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Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 48th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of the Family Feature, *Akiko, The Flying Monkey*. We are excited to return in our 2025 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 on 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 your screening experience.

Thank you so much for your tireless work! Enjoy the film!

Sincerely,
The CAFILM Education Team

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Movie Moments that Moved Me

- What was your favorite moment in the movie, and why did it stand out to you?
- How did the moment make you feel? Happy, sad, surprised, excited, scared, confused, inspired?
- Which characters were you thinking about during that moment?
- Did anything in that moment remind you of your own life?
- If you could change what happened in that scene, what would you do differently?

The Hero's Journey

- How does Akiko's story compare to other classic heroes?
- What steps of the hero's journey can you see in Akiko's story?
- How does Akiko change as he takes risks and faces challenges?

Freedom & Justice

- What does freeing the animals symbolize?
- How does the film encourage viewers to think about captivity? Not only for animals but for people or communities?
- What larger issues in the real world might this story be a metaphor for?

Storytelling

- How does using animals in a family story make difficult themes easier to understand?
- Do you think stories like this can inspire real-world change? Why or why not?



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

Directions: Select one discussion question from the list of topics we talked about from the film.

- The Hero's Journey
- Freedom & Justice
- Storytelling

Write a paragraph to answer it.

In your paragraph:

- Say what you think the film is teaching or showing about that topic.
- Use one part of the film - a scene or something a character did - as an example.
- Say why you think this idea is important

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

AWN | Akiko, The Flying Monkey and the Art of CG Animal Mouths

<https://www.awn.com/vfxworld/akiko-flying-monkey-and-art-cg-animal-mouths>

On The House | Review Akiko, The Flying Monkey | Fun for all the Family

<https://www.itsonthehouse.com.au/reviews/review/akiko-the-flying-monkey-fun-for-all-the-family-childrens-international-film-festival-2025?id=493>

Time for Kids | The Hero's Journey

<https://www.timeforkids.com/g56/the-heros-journey-g5/?rl=en-820>

The Kid Should See This | Smart Videos for Curious Minds of All Ages | The Hero's Journey

<https://thekidshouldseethis.com/post/the-monomyth-of-the-heros-journey>

PETA Kids | Animal Rights

<https://www.petakids.com/save-animals/why-animal-rights/>

Time for Kids | Animal Rights

<https://www.timeforkids.com/a8/animal-rights/?rl=en-890>

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.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.3

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.9

Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.1

Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7

Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.4

Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

Name: _____



ABOUT THE FILM

Young Akiko is tired of zookeepers making a monkey out of him, even though he is, zoologically speaking, a monkey. He also has a hunch that there's "more to life than lunch." With the strong support of his simian family, he plans an escape to the wild forest, embarking on an adventurous and joyful journey out of the cage and over the walls. Along the way, there's some unexpected assistance from an eagle, a raccoon, a ferret, and a chameleon. Together, they will help him achieve his goal: to reunite with his family and help free all of the city's animals. Veit Helmer (Baikonur, MVFF35)'s delightfully funny and musical mix of real live animals, silly humans, and playful puppetry is anchored by a deeper theme: dignity and freedom for all creatures.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

"I would say that I really tend to conceptualize as much as possible, that I really go with some kind of preconceived vision, but then, on the other hand, I totally believe in the moment of shooting. "

Absurdistan director Veit Helmer shot his first film at the age of 14, before studying filmmaking at the Munich Film School. He began his career with a series of short films, starting in 1989 with *Tour d'amour*. Helmer's 1995 short, *Surprise!* Got a lot of attention at various film festivals, and that same year he worked as a writer on the fanciful Wim Wenders feature *A Trick of Light*. In 1999, Helmer made his first feature, *Tuvalu*, a fantastical love story that starred French actor Denis Lavant. In the 2000s, Helmer continued to make short films like *Caspian Bride* and *Boom*, and he also directed the revealing documentary *Behind the Couch: Casting in Hollywood*. In 2008, he directed the allegorical comedy *Absurdistan*, which starred Max Mauff and Nino Chkheidze. "I hope the movie will stay in the imagination of the audience," Helmer said in an interview. "I am not making a film which is easily digested." On most of his movies, Helmer has also functioned as a producer, and was a producer on his Wenders film, *A Trick of Light*.



ECHOES OF AN EPIGRAPH

"How do you do and welcome to the zoo! My name's Akiko. Let me share my point of view."

FIRST ECHO | BEFORE VIEWING

- Read or listen to a line from the movie.
- What do you think it means?
- What pictures pop into your mind?

SECOND ECHO | DURING VIEWING

- Keep your ears open for when this line shows up.
- Who says it?
- What is happening when it's said?

THIRD ECHO | AFTER VIEWING

- Think back to the line.
- Does it mean something new now?
- Why is it important to the story?

RIPPLES | STRETCH THE IDEA

- Let the line ripple out into your world.
- How does this line connect to you, your life, or other stories?

BEFORE VIEWING

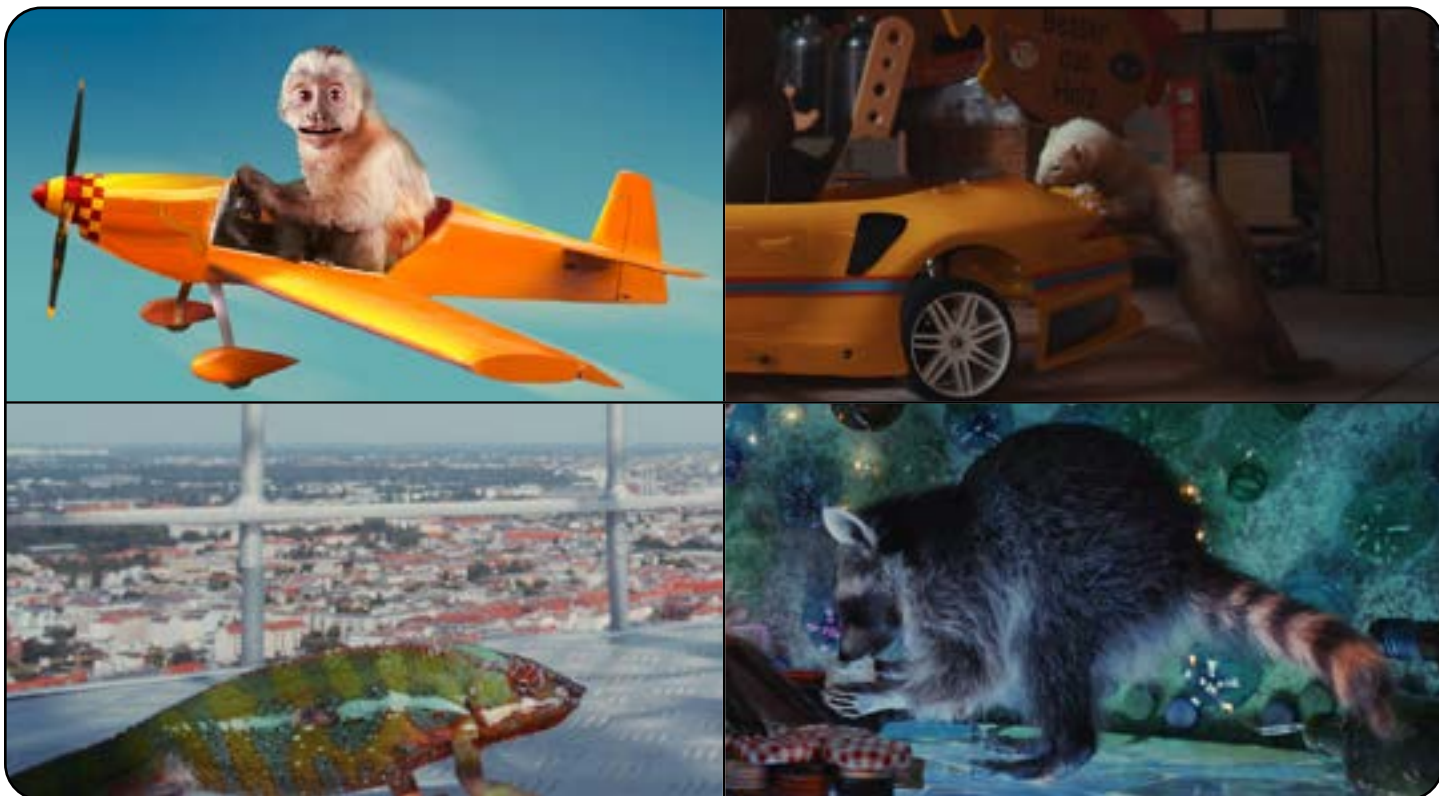
SEE | THINK | WONDER

Introduction:

This film celebrates the magic of imagination and admiration for the wild world humans and animals inhabit alongside each other. With the playful antics of talking animals, the viewer is invited into a world that at first seems familiar, yet upon closer inspection reveals a parallel universe where many animals live hidden very close to us.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Before watching this family feature film, take a look at some images from the film. Make some observations and thoughtful interpretations about what you see, what you think, and what you are wondering about before viewing.



SEE	THINK	WONDER
What observations can you make about the characters in the story by looking at these images?	When you look at these images, what do you think about? What are your thoughts about who the characters are and the role they might play in the story?	What are you curious about? What kind of adventure is this? How will these characters connect and interact?

BEFORE VIEWING | EXTENSION

Introduction:

The images featured in the see-think-wonder activity highlight some of the characters and settings you will see in this story.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Dig a little deeper into what you expect and predict by responding to the following questions. Draw or explain your thinking.

Hero or Helper? Who do you think will be the main hero in the movie? Will they work alone or with friends? Draw a picture or describe a character.	
Emotion Emojis How do you think the characters will feel during the movie? Pick a character and draw an emoji.	
Would You Rather? Would you rather go on a dangerous adventure away from home to help your family or solve a problem in your own community without leaving home? Explain.	
Trouble Spot Which character do you think will get into the most trouble and why? Draw or write your answer.	
Predict the Problem What kind of challenge will the characters face? Examples: • Puzzle • Other Animals • Humans • Getting Lost • Misunderstanding • Other	

BEFORE VIEWING | EXTENSION

Magic or Reality Do you think the movie will have magical events, or mostly real-life adventures? What clues in the images helped you decide?	
Draw a Prediction Draw one exciting scene you think will happen in the movie.	
Ending Guess How do you think the movie will end? Examples: • Everyone works together. • Someone learns a lesson. • Something surprises everyone. • Other	
Character Trait Match Which character do you think you will connect with the most and why? Examples: • Brave • Funny • Mischievous • Wise • Kind • Other	
Movie Excitement Meter How do you feel about watching this movie?	

BEFORE VIEWING

PERSONAL CONNECTION | THE HERO IN YOU

Introduction:

The act of writing helps us think about a topic. The film you are about to watch is about a young monkey (Akiko) living in a city zoo. When he discovers the world has much more to offer than he could have ever imagined, he must find the courage to escape the zoo and embark upon an adventurous journey to find his family

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Respond to the prompt using a journal entry style of writing. Feel free to add doodle notes or images to support your words.

- Describe a time when you were heroic. Was it a spontaneous act or something that you thought about? What were your obstacles to success? Was there someone more experienced who helped you? What were those qualities in you that helped you act so heroically?

Journal Entry

Doodle Notes

DURING VIEWING

STORY MAP

Introduction:

When watching a film, the purpose of a story map is to provide a visual framework for understanding, analyzing, and remembering the key narrative elements. Rather than just passively watching, using a story map encourages critical thinking and will help you dig a little deeper to analyze how the plot, characters, conflicts, and themes connect to bigger picture ideas.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

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?

SETTING

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

DURING VIEWING

SONGS THAT TELL THE STORY

Introduction:

Songs in film are not only fun to listen to, they also advance the story, help develop the characters, establish mood, or highlight important themes.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

As you watch the film, keep a simple listening log with simple prompts repeated for each song.

Song Title Scene Where does the song appear?			
Lyrics Main Refrain What words stand out?			
Tone Style What mood does the music create? Does it set or shift the mood at this point in the story?			
Story Function Does the song move the story forward, reveal something about a character, or reinforce a theme or message?			

SONG SORTING SMALL GROUPS	COMPARE & CONTRAST WHOLE CLASS
Sort the Songs into Categories: • Story-Driver • Character-Revealer • Moored-Setter • Theme Builder	Facilitate a Discussion: • Which song felt most essential to the story? • Which felt more like decoration? • Why do family features often include songs?

CONNECTIONS SHOW, DON'T TELL
Sometimes the song shows something about the story that dialogue or action alone cannot. • Choose one song and imagine the film without it. How would the story feel different? • Write a short stanza of new lyrics that could replace or extend one of the songs, keeping the theme, but shifting the emphasis.

DURING VIEWING

MAPPING THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Introduction:

The Hero's Journey is a common storyline in books and movies. Akiko, The Flying Monkey is a classic Hero's Journey. This guided viewing routine will help you think about how Akiko courageously ventured out of the zoo and into the world, faced multiple challenges, and learned something along the way before returning to the other animals.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Map Akiko's adventure out of the zoo and into the forest by recording details you notice in the film that match each element of the Hero's Journey story structure. Then, answer the focus questions for each stage in more detail.

Stage	Hero's Journey Element	What to Notice	Your Notes Observations
1. Ordinary World	The Hero in their normal life.	Akiko's life before discovering his unique ability or adventure.	
Focus Question: What is Akiko's work like at the start? How do we get to know his personality and understand his relationships?			
2. Call to Adventure	Something happens that challenges the Hero.	Akiko encounters a problem, quest, or villain.	
Focus Question: What motivates Akiko to leave his ordinary world? What's at stake?			
3. Refusal of the Call	The Hero hesitates or is afraid of going on the journey.	Akiko might doubt his abilities or is afraid of leaving friends and family.	
Focus Question: Why might Akiko hesitate? How does fear or doubt make him relatable?			

DURING VIEWING

MAPPING THE HERO'S JOURNEY

4. Meeting the Mentor	A guide provides wisdom or tools.	A friend, elder or magical creature gives Akiko advice, strength, or courage.	
Focus Question: Who helps Akiko prepare for the adventure? How do they influence his growth?			
5. Crossing the Threshold	The Hero enters the adventure fully.	Akiko leaves his familiar world for the unknown.	
Focus Question: What marks the point of no return for Akiko?			
6. Tests, Allies, Enemies	The Hero faces challenges.	Akiko meets obstacles, makes friends, or confronts threats from enemies or those who don't want him to succeed.	
Focus Question: How do these challenges reveal Akiko's character?			
7. Approach to the Inmost Cave	The Hero prepares for the big ordeal.	Akiko nears the climactic challenge of his adventure.	
Focus Question: How is tension built here? What emotions does the film convey visually?			

DURING VIEWING

MAPPING THE HERO'S JOURNEY

8. Ordeal	The major challenge, crisis, or confrontation.	Akiko faces his biggest obstacle.	
Focus Question: How does this moment test Akiko's skills, courage, confidence, or values?			
9. Reward	The Hero succeeds or gains knowledge.	Akiko achieves a goal or learns a life lesson.	
Focus Question: What does Akiko gain - power, wisdom, or confidence - and how?			
10. The Road Back	The Hero returns to ordinary life.	Akiko begins his journey home or toward resolution.	
Focus Question: How does the adventure affect Akiko's perspective or relationships?			
11. Resurrection	The final test or transformation.	Akiko demonstrates growth in a key moment.	
Focus Question: How has Akiko changed from the start to the finish of his adventure?			
12. Return with the Elixir	The Hero brings back a benefit or life lesson.	Akiko returns wiser, braver, or able to help others.	
Focus Question: What lesson or gift does Akiko bring to his community, his family, his friends, or himself?			

AFTER VIEWING

BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

1. What part of the film did you like the most and why?

2. Which character did you care most about? What made you feel that way?

3. What lesson or idea do you think the film wanted to teach?

4. Did the film remind you of something in your own life or another story? How?

5. If you told a friend about this film, what would you say in two or three sentences?

AFTER VIEWING

LIFE LESSONS

Introduction:

Besides being entertaining, films offer viewers some valuable life lessons. Filmmakers use this magical medium to entertain us with stories that impart values and wisdom that we can connect to our own life, or the world right now.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

- After watching, identify some valuable life lessons you can take away from this story.
- Use specific details and examples from the film to show how the film taught you this lesson.
- Reflect on how each lesson you identify connects to your own life and the value it might have in the world right now.

Life Lesson What did you learn?	Details and Examples from the film that show how you learned this lesson.
Lesson One:	
How does this lesson connect to your own life? This could be something from your past, the present, or something you're thinking about for your future.	



AFTER VIEWING

LIFE LESSONS

Life Lesson What did you learn?	Details and Examples from the film that show how you learned this lesson.
Lesson Two:	
How does this lesson connect to your own life? This could be something from your past, the present, or something you're thinking about for your future.	

Life Lesson What did you learn?	Details and Examples from the film that show how you learned this lesson.
Lesson Three:	
How does this lesson connect to your own life? This could be something from your past, the present, or something you're thinking about for your future.	

AFTER VIEWING

EXIT TICKET | EVERYDAY HEROES

Instructions:

As a check for understanding and feedback on the film, respond to the following question and write your response (2-3 sentences) in the space provided.

- What did Akiko and his new friends do to help each other? You can draw a picture or write one-two sentences.

ADMIT ONE

ADMIT ONE



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

NOTES ACROSS BORDERS

Instructions:

Akiko, *The Flying Monkey* has experienced a great adventure and wants to share the story with friends and family back home! In this activity you'll write a postcard from Akiko's perspective, describing the adventure, the sights, and the thrills, so everyone back home can feel like they were part of the journey.

Directions:

As Akiko, write a postcard to someone back home at the zoo, in the forest, or one of the friends you met along the way in a mailbox or toy store. Sharing specific details about your adventure by considering the following questions.

1. Who will you write to?
2. What will you tell them?
 - Where you are and what it looks like.
 - Something exciting or scary that has happened so far.
 - How you are feeling on your journey.
 - What you hope will happen next.
3. Don't forget to sign it! Remember, you are Akiko!
4. Feel free to add images to decorate what you imagine your surroundings look like.

A postcard template with a decorative border of alternating blue and orange diagonal stripes. The template is divided into two main sections by a vertical line. The left section is for the address. The right section contains a rectangular box for a stamp in the top right corner and three horizontal lines for the message below it.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

NOTES ACROSS BORDERS | REFLECTION

- What stage of Akiko's journey did you choose and why?
- How did this moment help Akiko grow as a hero?

Written Reflection

Doodle Reflection

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

CREATIVE REMIX

Instructions:

Akiko, The Flying Monkey is about a young monkey who leaves home and sets off on a big adventure. Along the way, he faces challenges, makes friends, and grows into someone braver and wiser. The story follows the classic Hero's Journey pattern - from leaving the familiar world, to overcoming trials, to returning home transformed.

Directions:

Now that you know how *Akiko, The Flying Monkey* follows the Hero's Journey, imagine that Akiko is about to set off on another adventure. This time, you get to create the story!

1. Plan: Outline Akiko's adventure by considering some key questions.
 - Where will Akiko travel?
 - What new challenges or obstacles will he face?
 - Who will he meet to help him along the way?
 - How will he change or grow by the end?
2. Storyboard: Use the storyboard or comic strip format. Draw pictures that show what happens on the journey from the call to adventure to the return home with a lesson learned. Be sure to include the challenges Akiko faces, as well as the mentors, allies, and enemies he encounters along the way.
3. Script: Write captions that match the pictures and describe what happens on his journey at each part of the new adventure.
4. Use Google Slides or Canva as a digital formatting option.

CALL TO ADVENTURE

What happens that leads to Akiko's next adventure? Why does he venture out into the world on this journey?

Image:

Caption:

EXTENSION ACTIVITY CONT.

CREATIVE REMIX

MENTORS, TESTS, ALLIES, & ENEMIES

What challenges does Akiko face on this adventure? Who does he meet along the way? What new friends does he make? What enemies does he defeat? What new things does he discover?

Image:

Caption:

RETURN & LESSON LEARNED

How does Akiko's adventure end? What happens when he returns home? What lesson has he learned? How has he changed?

Image:

Caption:

Reflection Questions:

- How did you follow the Hero's Journey while creating something original?
- What new challenges or lessons did you add?
- What new friends or enemies did Akiko meet along the way on this adventure?
- How might these choices help the audience connect with Akiko as the hero of his own journey?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

Instructions: Arc A film review is a report that provides information about a film, expresses an opinion, and summarizes the main parts of the story.

Directions: Use the template below to review, rate, and recommend the film.

Title:	Director:
Main Characters:	
Setting:	
Summary of the Story:	
Central Theme or Lesson Learned:	
What I liked:	
What I disliked:	
My Favorite Part:	
Movie Rating: Color in the Appropriate Number of Stars 	
Who would you recommend this movie to and why?	

ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS



An opening night screening at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

©Tommy Lau

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/>.