

# MVFF EDUCATION

**HAPPY  
BIRTHDAY**



**CURRICULUM GUIDE**  
GRADES: 8-12

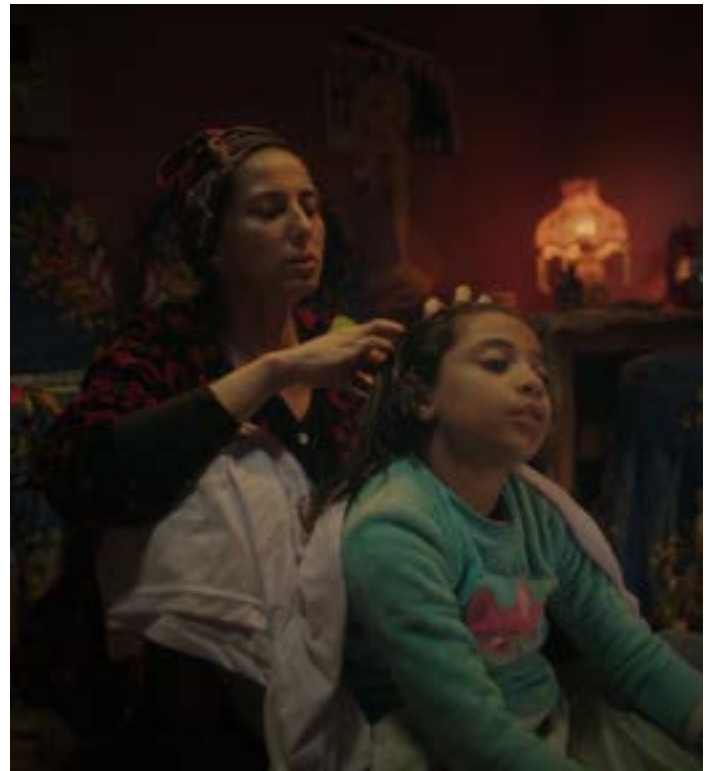
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 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  |
| About the Director   | 2  |
| Viewing Activities   | 3  |
| Extension Activities | 13 |
| About Film Festivals | 19 |



Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 48th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of the World Feature, Happy Birthday. 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**

- Describe a moment or a scene in the film that you found particularly surprising, disturbing, moving, conflicting, or confusing.
- What made this moment so powerful or compelling for you? Was it the story, the acting, the dialogue, the visuals, the soundtrack, or something else?
- How did this moment change the way you saw a character, situation, issue, or theme in the movie?
- How does the moment connect to bigger ideas?
- If you were explaining this moment to someone who hasn't seen the film, how would you describe why it matters?

## **Birthday Celebrations & Cultural Connections**

- What do birthdays teach us about the values of a culture?
- How do families show love and care during birthdays, even when life is hard?
- Which traditions felt most familiar to you, and which felt new or surprising?
- Why do you think birthdays are celebrated around the world, even if the traditions look different?
- If you could design a new birthday tradition for the world, what would it be and why?

## **Work & Identity**

- How does Toha's role as a maid shape how others see her, and how she sees herself?
- In what ways does the film ask us to notice the invisible or overlooked labor that sustains families like Nelly's?
- Does Toha's wish to live in her employer's world represent aspiration, assimilation, or survival?

## **Power & Family Relationships**

- What tensions do you see in the relationship between Toha and Nelly's family? What moments of care, exploitation, or both do you notice?
- Can unequal relationships ever feel equal? How does the film complicate this question?
- What does the film suggest about the price of belonging?

## **Film & Storytelling**

- How does the film highlight or give voice to Toha's experience?
- What choices did the filmmakers make to center Toha's perspective?
- Do you think films like Happy Birthday can shift how audiences view domestic work? Why or why not?
- How might this story resonate for Egyptian audiences versus international ones?

# 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.

- Birthday Celebrations & Cultural Connections
- Work & Identity
- Power & Family Relationships
- Film & Storytelling

**Write an essay that answers the question and explains your ideas.**

In your essay, make sure you:

- Share your opinion about what the film is saying about the topic.
- Use examples from the film - like a scene, a character's action, or the way something was shown on screen - to support your ideas.
- Connect the film's message to bigger ideas we discussed in class, or to real-world issues.
- Show that you've thought about the film by explaining why the topic is important or how different people might see it in different ways.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Scene Now | Arts and Culture | Happy Birthday Chosen as Egypt's 2025 Oscars Submission  
<https://scenenow.com/ArtsAndCulture/Happy-Birthday-Chosen-as-Egypt-s-2025-Oscars-Submission>

The Movie Buff | Happy Birthday Review  
<https://www.themoviebuff.net/2025/06/happy-birthday-tribeca-review-a-beautifully-ground-ed-portrait-of-classism-labor-and-girlhood/>

Medium | What's the History of Birthdays  
<https://medium.com/@QuestionClass/whats-the-history-of-birthdays-99e04006f79d>

Duolingo | Happy Birthday Around the World  
<https://blog.duolingo.com/happy-birthday-around-the-world/>

Babbel Magazine | Birthday Traditions Around the World  
<https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/birthday-traditions-around-the-world>

Little Passports Blog | Birthday Celebrations Around the World  
<https://www.littlepassports.com/blog/world-community/12-birthday-celebrations-around-the-world/?srsltid=AfmBOorMGcaP8UEUgu6S6ypk47qvendSXvYVJ3q7-c9UDJOpkDR81CZ>

Sing Me Happy Birthday Blog | Birthday Song Lyrics Around the World  
<https://www.singmehappybirthday.com/blog/happy-birthday-song-lyrics-around-the-world>

Cultural Atlas | Egyptian Culture Core Concepts  
<https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/egyptian-culture/egyptian-culture-core-concepts>

## 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.

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 FILM

Two delighted eight-year-olds wake up in the middle of the night to excitedly prepare for a birthday party. They might be sisters, or best friends, or cousins. The drama brilliantly demurs in giving us clarity, until the film's focus settles on Toha (a phenomenal Doha Ramadan), already a maid at such a young age. What unfolds are her poignant experiences as she navigates the dramatic class differences between her own family and that of her employers and their world of privilege. Set in contemporary Cairo, the incomparable Ramadan conveys the force of a little girl's will to resist the small injustices she does not fully comprehend. Writer-director Sarah Goher's surprising and heartbreaking film, a beautifully written and photographed story of resilience, will leave you contemplating what it means to grow up too fast when circumstance is the cruelest master of all.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

### SARAH GOHER

Sarah Goher is an Egyptian-American writer and producer, born and bred in the South Bronx. An alumna of NYU Tisch and the Nightingale Bamford School, Goher worked on *Cairo 678* (2010), *Clash* (2016), *Amira* (2021) and Marvel Studios' *Moon Knight* (2022). Her directorial debut, *Happy Birthday*, premiered at the 2025 Tribeca Festival in New York City, where Goher won 3 awards: Best International Feature, Best International Screenplay, and the Nora Ephron award for a distinguished female filmmaker.



## THE GENESIS OF THE STORY

I want to make this movie because . . . her name was Sahar.

She was the only other kid my age in my grandmother's house in Cairo, where I'd spend my summers far away from New York. I could barely speak Arabic, and she, no English, but that never got in the way of our endless misadventures.

That she served my grandmother was a peculiar observation I never made much of as a child. Even worse, everyone dealt with her presence as if there was nothing unusual. If anything, my grandmother was praised for taking her in and sparing her a worse reality of harsh labor and godknowswhat . . . But the closer I got to Sahar, the more I could sense the big feelings hiding inside her little body that no one seemed to notice; her complicated sense of identity hanging in limbo between two very different and unforgiving worlds. Sahar greatly inspired this story and the development of TOHA's character.

The term "child maid" should make one shudder, evoking visceral discomfort and outrage. Children like Toha exist within an unyielding social hierarchy—a structure that offers scarce opportunities for mobility while fostering a stark interdependence and tension between upper and lower classes. This fraught dynamic becomes the stage upon which Toha's story unfolds. The film delves into the complexities of her emotions as she relentlessly pursues a fantastical yet deeply relatable wish.

Child labor is illegal and punishable by law in Egypt. According to UNICEF, over 160 million children WORLDWIDE are engaged in child labor. That number does not reflect the many Tohas who often slip between cracks under the false pretense of goodwill, cloaked in classism.

# ECHOES OF AN EPIGRAPH

"If I make the birthday happen, will you give me a candle to make a wish?"

## FIRST ECHO | BEFORE VIEWING

- Read the epigraph aloud.
- What strikes you first?
- What does this quote seem to suggest or warn?
- If this were a headline, what story might follow?
- Jot down quick responses, predictions, or connections to your own life, current events, or prior texts or films.

## SECOND ECHO | DURING VIEWING

- As you watch, listen for moments that echo or contradict the epigraph.
- Where does the film live up to this idea?
- Where does it complicate it?
- Keep a running note.

## THIRD ECHO | AFTER VIEWING

- Return to the epigraph.
- How has its meaning deepened or shifted for you?
- Which scenes or characters embody this quote? Which resist it?
- If you had to rephrase the epigraph to match the film's message, what would you write?

## RIPPLES | STRETCH THE IDEA

- Create a visual or verbal echo - a drawing, headline, tweet-length version - that shows how the epigraph reverberates beyond the film and into society, history, or personal experience.

# BEFORE VIEWING

## ANTICIPATION GUIDE

### Introduction:

An anticipation guide for a film is a pre-viewing activity for you to respond to statements related to the film's themes, then revisit your responses after watching to see how your perspectives have changed based on new information and critical thinking.

### How to use this Thinking Routine:

Read each statement carefully. Mark whether you agree or disagree. Be prepared to dig a little deeper into one topic or theme in a previewing extension activity.

| Agree | Statement                                                                                                                 | Disagree |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
|       | All work has dignity, no matter the type of job.                                                                          |          |
|       | Domestic workers (maids, nannies, cleaners) are often invisible, even though they make everyday life possible for others. |          |
|       | Social class determines how people are treated.                                                                           |          |
|       | Some jobs are undervalued because of who actually does them (women, migrants, poor people).                               |          |
|       | The division between employer and employee is natural and unavoidable.                                                    |          |
|       | It is possible for true friendship to exist across major class differences.                                               |          |
|       | Telling personal stories through film can give voice to people who are usually overlooked.                                |          |
|       | Films have the power to challenge stereotypes about workers, women, and immigrants.                                       |          |

## BEFORE VIEWING | EXTENSION ACTIVITY

### THE THREE WHYS

#### Introduction:

The film you are about to watch includes topics and themes from the statements included in the anticipation guide.

#### How to use this Thinking Routine:

Dig a little deeper into one of the topics or themes you have something more to say about. Consider the three why questions to elaborate your position and clarify your thinking.

|                                                                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Statement</b><br>Copy the statement of your focus for digging a little deeper.   |  |
| <b>Why</b> might this topic matter to me?                                           |  |
| <b>Why</b> might this topic matter to people around me: family, friends, community? |  |
| <b>Why</b> might this topic matter to the world?                                    |  |



# BEFORE VIEWING

## PERSONAL CONNECTION | BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS & CULTURAL TRADITIONS

### Introduction:

The act of writing helps us think about a topic. The film you are about to watch tells the story of a young maid (eight-year-old Toha) who goes to great lengths to ensure her best friend (Nelly, the daughter of her wealthy employer) has a successful birthday party.

### How to use this Thinking Routine:

Respond to the prompt using a journal entry style of writing.

- What makes birthdays special? Write about a birthday tradition that is important to you, and one you would celebrate and share with someone else from another culture. Feel free to add doodle notes or images to support your words.

### Journal Entry

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### Doodle Notes

# DURING VIEWING

## STORY MAP | WORLDS, WONDERS, & WISHES

**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. This guided viewing routine moves beyond the basic story map and really emphasizes world building, contrasts, and social dynamics.

**How to use this Thinking Routine:** While viewing, fill in the key beats of the story arc.

- Fill in the key beats of the story arc.
- Use the chart to note details from each world.

### MAPPING THE STORY

**Exposition**  
**Setup | Characters | Wishes**

**Climax**  
**Turning Point | Birthday Party Moment**

**Rising Action**  
**Tensions | Conflicts**

**Resolution**  
**Outcome | Lesson**

# DURING VIEWING

## STORY MAP | WORLDS, WONDERS, & WISHES

### A TALE OF TWO WORLDS | NOTICE & NOTE

| Element                                         | Employer's Family Home | Maid's Family Home |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Lifestyle   Daily Life<br>Comforts & Challenges |                        |                    |
| Clothes & Appearance                            |                        |                    |
| Attitudes from Others                           |                        |                    |
| Belonging & Community                           |                        |                    |
| Discrimination & Struggles                      |                        |                    |

### CROSSING WORLDS

### NOTICE & NOTE

Where do you see Toha moving between worlds?

What does she gain and what does she lose when she moves between worlds?

### CROSSING WORLDS

### NOTICE & NOTE

How does the party highlight both worlds at once?

What emotions or tensions are strongest here?

Does the party fulfill Toha's wish, or complicate it?

What is revealed about class, identity, or the meaning of belonging?

## AFTER VIEWING

### REFLECTION & REVISIONING

How does the maid's wish represent aspiration, assimilation, or survival? Why?

## What is the price of belonging in this story?

Imagine the families switch roles. How would a birthday in the maid's home look and feel?

## Journal Entry

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

## Doodle Notes

# AFTER VIEWING

## SEEK TO SEE

### Instructions:

This routine nurtures empathy and perspective taking.

### How to use this Thinking Routine:

Drawing on the information you get while viewing the film, explore the following ways of seeking to see.

#### I SEEK TO SEE

##### Multiple Feelings

What are Toha's various feelings in the different situations she finds herself in?

##### Strengths

What are Toha's strengths, her cultural richness, and personal power?

##### Connections

What are some ways you connect to what Toha is thinking or feeling?

##### Human Dignity

What words would you choose to honor her humanity and make her shine?

#### REFLECTION

Reflect on your experience seeking to see.

- Did you notice any shifts in your thinking, perspective, or feelings while you were watching?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What questions do you have?

A Thinking Routine Adapted from Harvard Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education  
<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

## AFTER VIEWING

### BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

1. What central theme or issue does this film explore and how effectively does it do it?

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2. What scene, image, or moment best captures the film's overall message? Explain.

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3. How does this film expand your understanding of history, culture, or society?

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4. What choices did the filmmaker make (style, structure, visuals, sound, editing) that shaped your response to the story?

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5. What questions, critiques, or debates does this film leave you thinking about?

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# AFTER VIEWING

## EXIT TICKET | CELEBRATIONS & CONNECTIONS

### 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 does this film make you think about the ways class or social status can influence access to joy, tradition, or cultural celebrations?

ADMIT ONE

ADMIT ONE



# EXTENSION ACTIVITY

## ROLE SWAP | CREATIVE STORYBOARD & SCRIPT

### Instructions:

*Happy Birthday* explores social class and how it shapes people's lives. Birthday celebrations can look and feel very different depending on your social location. In this activity, you will imagine what happens if Toha and Nelly swapped roles - Nelly attending Toha's birthday - and storyboard how the party might unfold, thinking about how each character's background, personality, and social experience might shape the celebration. This extension activity encourages empathy and highlights how power and class shape lived experiences.

### Directions:

After mapping both worlds, create a short scene where the maid's family hosts the employer's family for a Birthday Party.

1. Plan the Scene by considering some key questions.
  - Where would the birthday celebration take place?
  - What would the event look like?
  - What type of food, decorations, and music would the party include?
  - What tensions or conflicts might emerge?
  - How might clothing, attitudes, and belonging flip?
2. Use the three-act structure storytelling model to outline your scene. This framework provides a common narrative structure for films, guiding the audience through the story's progression and character development.
3. Draw pictures that show what happens in each of the three acts.
4. Write captions and add dialogue.
5. Use Google Slides or Canva as a digital formatting option.



# EXTENSION ACTIVITY CONT.

## ROLE SWAP | CREATIVE STORYBOARD & SCRIPT

### ACT I | SET UP

The protagonist's normal world and initial goals are introduced.

Image:

Caption:

### ACT II | CONFRONTATION

The protagonist faces a series of obstacles and challenges to their goal.

Image:

Caption:

### ACT III | RESOLUTION

The conflicts are resolved and the story concludes.

Image:

Caption:

# EXTENSION ACTIVITY

## ROLE SWAP | CREATIVE STORYBOARD & SCRIPT

### Instructions:

Cultures are connected through celebrations. This activity is designed to explore and share the importance of birthday wishes, family and friendship, and acts of kindness.

**Directions:** Complete the tasks in each of the activity boxes. Imagine this is your passport for birthday celebrations around the world.

### VISAS

#### BIRTHDAY WISHES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Write or draw what you wish for on a birthday. Teach someone to say "Happy Birthday" in your home language if it is representative of another culture in your community classroom. Or, learn to say "Happy Birthday" in another language besides your own. Add that message to your birthday wish.

#### FAMILY CIRCLE CRAFT CORNER

Reflecting on how Nelly's family and Toha worked together to create joy, imagine you are decorating a paper plate or a medallion with symbols of family and friendship. Draft your design and make it colorful and cheerful.



1

### VISAS



2

# EXTENSION ACTIVITY

## ROLE SWAP | CREATIVE STORYBOARD & SCRIPT

### VISAS

#### CULTURAL BIRTHDAY FESTIVAL

Create Cultural Celebration Stations in the Classroom. Have students get their passport stamped with a symbol that represents each station. Here are some Examples:

- Pinata Party [Mexico]: Decorate or play with mini paper pinatas.
- Longevity Noodles [China]: Learn how noodles symbolize long life at birthdays.
- Kransekake [Norway]: See or build a tower cake out of paper rings like the real almond cake for celebrations.
- Clapping game [South Africa]: Where guests clap hands for each year of age.
- Chair Lifting [Israel]: Learn about being lifted on a chair for the birthday child's age.
- Expand this List: Share additional celebrations represented in your classroom or community.



3

### VISAS



4

### VISAS

#### SONGS AROUND THE WORLD

Find and listen to a selection of Birthday songs in other cultures and languages. Make a Birthday Playlist.

#### FILM FESTIVAL

Watch kids from around the world celebrating birthdays. What do these celebrations all have in common?

#### BIRTHDAY TREATS & TRADITIONS

Share a big cake decorated with flags from around the world. Or, have students research, prepare, and share a variety of dishes that are served at Birthday Celebrations around the world.



5

### VISAS



6

# EXTENSION ACTIVITY

## FILM REVIEW

### Directions:

After watching the world feature *Happy Birthday*, review the film in writing using the industry standard format of this genre.

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 subject and story).
2. **Interpret** the film/filmmaker's 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](http://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/>.