

MVFF49

MILL VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL | 1-11 OCTOBER



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 3-6

Name: _____



LETTER TO EDUCATORS

Dear educators,

Thank you for attending the 49th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of the Family Feature *Brave Cat*. We are excited to welcome you to our 2026 fall season with a combination of both in-person screenings for local schools and online screenings for those of you joining us from afar.

We believe film is the literature of the 21st century: a universal language that helps students make sense of the world, and a powerful entry point into questions of ethics, identity, and active citizenship. This year's school screenings continue that focus and we think *Brave Cat* will be a rich, engaging film text for your classroom.

This guide gives you everything you need to bring the film into your curriculum, including:

- Discussion prompts for small-group or whole-class dialogue on the film industry and the film itself.
- Common Core-aligned writing options for evidence-based essay prompts or a film review format, depending on your students' experience level.
- Thinking routines for before, during, and after viewing with a focus on social-emotional learning.
- Extension activities exploring the film as both art and cultural or political statement.
- A festival-context handout to help frame the screening experience for your class.

Thank you for the work you do. Enjoy the film!

Sincerely,
The CAFILM Education Team

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. Before you attend or screen the film: Hand out the Festival Context sheet so students know what a film festival is and why this screening matters.
2. Pick your discussion mode: Choose whole-class or small group prompts based on your time and class dynamic. Both formats work with the film industry angle, the specific film, or both and can be paired with the discussion notecatcher.
3. Choose a writing path: If students already write evidence-based essays, use the essay prompts. If not, try the film review format as a lower-lift alternative.
4. Layer in thinking routines: Assign the before, during, and after routines to deepen engagement. These double as social-emotional learning check-ins.
5. Extend if you have time: Use the extension activities for students who want to dig a little deeper into the film's social, cultural, or political dimensions further.

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ABOUT THE FILM

Kona is a young cat who dwells in the forest with her loving mother and her wise grandma. All forest creatures live together in harmony except for the solitary human who scouts the countryside with his ill-tempered hunting dogs, capturing animals for a traveling circus. When he snares her mom, Kona embarks on a quest that takes her through the forest, over snowy mountains, and down to the ocean's shore on a quest to find her parents. While she begins her journey alone, she soon finds help and companionship from Colin, an adorable - if pesty - pup, and brave Bernard, a runaway circus bear.

Oscar-winning Chilean animator Gabriel Osorio's beautifully imaginative settings (inspired by the Patagonian landscape) and intricate handmade production design weave a family-friendly tale of bravery, determination, and forgiveness.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR GABRIEL OSORIO VARGAS

Gabriel Osorio Vargas is a Chilean film director. His short film *Bear Story* (2014) won the Oscar® for Best Animated Short Film. That was followed by another short, *I Am Little Red* (2017). He has also directed television series and TV ads. *Brave Cat* (2026) is his first feature.



THE CALLBACK

ECHOES OF AN EPIGRAPH

"You need a compass so you don't get lost."

FIRST ECHO | BEFORE VIEWING

- Choose 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

DO YOU HAVE YOUR BACKPACK READY?

Introduction:

The film you are about to watch is about a brave cat that sets off on a new adventure. The backpack is about making sure you're carrying the right things inside yourself before you face something new, scary, or uncertain. Just like Brave Cat wouldn't head into the woods without a map and a compass, we don't head into a hard moment without checking what we're bringing with us - our worries, our excitement, our questions, and our next steps.

How to use this Pre-Viewing Activity:

Watching this film will be like embarking on a journey. Use the compass prompts below to get ready to explore the film.

N Need to Know What do I still need to find out before I watch?	
W Worries What's making my viewing backpack feel too heavy or too light?	E Excited About What part of this film journey am I really looking forward to?
S Stance & Steps Where do I stand right now before viewing - and what are the steps I need to take to get to the end of the movie?	

DURING VIEWING

COMPASS POINTS & CONNECTIONS

Introduction:

This film is about three characters who have each lost their sense of home in a different way. All explorers need compasses to find their way home but explorers always find a way. Sometimes, a compass doesn't tell you what's right, it just shows you where you're already meant to go.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Every character in this film is following their own compass - not a literal instrument, but an inner sense of what matters most and where home really is. While you watch, look for moments in each compass zone and jot down quick words or short phrases. Your notes will be helpful for digging a little deeper after viewing.

Compass Zone	Watch For	Your Notes
Literal Compass Direction & Journey	Where does the compass point at each part of the journey?	
Inner Compass Courage & Fear	Watch for a moment a character is scared - but moves forward anyway.	
Moral Compass Trust & Difference	Watch for who the characters trust, misjudge, or learn to see differently.	
Broken & Repaired Compass Forgiveness	Watch for the moments when the story turns from getting even toward understanding.	
Home This is a moving target, not a place.	What does home mean to each of the companions? How does it change during the story?	Kona: Colin: Bernard:

AFTER VIEWING

ROLL CREDITS | EXIT TICKET

How to Use this Post-Viewing Activity:

Before any discussion begins, give students a quiet minute. Ask students to write silently without sharing out yet. Let this sit before moving into analysis. In the exit ticket, write:

- One word for how you feel right now.
- One image from the film you can't shake.
- One line - from a character or a conversation - that resonated with you and you want to remember.

ADMIT ONE

ADMIT ONE



AFTER VIEWING

DO YOU HAVE YOUR BACKPACK READY?

How to use this Post-Viewing Activity:

Instead of North, South, East, and West, what are four points or things that guide you in your life to help you find your way when you are far from home, feeling lost, or afraid? Describe or draw what you need in your backpack to help guide you.

Compass Point #1

One thing I need to help guide me when I'm away from home.

Compass Point #2

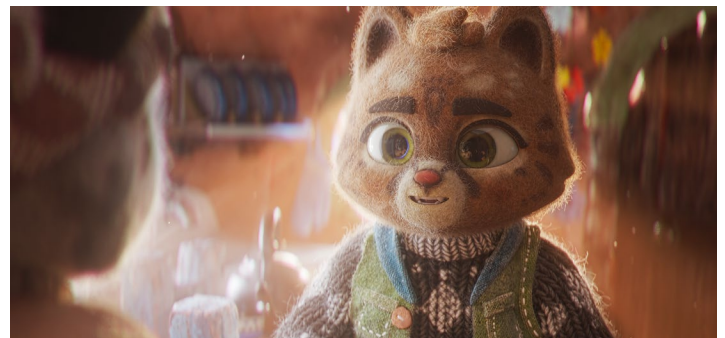
I carry this with me so I don't get lost.

Compass Point #3

I carry this with me on an adventure because it helps me feel brave.

Compass Point #4

This helps me when I'm feeling lost or afraid.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

HEADINGS & HIGHLIGHTS

Pick your discussion mode:

Choose whole-class or small group prompts based on your time and class dynamic. Both formats work and can be paired with the discussion notecatcher that follows.

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?

Kona's Compass - Facing Fear

- What is Kona afraid of at the start of the story?
- Kona's search for her mother forces her out of everything familiar. What does the film suggest is the difference between being brave and simply having no other choice?
- Fear often shrinks our world - we stay where it's safe. How does the film show Kona's world getting bigger as she gets braver?
- If Kona's compass could talk, what do you think it would say to her when she feels like giving up?

Colin's Compass - Trust & Belonging

- Why might Colin have a hard time trusting a cat and a bear?
- What do Colin, Kona, and Bernard do to earn each other's trust over time?
- In nature and in stories, cats, dogs, and bears are usually rivals or predator and prey. Why do you think the filmmaker chose these three specific animals to become family?
- Colin was raised for one job by people who then abandoned him. How does he redefine what loyalty means over the course of the film?

Bernard's Compass - Letting Go & Moving Forward

- What has Bernard lost by the time we meet him in the film?
- Even though he's the oldest, Bernard learns things from Kona and from Colin too. What does that tell you about who gets to teach and who gets to learn?
- What happens when the compass no longer points toward revenge, but understanding?
- What is one small thing Bernard does that shows he still has hope?

Three Compasses - One Home

- At the start of the film, home seems to mean a specific place. How does that change by the end? What does home mean to each character now?
- If you drew a compass for this whole story - not just for one character - what would the four directions (N, S, E, W) stand for?
- Was there a moment in the film where you thought the group might fall apart? What compass point pulled them back together?

DISCUSSION NOTECATCHER

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Discuss the questions in small groups and record the ideas that come up in conversation. Be prepared to share what you take away with the whole class.

IDEAS I HEARD DURING DISCUSSION

MIND-POP IDEAS

Ideas that came to my mind during discussion.

ONE IMPORTANT THING I LEARNED DURING DISCUSSION

INTERPRETIVE WRITING OPTION

Choose one Compass Moment from the Options Below.

How to write your response:

- Start with your idea - your claim.
- Give two examples from the film that support it.
- Explain how each example connects to your idea.
- End with why this compass moment matters to the whole story.

Literal Compass - Direction & Journey

The compass isn't just about getting somewhere - it's about becoming someone. Pick one moment when the direction of the journey changed. What do you think that moment means?

Inner Compass - Courage & Fear

Being brave doesn't mean a character isn't scared - it means they move forward anyway. Choose a moment when a character was afraid but acted anyway. What does this moment teach us about courage?

Moral Compass - Trust & Difference

Sometimes we judge people before we really know them. Pick a character who was misjudged at first. What changed? What does this teach us about first impressions?

Broken/Repaired Compass - Forgiveness

A compass can lose its way - and so can people. Pick a moment from the story when a character chooses understanding rather than getting even. Why do you think they made that choice, and what changed because of it?

Home - A Moving Target, Not a Place

By the end of the film, home means something different than it did at the start. Pick one character. How did their idea of home change?



FILM REVIEW OPTION

Share Your Opinion like a Real Critic

- A film review shares your honest opinion about a movie and gives real reasons for that opinion so a reader can decide if they want to watch it too.
- It's part storytelling, part opinion, and part convincing someone.

Suggested Outline

1. The Hook (1-2 sentences)

Grab your reader with an exciting question or bold statement - make them want to keep reading.

2. The Basics (2-3 sentences)

Tell us the title, who's in it, and what the story is about. No spoilers - just enough to set the scene.

3. Two Big Ideas (2 short paragraphs - 3-4 sentences each)

Pick two things to talk about - what you liked, what surprised you, or a compass moment that stuck with you.

4. Your Verdict (1-2 sentences)

Give the movie a star rating (1-5) and your reason why. This is your honest opinion - own it!

5. Who Should Watch This (1-2 sentences)

Tell a friend or family member whether they would like it and why. Think about what kind of viewer would enjoy this film most!



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

BRAVE CAT ICEBERG

Instructions:

The film uses a ship and an iceberg near the end. What does hitting something you can't fully see or prepare for represent? This activity adapts the classic "cultural iceberg" model - where visible traits (food, clothing, and language) sit above the waterline, and deeper, invisible traits (personal values, beliefs, history, and fears) - sit below - to a character from the film. It reinforces the film's core ideas that what you notice first about someone is rarely the most important thing about them.

Directions:

1. **Choose a Character** - Kona, Colin, or Bernard.
2. **Fill in the Iceberg** - Use the iceberg model to demonstrate what sits above the waterline (what you see first) and below the waterline (what's hidden).
3. **Complete a Second Iceberg** - Use the second iceberg for a real person in your own life - a classmate, neighbor, or new student - to transfer the idea beyond the film.

A Character From the Film

ABOVE THE WATERLINE - What you notice first

- Physical appearance - species, size, characteristics.
- Role - forest cat, guard dog, circus bear.
- First impressions - how they act when they first meet the others - attitude, language, personality.

- - - WATERLINE - - -

BELOW THE WATERLINE - What's hidden underneath

- What they've lost.
- What they're afraid of.
- What they hope for.
- Their family - parents, grandparents, siblings.
- Their history - captivity, exile, family.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY CONT.

BRAVE CAT ICEBERG

A Person In My Own Life

ABOVE THE WATERLINE - What you notice first

- Physical appearance - race, age, gender, clothing.
- Role or relationship - classmate, friend.
- First impressions - attitude, language, personality.

--- WATERLINE ---

BELOW THE WATERLINE - What's hidden underneath

- What they've lost.
- What they're afraid of.
- What they hope for.
- Their family - parents, grandparents, siblings.
- Their history - culture, life experience, religion, moral beliefs.



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

THREE VOICES, ONE JOURNAL

Instructions:

Writing about one event from different perspectives means exploring how different characters think, feel, see, and experience the world around them. The magic of perspective builds empathy and helps viewers understand everyone's side of the story.

Directions:

In small groups, students each write one diary entry from the road - one as Kona, one as Colin, and one as Bernard - describing the same event from their character's point of view.

- First, select and discuss the moment from the journey you will write about.
- Next, decide who will take each of the three different characters - Kona, Colin, and Bernard.
- Write from your character's point of view.
- Finally, share and compare how the same event might have looked or felt different.

Diary Entry

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.

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.



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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ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS

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 throughout 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 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 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.