



AFI FEST 2003

AFI LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
NOV 6-16

WRITING A FILM REVIEW: A COMPETITION FOR LA'S HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

■ AFI SCREEN EDUCATION AT AFI FEST 2003

Every year, students from public high schools in Los Angeles County are invited to participate in AFI FEST through curriculum, special screenings and other educational opportunities. In 2002, AFI FEST hosted more than 1,000 Los Angeles County students at special screenings during the Festival and provided a written curriculum entitled "Subtitled Films: How and Why to Watch Them." For many students, this was their first introduction to international films featuring English subtitles.

■ THE COMPETITION

The ability to exhibit critical awareness—especially of the media arts—is a powerful communication tool for today's youth. Film criticism presents an opportunity for students to express and share their delight and pleasure (or frustration and disappointment) through an artfully written film review.

In 2003, AFI FEST continues its Screen Education program by establishing a film review competition. Students will be assigned a film at AFI FEST 2003 and invited to attend a free Saturday morning screening. Assisted by AFI Screen Education written curriculum (see attached, or go to www.AFI.edu/contest), students will view the film and then have one week to write a review.

The film to be reviewed is *KOPS* (2003 Sweden/Denmark 90 min 35 mm). It is about a small town in Sweden in which crime has become a distant memory. That's good for everyone but the police—bureaucrats are threatening their station with closure. The only way they may be able to save their jobs is if a crime wave were to suddenly occur.

In addition to its regular Festival screening times, there will be a free screening on Saturday, November 8, 10:00 a.m. at ArcLight Hollywood. Please refer to page 99 in the *AFI FEST Program Guide* for more detailed information on *KOPS*.

TEACHERS: While the November 8, 10:00 a.m. screening of *KOPS* is free, tickets are still required. Please call 1.866 AFI FEST to reserve tickets to this screening for your students.

■ JUDGES FROM THE LOS ANGELES FILM CRITICS ASSOCIATION

Three distinguished judges from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association will read all of the submitted reviews. The judges are **Jean Oppenheimer** (President of the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, NPR Film Critic), **Michael Rechtshaffen** (Film Critic, *The Hollywood Reporter*) and **Wade Major** (Senior Film Critic, *Boxoffice Magazine*).

■ PRIZES

The judges will determine two winners. Each will receive a pair of tickets to the exclusive AFI Associates Premiere of New Line Cinema's *THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING* on December 3, 2003!

The Rules: All submissions must be received by mail or e-mail no later than Friday, November 14, 2003. The winning reviewers will be notified by telephone or e-mail no later than Friday, November 21, 2003. Only one film review submitted per student, please. All film reviews should be neatly typed and between 500 and 800 words. All submissions should be e-mailed to AFIFEST@AFI.com or mailed to:

Film Review Competition – AFI FEST 2003
c/o AFI – 2021 N. Western Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90027



With special thanks to the AFI Associates

www.AFI.com

1.866.AFI FEST

Writing a Critical Film Review

A good film critique provides the reader with a basic idea of what the film is about. It provides the writer's critical assessment of the success/failure or effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the film supported by the evidence the writer gathers from the film. It is more than a plot synopsis or the enthusiastic blurbs of publicity hype. For the writer, the critique is an opportunity to exhibit a critical awareness of the elements of the film as well as to share the delight and pleasure (or frustration and disappointment) the film offers the viewer.

The questions below are meant to stimulate thought about a film and to provide areas of concern you may wish to address in your critique. The list is by no means exhaustive. Early in the critique it is desirable to sketch enough of the plot to give the reader an idea of what happens in the film. Do not try to recount everything - the key word here is "sketch".

If you provide only a plot summary, you are not writing a critique—you're writing the equivalent of a book report. Once you introduce the main characters and devote a few lines to the plot, thus giving the reader a good overview, get down to the job of convincing the reader that you have something interesting to say about the film—the plot is trivial, the hero is not really a hero, the plot and characters are fine but the camera work is needlessly tricky, or whatever else you decide your thesis to be.

Always use the present tense when writing your review and avoid words such as "great," "excellent," and the all-encompassing "really good."

Things to think about:

Here are some basic, starting questions to ask yourself when writing your critique.

- 1) Is the film adapted from fiction or drama, or is it based on an original idea and screenplay? If it is an adaptation, does it follow the original and neglect the cinematic opportunities of the story? Or does it sacrifice the original work for unnecessary cinematic devices? If the story is original, how fresh or innovative is it?
- 2) Are the characters believable?
- 3) Are the actors appropriately cast?
- 4) What is the theme of the film? Do the plot, acting, and other elements in the film successfully impart the theme to the viewer?
- 5) Is the setting/locale appropriate and effective?
- 6) Is the cinematography effective? Does the film make certain use of color, texture, lighting, etc. to enhance the theme, mood, setting?
- 7) Is the sound track effective? Is the music appropriate and functional, or is it inappropriate and obtrusive?
- 8) Are camera angles used effectively? Are they ever used for a particular effect?
- 9) Are there special effects (and/or special effects makeup) in the film? If so, are they essential to the plot? Are they handled skillfully? Do they serve a necessary function, or does the film sacrifice plot or characterization for the effects themselves?
- 10) Does the film make use of symbols or symbolism? What purpose do the symbols serve? Are they used effectively? How does the symbolism in the film contribute to or enhance the film's overall theme?

Study the Pros, Reflect and Discuss.

Assignment:

Collect three reviews for a film you've seen. Check in publications like Daily Variety, The Hollywood Reporter and your local paper for the reviews (many of these publications have online versions where archived reviews are available).

Read the reviews with the questions above in mind, and decide if the reviewer has a positive or negative opinion of the film. What kind of words does the reviewer use to express an opinion? Does the reviewer site specific examples from the film to support the review? Does the reviewer give away important plot twists or surprises? Do you agree with the review? Why or why not? Use the reviews you agree with to support your argument and contrast your opinion with the reviews you do not agree with.