

THE REVIEW CONTEST JUDGED BY THE LOS ANGELES FILM CRITICS ASSOCIATION

To motivate students to write a critical review of ABEL, AFI FEST presented by Audi 2010 offers students the opportunity to have their reviews judged by distinguished critics from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. A grand prize will be awarded to the top review from each screening, with other prizes from AFI FEST going to additional outstanding reviews.

WRITING A CRITICAL FILM REVIEW

The writing of a film review is different from other styles of critical writing. A film reviewer needs not only to share their opinion of the film with the reader, but also needs to cite examples from the film that back up their opinion, while not giving away the plot. The writing of a good review strengthens all other styles of writing, as it requires observation, critical thinking and a high level of descriptive and narrative expression.

Study the Pros. Reflect. Discuss.

1. Collect three different reviews for a film you have already seen. Check newspapers, magazines and/or online.
2. After reading each review, decide if the reviewer has a negative, positive or mixed opinion. (A mixed opinion is when a reviewer likes some parts of a film—maybe they thought the lead actress was really good—but not other parts—maybe they thought the end of the story wasn't believable.)
 - a. How does the reviewer communicate their opinion to the reader?
 - i. How do they describe what they do or don't like? Do they use comparisons of some kind? What do they compare the film or parts of the film to?
 - ii. What type or kinds of words do they use to express their opinions?
 - b. What examples does the reviewer cite from the film to support the review?
 - c. Does the reviewer give away important plot twists or surprises?
 - d. Do you agree with the reviewer's take on the film?
 - i. Why or why not?

Challenge:

You are going to watch ABEL, and then write your own review of the film. Keep in mind the ideas you learned from looking at the ways the pros write film reviews.

- 1) Decide what you think about the film. Share a few thoughts with the reader.
- 2) Briefly describe the film to the reader – plot, characters, etc. (remember, they have not seen the film).
- 3) Express your opinion of the film and/or elements of the film.
- 4) Support it by citing examples from the film to make your case. (Just make sure to not give away so much of the story that no one wants to actually go see the film after reading your review!)

Remember: If you provide only a plot summary, you are not writing a review—you are writing the equivalent of a book report. Once you introduce the main characters and devote a few lines to giving the reader a good overview of the plot, get down to the job of convincing the reader that you have something interesting to say about the film—you think the plot doesn't make sense, the humor helps the viewer access more serious themes, the hero wasn't really a hero in the end, the story and characters are fine but the camera work is needlessly distracting, or whatever you decide your main point to be.

Any opinion you have must be supported by examples from the film.

Helpful Points to Think About:

Here are some basic, starting questions to ask yourself when writing your review:

- 1) Are the characters believable? (Do you believe they would do and say the all the things they are doing and saying in the film?)
- 2) Are the actors appropriately cast? (Are the actors believable in the roles they were playing?)
- 3) Is the story well told? Is it a story worth hearing and then, if so, is it told well?
 - Does it keep your interest? Can you follow it? Does it get confusing? Is it too simple?
 - Is it mysterious? If so, is that a problem, or is it good that it's mysterious? If mystery is good, how does the film maintain its mystery?

- Does the film have elements of comedy? What kind of comedy is it?
 - Does it have drama? If so, does the drama have enough tension? Do you really feel that the main character is in danger?
 - Does it feel realistic? Is realism an important part of this film?
- 4) Do the sets and costumes add any information about the characters, the time period, the locations or even the tone of the film that might be useful as part of citing examples from the film to back up your opinions?
 - 5) Is the cinematography effective? Do the lighting, camera movement and camera angles help tell the story and create a mood and tone that works for the story? Are they ever used for a particular effect?
 - 6) Is the sound track effective? Does it help tell the story? Is it appropriate and functional? Or does it ever take away from the quality of the film?
 - 7) Are there special effects (and/or special effects makeup) in the film? If so, are they essential to the plot? Were they handled skillfully? Do they serve a necessary function, or does the film sacrifice plot or characterization for the effects themselves?
 - 8) Does the film make use of symbols or symbolism? What purpose do the symbols serve? Are they used effectively?

©American Film Institute 2010