FAMILY SHORTS
A GLOBAL COLLECTION OF FILMS FOR YOUNGER AUDIENCES

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THIS GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILMS:

The **Family Films** program is a series of thought-provoking and imaginative short films, selected to engage a young audience. International in scope, the program includes animated and live-action films, with both narrative and experimental structures. The Family Films program will delight and entertain, while introducing its audience to the diversity of culture and technique that makes up today's global cinema. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the program will encourage young viewers to consider the processes involved in filmmaking and to approach the screen as critical thinkers.

USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **Family Films** program. Support materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

Please direct all comments and queries to Keith Zwölfer, Youth Education Manager:

San Francisco Film Society Youth Education
39 Mesa Street, Suite 110 · The Presidio San Francisco, CA 94129-1025
kzwolfer@sffs.org
415.561.5040

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SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE

1) Which film in this series was your favorite? Why?

2. Which film in this series was your least favorite? Why?

3. Which film in this series do you think was the most challenging to make? Why?

4. These films combined live action and many different kinds of animation. What does this variety of formats say about modern filmmaking technology?

5. One theme that recurs throughout this series of short films is art and music. Where did you see art and music in the film series? What was important about art and music in these stories?

    a. How does music enable the friendship between the cow and the young man in **Aria For a Cow**?

    b. How does Lila's drawing change her relationship with the world?

    c. How does the comic book in **Super Sounds** help to begin the friendship between these two kids?

    d. What kind of art do you see in **Simorgh**?

    e. How is Max's artwork connected to his childhood in **Home**? Do you think this makes it more difficult for him to leave? How do you think his artwork will change as he grows up?

    f. What was the relationship between music and drawing in **Cows**?

WHICH CHARACTERS WERE STRANGEST OR MOST UNIQUE?

6. Another theme that recurs throughout this series is animals. What different animals did you see in the short films program? Which were real animals and which were imaginary? How can you tell the difference?

    a. What was realistic and what was imaginary about the cow in **Aria For a Cow**? Did you learn anything about modern dairy farming from this story?

    b. Does Lila like animals? What different animals does she draw during the film?

c. What animals did you see in **Simorgh**? Are they real animals or imaginary ones?

    d. Which cows did you like better, the cows in **Aria for a Cow**, or the cows in **Cows (Moosic Video)** How were the cows different from one another?

    e. What animals does Percival interact with? Does being on stilts prevent him from making friends with animals?

    f. Does the tree ever behave like an animal in **One Two Tree**? Why does it remind you of an animal?

7. Many of these films feature characters who are alone. Some of them are lonely and make friends, and some of them are having their own adventures.

    a. How do you think these filmmakers feel about individuality? Which characters were the strangest or the most unique?

b. Which characters do you think were happy to be alone, and which characters wanted a friend?

c. How did the two kids make friends with one another in **Super Sounds**?

d. Do you think that the younger brother would be lonely without his older brother?

8. What words would you use to describe this series as a whole? What common themes can you find? Do you think these films were interesting to watch together? Did any seem out of place?

9. Did you enjoy the **Family Films** series? What more do you want to know about these films? What questions do you have about how they were made?

ARIA FOR A COW

SYNOPSIS:

A musical plea from the often neglected and underappreciated barnyard inhabitants is brought to life by a never-heard before song by Howard Ashman & Alan Menken. (Dan Lund, USA, 2015, 7 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) Who are the characters in this movie? Do you like these characters? Whom do you like better, the young man or the cow?

2) What is the cow reacting to when she decides to make a performance?

3) Do you think this young man likes his job? How does his attitude toward his job change when he gets to know the cow better?

4) What did you think of the cow's song?

5) How is life different for the cow and the young man after they get to know one another? What changes?

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE SONG IN ARIA FOR A COW?

LILA

SYNOPSIS:

Armed with a boundless imagination and talent for drawing, Lila creatively fills in the missing pieces of her life and the world around her. (Carlos Lascano, Argentina/Spain, 2014, 9 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1.) Describe Lila. What kind of a person is she?

2.) What does Lila like to draw?

3) How do Lila's drawings relate to the world that she lives in?

4) Do you think that drawing makes Lila's life nicer? Would you like to be able to draw the way Lila draws?

5) If you were Lila, what would you draw into your own life?

MY BIG BROTHER

SYNOPSIS:

Sure, we've all fought with our siblings, and sometimes it's even hard to see eye to eye with them. We've got it easy compared to these vertically challenged brothers. (Jason Rayner, USA, 2014, 3 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) Describe the narrator of this story? Who is he?

2) What is so strange about this boy's brother?

3) What is good about having a brother who is so big?

4) What do you think this film says about being different? Is it okay to be different?

SUPER SOUNDS

SYNOPSIS:

A shy and lonely young boy lets down his guard long enough to welcome in a potential new friendship. (Stephen de Villiers, Australia, 2014, 12 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) Describe the girl and the boy in this story. How are they like or unlike other kids that you know?

2) What do the girl and the boy have in common?

3) Do you think this boy is shy? Why do you think he is shy?

4) How do the girl and the boy become friends?

5) Do you think this film has a message? What does it have to say about being an imperfect kid?

SIMORGH

SYNOPSIS:

A stunningly designed piece that incorporates Persian music, calligraphic art and ornamental designs to tell the traditional Persian story of life that deals with the fragility of self-worth. (Meghdad Asadi Lari, USA, 2014, 5 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) What kinds of drawing did you see in this film? Does the style remind you of anything?

2) What did you think of the music in the film? What styles of music does it remind you of?

3) What animals did you encounter in this film?

4) Describe the landscape of the film. What kinds of plants and geological features exist here?

5) What happens to these creatures during the film?

STORY OF PERCIVAL PILTS

SYNOPSIS:

A whimsical story about living an impractical life based on a childhood promise, where the phrase "reaching for the stars" takes on a whole new vertigo-inducing meaning. (Janette Goodey & John Lewis, Australia/New Zealand, 2015, 9 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) What did you think of Percival's story? Were you surprised by the stilter?

2) What different kinds of landscapes and towns did Percival see during his adventures?

3) How did the town where Percival settled react to a resident on stilts?

4) Was Percival ever able to settle down? What happened to Percival in the end?

5) Why do you think Percival wanted to go higher? Do you think his growing stilts might be a metaphor that the filmmakers are using to say something about people?

6) What do you think the narrator thinks of Percival? Do you think he looks up to him?

HOME

SYNOPSIS:

It's hard to leave your childhood home and the memories you've created there. Some things we are forced to leave behind and then
there is the rest we'll always keep close to our hearts. (Saschka Unseld, USA, 2014, 5 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) What happens in Home?

2) How does Max feel about moving?

3) Why do you think moving is difficult for kids? What is hard about leaving a house you have lived in for a long time?

4) What is Max's mom like? Do you think she is a nice mom?

5) Why do you think the creatures Max has drawn come to join him? Do you think Max will remember these drawings that he made when he moves into his new home?

DUET

SYNOPSIS:

This lovely tale is a celebration of life through the hand-drawn line. Animated and directed by the creator of Ariel, Pocahantas, Tarzan and Rapunzel. (Glen Keane, USA, 2014, 4 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) What did you think of the drawing in Duet?

2) Did this story remind you of any other stories?

3) How did the music help to tell the story of these two kids who grow up and fall in love?

COWS (MOOSIC VIDEO)

SYNOPSIS:

Not enough dancing cows you say? Well, we've got another bovine musical showstopper guaranteed to udderly satisfy even the most lactose intolerant of audience members. (Sandra Boynton, USA, 2014, 3 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) What did you think of the animation in the film?

2) Was the story funny?

3) Did you like the music in Cows?

ONE TWO TREE

SYNOPSIS:

This is the story of a tree like any other. One day it jumps into a pair of boots and goes for a walk. (Yulia Aronova, France & Switzerland, 2015, 7 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) What do the trees like to do when humans fall asleep?

2) Why do the trees like boots so much?

3) What funny things happen when the tree tries to act like a human or a boat or anything else?

4) Would you like to live in a world where trees wandered around in boots as soon as we fell asleep?

5) How did the filmmaker's imagination combine with drawing to tell the story of the wandering tree?

LAVA

SYNOPSIS:

Inspired by the isolated beauty of tropical islands and the explosive allure of ocean volcanoes, this musical love story takes place over millions of years. (James Ford Murphy, USA, 2014, 8 min)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1) Describe the landscape in this film. Where is Lava set?

2) What did you think of the music in Lava? Did you enjoy the singing?

3) What happens to the volcano in this film?

4) Did you enjoy Lava? What did you like about it?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY:

1) Draw a Story

All movies are planned before they are made. Have each student fold a blank sheet of paper into 4 quadrants. Ask them to then create a storyboard—a sequence of drawings that together tell a story. The story can be anywhere from 4–8 quadrants long (using both sides). The story could be an experience or dream the student has had, something he/she has read, or something completely original. Then break the class into pairs or small groups and have each student present his/her story to the group members.

ALL MOVIES ARE PLANNED BEFORE THEY ARE MADE

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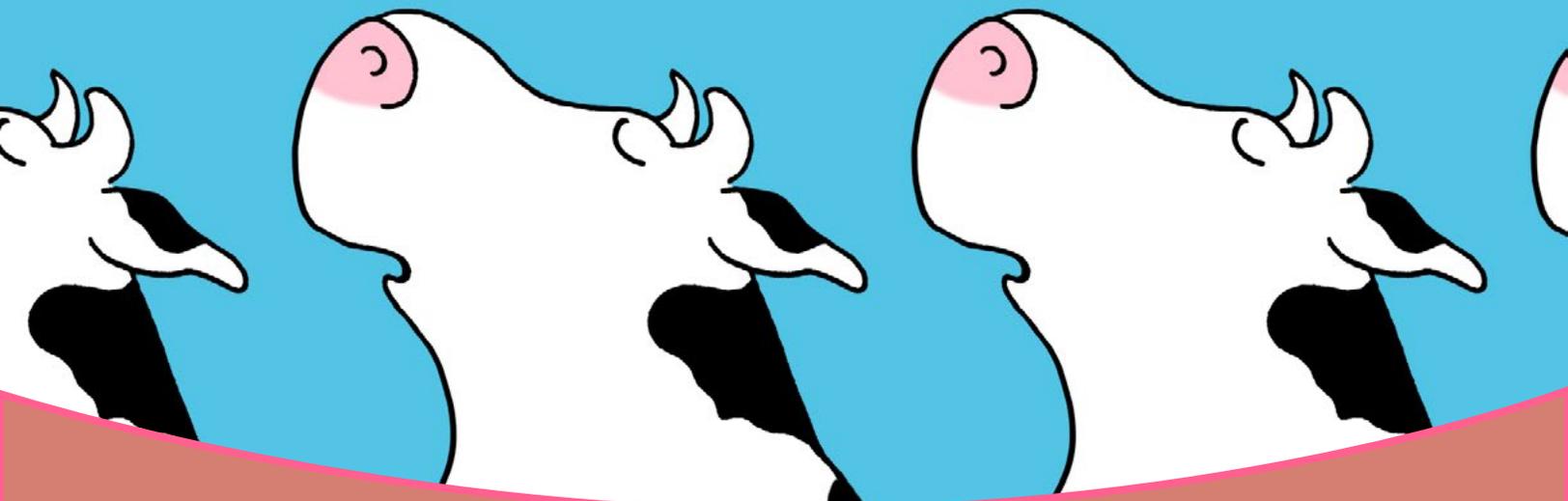
MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive.

Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

(1) Medium: the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered

(2) Author: the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination

(3) Content: the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys

(4) Audience: the target audience to whom it is delivered

(5) Purpose: the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

{ CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS }

MEDIUM — **All Media Is Constructed.**
How is the message delivered and in what format?
What technologies are used to present the message?
What visual and auditory elements are used?
What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?

AUTHOR — **All Media Is Constructed by Someone.**
Who is delivering the message?
Who originally constructed the message?
What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?

CONTENT — **All Media Is A Language.**
What is the subject of the media message?
What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content?
What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response?
To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?

AUDIENCE — **All Media Messages Reach an Audience.**
Who receives the message?
For whom is the message intended?
What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message?
What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message?
How might others perceive this message differently? Why?

PURPOSE — **All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason**.
Why was the message constructed?
Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How?
To what extent does the message achieve its purpose?
What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?

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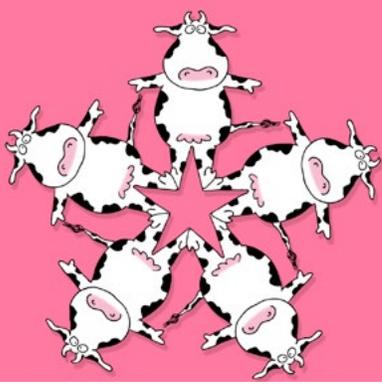
ANIMATION OVERVIEW

What is Animation?

Animation is a process used to create motion pictures through the combination of still images (e.g., digital graphics, photographs of drawings, photographs of objects, etc.) which, when played in sequence, create the illusion of movement. All television cartoons, for example, are animations, and are made up of thousands of still images (drawn by hand or on a computer) that are played sequentially, along with a soundtrack, to tell a story.

Types of Animation:

2D Animation Techniques
• Classic animation (e.g., Disney's The Lion King, most TV cartoons)
• Rotoscope (e.g., Star Wars lightsabers)
• Flip books

3D Animation Techniques
• 3D animation (e.g., Pixar's Toy Story, Wall-E, Up)
• Stereoscopic 3D (e.g., Avatar)
• Cut-out / Silhouette animation (e.g., South Park)

Stop Motion Techniques
• Claymation (e.g., Nick Park's Wallace and Gromit)
• Puppet animation (e.g., Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas, Coraline)

Types of Animation:

The world's most famous animator, Walt Disney, began making short animated cartoons based on children's stories in 1923. In 1928 he introduced Mickey Mouse in the first animated sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, which became an immediate sensation. Throughout the next decade, Disney would add such elements as carefully synchronized music (*The Skeleton Dance*, 1929), Technicolor (*Flowers and Trees*, 1932), and the illusion of depth with his multi-plane camera (*The Old Mill*, 1937), a device that allowed for animated cels to be photographed against a three-dimensional background. Although not the first animated feature, Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was the first to use up-to-the-minute techniques and the first to receive widespread release. The film's success can be attributed in part to Disney's willingness to use animation to create a profound dramatic experience. He strove for photographic realism in films such as *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941) and *Bambi* (1942).

The success of television cartoons led to the virtual disappearance of animated shorts produced for theatrical release. Animated feature-length films, however, flourished, especially after the release of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989), regarded by many as the studio's best animated feature in decades. Other Disney blockbusters followed, including *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994) and *Lilo & Stitch* (2002).

The development of computer animation was another great advancement in the form and resulted in feature films of astounding visual sumptuousness. In 1995, *Toy Story* was the first film to use only computer-generated imagery (CGI). In 2001 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences added a new Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film. The first recipient of the award was *Shrek* (2001). Other major animated features were *Toy Story* (1995) and *Toy Story 2* (1999), *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) and *Finding Nemo* (2003).

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