. And yet when faced with Melody he falters because he is outside of his comfort zone. That's understandable, but it doesn't mean he should be content to stay there. Similarly, Principal Antenucci is not wrong that if her school becomes known as a place where kids with disabilities will get treated fairly, others will flock to that school and that could impact her budget. But where the learning and growth happens is when these characters start to look at, and move past their own ignorance and preconceptions, the world becomes not only a fairer and more just place, but also a better place, and, dare I say, more interesting place as well. Will it take longer for a teacher to teach a child with dyslexia amongst other children who do not have dyslexia? Probably. But does that mean that the child with dyslexia should not be given the same standard of education and opportunities that the children without dyslexia are given? No.

We had the most generous consultants who let me into their homes and lives to gain a deeper understanding of what living with cerebral palsy was like, and what using AAC was like. It taught me so much about patience and listening. Taking the time to listen is actually the moral of the whole film. As the credits roll, I want people to feel and to value the concept of taking more time to listen. To ourselves. To others. And most definitely to people or things that we don't understand and maybe have prejudices about.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

AMBER SEALEY

"Presume competence" is something I had Dr. Katherine Ray say in this film because it's one of the best things I carry with me from making this film — the opportunity to look at every person, child, and student in question as having the potential to develop their thinking, learning, and understanding. It also means valuing all people as whole individuals with the right to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. And that also means they have the right to communicate however works best for them. Sometimes it's with our words. Sometimes it's with our hands. Sometimes it's with an AAC device. There are endless ways to communicate but we'll never get to better understanding until and unless we make the time to stop, wait, and listen — and value what we discover as a result.



BEFORE VIEWING

JOURNAL RESPONSE

Directions:

The film you are about to see is primarily about how nonverbal people have incredible insights on life to share. We just need to give them a way to communicate those ideas. Similarly, you may agonize over words and your own ability to convey your thoughts. One of the ways Melody tries to make sense of the world is by making lists. Use the space below to make a list of your own. Consider the categories that Melody uses or create one of your own.

1. Some of Melody's Lists:
2. Things I will never get used to.
3. Things I want.
4. Things I love.
5. Things I hate.
6. Things I never did before today.
7. Things I can do that you only think I can't.
8. Things about the world I don't understand.
9. Things I'm excited about.
10. Things I can't do.

My List

Things...

BEFORE VIEWING

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Directions:

The film you are about to see is about a sixth-grade girl with cerebral palsy whose school experience so far has been limited to the special education room located in a portable next to the school. She is confined to a wheelchair and unable to speak so her communication is limited to pointing to pictures, words, and letters.

Read each statement below. If you agree with the statement, explain why in the left hand box under the agree column. If you disagree, explain why in the box under the disagree column.

Agree	Statement	Disagree
	What someone has to say is more important than how they say it.	
	All students deserve equal access to education and learning opportunities, regardless of their abilities or requirements.	
	Those who are differently abled have the same wants and fears as everyone else.	
	Coming-of-age involves learning the lessons of society's unwritten rules.	
	There is nothing worse than wasting the time of a hyperactive, bright, and creative mind.	
	Being special usually means being separated.	
	Acceptance, understanding, and inclusion make life better for us all.	

DURING VIEWING

EMPATHY MAP

How to Use this Thinking Routine:

In *Out of My Mind*, we follow the story of Melody Brooks who is trying to navigate the world as a nonverbal wheelchair user. In this empathy map activity, fill out each quadrant to better understand and connect with her lived experience.

HEAR

Much of the film includes voiceover narration. What does the viewer hear from Melody herself about the challenges she is facing as a sixth grader with cerebral palsy?

SEE

What does Melody's teenage experience look like? What challenges does she face at home, at school, and in the world?

FEEL

How does Melody feel about being a teenager? How does she feel about her physical and verbal challenges?

SAY/DO

How do Melody's words and actions differ from what she is thinking and trying to do?

A Thinking Routine Borrowed from Harvard Project Zero's Think Routine Toolbox:
<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

DURING VIEWING

STORY MAP

Directions:

Use the story map to identify the elements of narrative film. Identify the film's characters, plot, setting, problem, and solution as well as important symbols and themes.

PROBLEM

What is the main conflict of the film?

OUTCOME

How is the conflict resolved in the film?

CHARACTERS

Who are the main characters in the film and what is their relationship to each other?

ACTION

What actions do the characters take during the film? How do these actions develop the story?

SETTING

What is the significance of where the story takes place?

SYMBOLS

Are there any important symbolic props used in the film? If so, what are they and how are they significant to the story?

THEME

What are the main themes of the film? These are broader points about society at large.

AFTER VIEWING RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Directions:

Respond to each question, referring to specific scenes, events, and dialogue from the film as evidence for your interpretation.

1. In a world that doesn't seem to work for her, what seems to cause the biggest frustrations for Melody?

2. What is significant about Ollie the fish? How does Ollie's life mirror Melody's? What does Melody learn about friendship on her trip to the aquarium? Can you make a comparison between Ollie's life, the fish in the aquarium, and Melody's life?

3. How does Melody feel about school? How does she fit in with her classmates and how does she stand out? What does the attitude of her teachers say about the school system and teaching children with special needs?

4. How does the inclusion program change Melody's school experiences? Describe both the positive and negative aspects of her experience in an inclusive classroom.

5. How does the AAC (Alternative and Augmented Communication) device change Melody's life, her outlook on life, and her potential?

AFTER VIEWING RESPONSE QUESTIONS

6. Why does Melody decide to enter the whiz kids team competition? What challenges does she face to get on the team? How does she overcome these obstacles? What does she learn about friendship and competition in the process? What does she learn about herself?

7. "Why do we study the past? To prepare for the future." What is ironic about the repetition of the teacher's question and the students' rehearsed answer?

8. What is your interpretation of the ending of the film and Melody's last words? What message does she convey specifically to her history teacher, but more broadly to the world, about who she is and why she will continue to fight?

9. Did the film succeed in helping you better understand the lived experience of a differently abled person? How?

AFTER VIEWING

SAME, DIFFERENT, CONNECT, ENGAGE

How to Use this Thinking Routine:

Same, different, connect, engage is a thinking routine to nurture empathetic perspective taking and social or cultural bridge building. After watching *Out of My Mind*, think about your relationship to the main character by responding to the following prompts.

SAME

In what ways are you similar to Melody?

DIFFERENT

In what ways are you different from Melody?

CONNECT

In what ways are your own life experiences connected to Melody's

ENGAGE

What would you like to ask, say, or do with Melody if you had the chance?

A Thinking Routine Borrowed from Harvard Project Zero's Think Routine Toolbox:

<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

CITIZEN JOURNALISM & REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

Research Assignment:

Research: Investigate the problems of children with cerebral palsy, especially those that are of school age. How does it affect the child socially, academically, and personally?

Or, Research: Investigate current laws for inclusion of children with disabilities into classrooms. What effect, if any, do such things have on a school community?

Directions:

1. **Dilemma.** What is the central issue of the film?
2. **Facts and events.** What are the facts and events of the situation? What evidence from the film confirms these?
3. **Thoughts and feelings.** Identify the thoughts and feelings of the characters/participants in the situation. What evidence confirms these?
4. **Clear.** Record what is clear from the film in the column below.
5. **Need to check.** Record what may still be unclear or lacks sufficient evidence from the film in the column below.
6. **Research.** Before you make your best judgment about this story, do some additional research and try to clarify what is unclear or lacks sufficient evidence.
7. **Judgment.** Make your best judgment about the situation, based on this information.
8. **Reporter's Notebook.** Use the Reporter's Notebook Handout to record what you learned.
9. **Report.** Create your own news story or investigative report. Present your findings in a written article, a video report, or a podcast episode in order to draw attention to the issue.
10. **Present.** Present your report to the class and consider submitting it to your school publication or a news organization in your community.



REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

	WHAT I LEARNED/WHAT IS CLEAR	WHAT I NEED TO CHECK/ RESEARCH FURTHER
FACTS & EVENTS What happened? What evidence from the film confirms this?		
THOUGHTS & FEELINGS How did the characters think or feel about it?		
My Research, or what I learned about the issue from additional sources:		My Best Judgment on the Issue:

A Thinking Routine Borrowed from Harvard Project Zero's Think Routine Toolbox:
<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

INTERNAL IDENTITY MONOLOGUE

Directions:

Out of My Mind is about the power of language, and it explores, in depth, the ability to forge mutual understanding with the world and shape personal identity. Although she cannot speak, Melody has a rich inner life constructed through her own internal identity monologue.

Craft a monologue that expresses something about your personal identity. Use the guide below to help you choose material and transform a moment of your own life into an internal monologue.

Part I

Complete the following statements:

1. Something that makes me angry.
2. An experience that transformed me.
3. Something that confuses me about my identity.
4. A funny story connected to how I view myself and the world.
5. Something I've always wanted to be able to tell someone or talk about, but haven't.
6. What I'd like people to know about who I am and where I come from.
7. Something else important.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

INTERNAL IDENTITY MONOLOGUE

Part II

Choose one of the items you wrote about - or follow another idea you have for a monologue - and do a free write. Try to fill a page with everything that comes into your head when thinking about this topic or memory.

Part III

Read over your freewrite, and answer the following questions to begin to craft your ideas into a monologue.

1. Who is your audience? Be as specific as possible about the people or groups (a family member, friend, class, etc.) - the more specific your audience, the more compelling your voice will be. Avoid vague audiences like "the world."
2. Why are you speaking to this person, or these people, at this moment? What is your motivation? What aspects of your identity come into play? What tone would you like to strike?
3. Think of your monologue as a story. What is the beginning? (How will you hook your audience?)
4. The middle?
5. The climax?
6. The end?

Part IV

Consider using the voice you have to share your internal identity monologue with your class, or a wider audience in order to exercise the power of language. Remember, what everyone has to say is important and it helps forge a better understanding of the world around us and the people in it.

A Writing for Stage and Screen Routine Adapted from the New York Times Learning Network

<https://archive.nytimes.com/learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/11/express-yourself-crafting-social-location-maps-and-identity-monologues/>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

Directions:

After watching the narrative feature *Out of My Mind*, write a review of the film.

While a film review is an evaluation of a movie, it is not simply a viewer-response expressing the writer's feelings about the film. Instead, a film review attempts to do three things for the reader:

1. **Summarize** what the film is about (the story)
2. **Interpret** the film/filmmakers' intended meaning (the themes and claims)
3. **Evaluate** whether the film is successful in expressing the intended meaning (its effectiveness in conveying the themes and claims)

A review will support its perspective with evidence from the film, such as descriptions of important moments, characters, and scenes.

Suggested Structure

Introduction

- Introduce the film: title, director, and any relevant credentials (award wins for the film, other films by the director, origins for the film's story, etc.).
- Summarize what the film is about - briefly, and without any "spoilers" that give away plot twists and surprises.

Body

- Offer an interpretation of what the film/director is trying to say through this story. In other words, what is the film's theme, message, or primary claim?

Conclusion

- Evaluate whether the film is successful or not in conveying its intended message.
- Identify who the intended audience is and how effective the film is in meeting their needs. Is the film for a particular age group or social group?

Final Tip: Make sure to include some critical appraisal of the film in the first and last sentence, but try to weave it throughout the review as well.



From CAFILM Education Resources: Narrative Film Analysis Toolkit
<https://www.cafilmedu.org/curriculum-resources/>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

My Film Review

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS



An opening night screening at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

What is a film festival?

A film festival is an event in which multiple movies are presented over the course of one or several days. Depending on the size of the festival, all of the screenings may take place in a single theater or may involve multiple venues throughout a city. Festivals also include special events like panel discussions with filmmakers and actors. Typically, filmmakers submit their works to a festival, where a team of curators selects the best entries for inclusion in the festival. For independent and international filmmakers, festivals are often an important way to raise awareness of a film, generate an audience, and/or attract a studio to purchase the rights to distribute a film in a wider release. Acceptance into a major festival can add significant prestige to a film, with some festival awards (such as the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or) considered among the highest honors a film can receive.

There are many film festivals through-

out the world, with some focusing on particular themes, such as highlighting LGBTQ films/filmmakers, specific cultural groups, or particular genres. While some of the more famous festivals may be in distant locations, there are hundreds of small festivals spread through every corner of the world and, increasingly, festivals are using streaming access to make it easier for the public to view their curated programs.

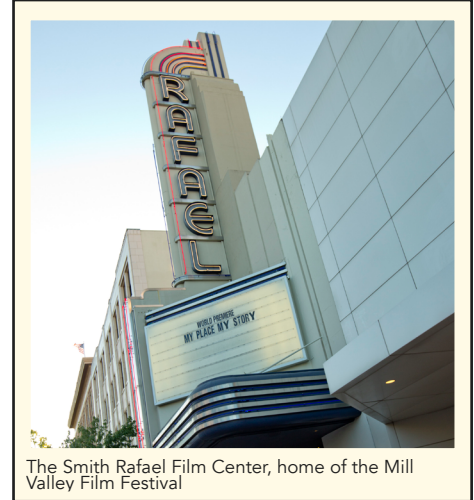
History of the Mill Valley Film Festival

Since founding the Mill Valley Film Festival in 1977, Executive Director Mark Fishkin has shepherded this once small, three-day showcase into an eleven-day, internationally acclaimed cinema event presenting a wide variety of new films from around the world in an engaged, community setting.

The festival has an impressive track record of launching new films and new filmmakers, and has earned a reputation as a filmmakers' festival

by celebrating the best in American independent and foreign films, alongside high-profile and prestigious award contenders. The relaxed and non-competitive atmosphere surrounding MVFF, gives filmmakers and audiences alike the opportunity to share their work and experiences in a collaborative and convivial setting.

Each year the festival welcomes more than 200 filmmakers, representing more than 50 countries. Screening sections include world cinema, US cinema, documentaries, family films, and shorts programs. Annual festival initiatives include Active Cinema, a forum for films that aim to engage audiences and transform ideas into action; Mind the Gap, a platform for inclusion and equity; and ¡Viva el Cine!, a showcase of Latin American and Spanish-language films.. Festival guests also enjoy an exciting selection of Tributes, Spotlights and Galas throughout the program.



The Smith Rafael Film Center, home of the Mill Valley Film Festival

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the purpose of a film festival? What are the benefits for filmmakers? For the audience? For the community?
2. How might the films at a festival differ from the films available to watch at your local movie theater?
3. What qualities do you think festival curators might look for in a film? If you are watching a festival film with a class/school group, what aspects of the film do you think made it appealing to the curators?

Get Involved!

Many film festivals, including the Mill Valley Film Festival, have student film categories. If you are a filmmaker, explore FilmFreeway (www.filmfreeway.com) for a database of worldwide film festivals where you can submit your film. The call for entries for MVFF opens in late February and closes in June. Youth filmmakers do not have to pay an entry fee. MVFF also offers many opportunities for volunteering. Find out more at <https://www.cafilm.org/volunteer/>.