

MVFF EDUCATION



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 3-8

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Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 48th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of Animation Nation, A Family Film College Showcase. 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

- Which of the films featured in this showcase made you feel something unexpected - happy, sad, excited, surprised, scared, or maybe even confused? How or why?
- Was there a character or story that stayed in your mind after the movie ended?
- Did any of the stories remind you of something in your own life or in the world around you?

The Creative Imagination of Animation

- What unique reality do these filmmakers create and how did they engage you into the worlds they built?
- How do the colors, shapes, or textures contribute to the mood and meaning?
- How did animation timing, rhythm, or sound design create impact?
- What abstract ideas or emotions are represented through visuals instead of words?

Voice & Perspective

- Whose point of view are these animated films showing and how do you know?
- Do you think these films show experiences that are common for kids, or something different from what you usually see?
- How might someone from a different place or culture see these stories differently?

Social Relevance & Cultural Impact

- What do you think these films might mean beyond the stories themselves?
- How do these films make you think about important ideas connected to family, friends, community, or culture?
- Which of these stories remind you of something in your own life or in the world around you?



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

COMPARE | INTERPRET | WRITE

Interpretation Option: Choose one animated short and write about how its style communicates meaning beyond words.

Comparative Option: Compare two animated shorts with very different styles. How does animation expand the ways stories can be told?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Into Film | Animation

<https://www.intofilm.org/theme/48>

Educational Voice | The Impact of Popular Animated Films

<https://educationalvoice.co.uk/animated-films-and-series/>

Educational Voice | Animation Recommendations

<https://educationalvoice.co.uk/educational-animation-recommendations/>

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.

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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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Name: _____



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Get ready for a mix of cartoons like you've never seen before! Each of the shorts featured in this program has its own style and together they show just how many different ways animation can tell a story. From cosmic rivals and magic houses to urban mayhem and cultural celebrations, each story invites us to see the world differently, whether through humor, adventure, or a touch of magic and imagination.

FILMS FEATURED IN THIS PROGRAM



THE SUN AND THE WIND

Director: Soyeon Kim | US 2025

Two cosmic rivals battle it out, only to realize that even the fiercest power can't beat a small spark of warmth. Based on a classic Aesop's fable.

SOLAR ECLIPSE

Director: Zsofia Katona | US 2023

A father and daughter, burdened by loss, find unexpected light and hope as darkness falls during a solar eclipse.



RADIOCATIVE

Director: Damaris Alvarez | US 2023

Lucas' older brother Ethan always outshines him and gets all the attention and praise. But that ends tonight. Tonight, Lucas is ruining his sibling's chance of success! But wait . . . he turns into a cat?

NIDO DE MI VIDA

Director: Ivy Gonzalez | US 2025

A single mom and her child awaken and begin their morning in their small, humble home that encapsulates memories like a locket held close to their hearts, sealed against time.



HOUSE MAGIC AND A TEAPOT

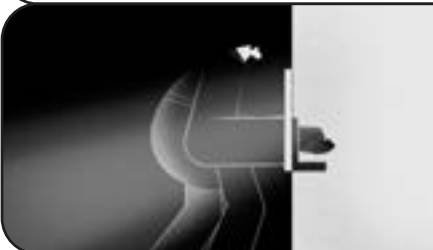
Director: Yanzhang "Jessica" Song | US 2025

A magical house has long waited for the perfect witch - until one stormy night, a traveler knocks on its door and a special enchantment blooms.

CREATURES OF CHAOS

Director: Asavari Kumar | US, Denmark 2025

Four neighbors discover that their emotional struggles take on physical forms - creatures they attempt to conceal. As the creatures grow larger, an unexpected encounter reveals the neighbors are not alone in their experiences.



GIROGI APPA

Director: So Youn Rebecca Jeon | US 2021

A poetic, experimental story of a boy releasing his bird, inspired by Korean "Gir-eogi Appa," honoring fathers' sacrifice and love, and encouraging storytellers to share their own culture.

FILMS FEATURED IN THIS PROGRAM



TENT CITY

Director: Camille Romero | US 2023

A poetic look at Southern California's growing homelessness crisis, aiming to raise awareness, spark discussion, and inspire meaningful change in our communities.

CHRYSTALLIS DAY

Director: Abigail Alonso | US 2025

When a young fairy is about to get her wings, she becomes worried about the possibilities of failure. With the help of her brother, she learns that in order to grow she needs to be brave.



MOON

Director: Genesis Sosa | US 2024

Bebe journeys to reach the moon, newly discovered to have sprouted cheese. Through her journey, her motivations to reach the cheese moon become clear: the love for her family.

PUSH

Director: Trilina Mai | US 2019

A grandfather and grandson walk life's winding path together, their bond deepening as they guide and nudge each other through changes great and small.



MY FRIEND THE DANDELION

Director: Athena Greenleaf | US 2024

When a young girl wishes for a friend on a dandelion, a magical lion appears. Together they navigate a new friendship and learn how to say goodbye.

HOMECOMING

Director: Yuxin (Cindy) Cheng | US 2024

A young woman walking down the street smells something familiar and recalls a joyful childhood memory with her family, inspiring her to reconnect with her loved ones.



BEFORE VIEWING

SEE | THINK | WONDER

Introduction:

Each of the shorts featured in this program has its own style and together they show just how many different ways animation can tell a story.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Before watching this short film, take a look at the images that represent each film on the program guide. Make some observations and thoughtful interpretations about what you see, what you think, and what you are wondering about before viewing.

SEE • What do you notice when you look at all the pictures together? • Do you see any patterns, similarities, or differences across them?	
THINK • What do you think these films might be about when you look at the collection as a whole? • What do you think the moods or feelings of all these stories might be? • What kinds of messages or ideas do you think the filmmakers might want to share?	
WONDER • What do you wonder about the characters or worlds shown in these pictures? • What questions do you have about how the stories might connect - or be different - from each other? • What do you wonder you'll learn, notice, or feel when you watch these films?	

BEFORE VIEWING

PERSONAL CONNECTION | CARTOON MAGIC

Introduction:

Everyone has a favorite animated movie from when they were younger, or even right now! Sometimes we love a movie because the story makes us laugh, cry, or think. Sometimes we connect to a character because they remind us of ourselves, someone we know, or someone we want to be. Other times, it might be the look of the movie - the colors, the animation style, or the music - that stays in our memory. And sometimes what we love most is the big message of the movie - what it teaches us about family, friendship, courage, or the world.

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.

- Think about an animated movie that has been special to you. What makes it your favorite? Did you connect to the characters, the story, the style, or the message? Explain why this movie matters to you and how it made you feel when you first watched it, or even when you watch it now.

Journal Entry

Doodle Notes

DURING VIEWING

STORY | STYLE | IMAGINATION | LESSON

Introduction: You are about to watch a collection of animated films. Each film tells a story in its own unique way, using characters, color, movement, music, and special effects. This program is not just about watching for fun - you'll also notice patterns, ideas, and animation styles that connect the films and make them meaningful. The films in this program carry unique perspectives that challenge, inspire, and open new ways of seeing the world.

How to use this Thinking Routine: Watch each film closely and pay attention to characters, setting, and the problems they face. Notice how the film looks and sounds. Take quick notes for each film. Use the notecatcher to record what you notice. You can draw or write, whichever helps you remember key points in order to dig a little deeper later.

SIGNPOSTS | WHAT TO NOTICE | WHAT TO NOTE

Characters Who are the characters in the story?	Setting Where does the story take place?	Problem Conflict What is the main problem in the story?	Solution Ending How does the story end? Is the problem solved?
Favorite Style Element Style elements include colors, music, funny moments, or animation tricks.	Imagination Did this film remind you of another story or world? Could you imagine yourself in it?		Lesson What message or feeling do you think the filmmaker wanted you to take away?

THE SUN AND THE WIND

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination		Lesson

DURING VIEWING

SUBJECT | STORY | STYLE | VOICE | CONNECTION

SOLAR ECLIPSE

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

RADIOCATIVE

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

NIDO DE MI VIDA

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

DURING VIEWING

SUBJECT | STORY | STYLE | VOICE | CONNECTION

HOUSE MAGIC AND A TEAPOT

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

CREATURES OF CHAOS

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

GIROGI APPA

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

DURING VIEWING

SUBJECT | STORY | STYLE | VOICE | CONNECTION

TENT CITY

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

CHRYSTALLIS DAY

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

MOON

Characters	Setting	Problem Conflict	Solution Ending
Favorite Style Element	Imagination	Lesson	

DURING VIEWING

SUBJECT | STORY | STYLE | VOICE | CONNECTION

PUSH

Characters

Setting

Problem | Conflict

Solution | Ending

Favorite Style Element

Imagination

Lesson

MY FRIEND THE DANDELION

Characters

Setting

Problem | Conflict

Solution | Ending

Favorite Style Element

Imagination

Lesson

HOMECOMING

Characters

Setting

Problem | Conflict

Solution | Ending

Favorite Style Element

Imagination

Lesson

AFTER VIEWING

SHORT FILM | LASTING IMPACT | BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

1. How do short animated films show big themes, like kindness, courage, or friendship, in simple stories?

2. Whose voices or experiences were highlighted in the films, and why are these perspectives important?

3. What makes animation a powerful way to connect with other children, families, and communities across cultures?

4. How do animated films use style, color, or sound differently than live-action movies to tell their stories?

5. If you could make an animated short film, what lesson or feeling would you want people to take away?

AFTER VIEWING

ONE SENTENCE SUMMARY | SIX WORD REVIEW

Introduction:

Short films pack a full story into a small frame of time. Each one is its own world - sometimes sharp, sometimes subtle, always purposeful. Because they are so concise, they challenge us as viewers to notice details, pick up on themes quickly, and reflect on meaning long after the screen goes dark.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

After viewing each short film write a one-sentence summary and a six-word review.

- One-Sentence Summary - Capture the essence of the film in a single, complete sentence. Focus on the central idea, conflict, or emotional impact.
- Six-Word Review - Distill your reaction into exactly six words. This can be reflective, evaluative, or even playful.

THE SUN AND THE WIND

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

SOLAR ECLIPSE

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

RADIOCATIVE

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

AFTER VIEWING

ONE SENTENCE SUMMARY | SIX WORD REVIEW

NIDO DE MI VIDA

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

HOUSE MAGIC AND A TEAPOT

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

CREATURES OF CHAOS

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

GIREOGI APPA

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

TENT CITY

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

AFTER VIEWING

ONE SENTENCE SUMMARY | SIX WORD REVIEW

CHRYSTALLIS DAY

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

MOON

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

PUSH

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

MY FRIEND THE DANDELION

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

HOMECOMING

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

AFTER VIEWING

MOVIE WITH A MORAL | MORE THAN JUST CARTOONS

Introduction: Animated shorts are sometimes seen as lighthearted entertainment, or just cartoons, but they are much more than that. These short films have the power to tell compelling stories, explore deep emotions, and convey meaningful ideas, all in just a few minutes. Because these films combine imagery, movement, sound, humor, and symbolism, animated shorts can communicate messages that linger long after the screen goes dark.

How to use this Thinking Routine: This activity asks you to look beyond the surface of animation to uncover the lessons, values, or questions each film raises, and what messages you think the filmmakers want to share. By doing so, you'll see that animation isn't just for fun, it's a powerful medium for reflection and insight. After watching the animated shorts in the program, let's think about the bigger lessons we can take away. Not just from one movie, but from the whole collection.

SPOT THE LESSONS | MIND MAP

List some of the important messages you noticed in the films.
Note the film and the lesson so you might be able to notice a connection or a pattern.

CONNECT ACROSS FILMS

Select two different films that you think teach a similar moral.
Write the title and explain how each one showed the moral you identified in its own way.

FILM #1

FILM #2

Shared Moral Lesson:

How Each Film Showed It:

Shared Moral Lesson:

How Each Film Showed It:

THE FESTIVAL'S BIG MORAL

As a group, we saw many lessons across many short animated films.
Which one moral do you think is the most important for kids today? Why?

The Big Moral:

Why it Matters:

MAKE IT YOURS

How could you use this moral in your own life? Give one example.

The Moral of My Story:

AFTER VIEWING

EXIT TICKET | ANIMATION NATION | FAMILY FILM COLLAGE

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.

- If you could step into one of the animated shorts and become a character for a day, which one would you choose and what would you do?

ADMIT ONE

ADMIT ONE



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM FESTIVAL CAPSTONE

Instructions:

Watching a collection of short films is witnessing the creativity, courage, and vision of filmmakers who bring their stories to life on screen. The fact that these films spark ideas, emotions, and conversations is a testament to their power. By going beyond the act of viewing, you celebrate not only their inspiration, but also your own ability to respond as an engaged audience member and creative thinker.

Directions:

Review the list of extension activity choices and select one activity that resonates most with you. Complete the activity thoughtfully and submit your work as your festival artifact.

1. Storyboard a Spin-off

- Pick a secondary character and design a short new adventure for them.
 - Sketch the adventure in comic strip form.
 - Write up a short pitch with a title and a logline.

2. Soundtrack Swap

- Choose one animated short and imagine a totally different style of music.
 - Examples: hip hop, classical, folk.
 - How would that change the mood or message?
 - Share a clip with a reflection.

3. Universal Lesson Poster

- Create a one-page illustrated movie poster for the short that highlights its theme in a way younger audiences can understand.
 - Examples: kindness, courage, imagination.
 - This can be done digitally, or on posterboard.

4. Movie with a Moral | The Pitch

- Each student, or small group, creates a 1-minute pitch for a short animated film they'd like to see or make themselves. Present these pitches verbally, sketch a quick movie poster, or record a 30-second trailer.
 - Title & Logline.
 - Subject: What it's about.
 - Story: How it would be told.
 - Style: Describe your vision for the animation style you imagine.
 - Impact: What is the moral of the story?



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/>.