

Evaluating Art: What's Your Favorite Movie?

Overview

Description

This assignment asks students to explore a process by which criteria can be generated for evaluating a work of art, in this case a film. Students will 1) use critical thinking strategies to assess the criteria underlying their and their classmates' personal preferences and 2) use their speaking and listening skills as they work collaboratively to develop a class consensus for identifying "greatness" in a movie.

Final Products: The class will publish (in poster or some other form) its consensus regarding its standards for a "great" movie. Individual students will also write two essays: 1) an analysis of their own criteria for a "favorite" movie and 2) an argument for why one of their own favorite movies should be considered "great," according to the consensus standards developed by the class. Finally, students will also write a formal letter defending or justifying one of their personal choices for a favorite movie to a relative, friend, or teacher whom they believe would object to the choice. Accompanying the letter will be a supplementary paragraph explaining the rhetorical strategies the letter employs.

Subject

English III, English IV

Task Level

Grade 11-12

Objectives

Students will:

- Understand factors involved in their own preferences for some movies over others, including their personal criteria for choosing a movie as one of their favorites.
- Consider the impact of personal experiences and external influences on their own movie preferences.
- Understand that different sorts of criteria are possible when evaluating the merit of a work of art, such as a movie.
- Revise and refine their list of favorite movies, based on increased insight into their own standards and those of others.
- Write a 1-page essay explaining the factors that went into their final choice and analyzing what the exercise has revealed to them about their own movie tastes.

- Write and revise a persuasive letter to a specific audience (e.g., parent, friend, or teacher) who might object to at least one of their movie choices.
- Write a rhetorical analysis of their persuasive letter, explaining its argumentative strategies.
- Understand the difference between identifying a movie as a personal favorite and identifying it as one that a wider group would recognize as “great.”
- Reach a class consensus regarding criteria that make for “greatness” in a film and publish that consensus in the form of a poster or handout.
- Write and revise a formal 2-page essay in which they choose a film (preferably, but not necessarily, one from their earlier list), and construct a defense of its “greatness” based on the agreed-upon class standards.

Preparation

- Prepare copies of the Student Notes pages.
- Ensure student access to the Internet.
- Prepare a list of resources to help students become familiar with the artistic criteria of movie critics and film professionals. Such resources might include “top 10” lists published in national and regional publications, film reviews, and lists of major awards. Students might also consult more specialized websites and blogs. See Instructional Support for a list of possible resources.

Prior Knowledge

- Students should be comfortable using word processing software.
- Students should have knowledge of effective strategies for doing research on the Internet.
- Students should be comfortable using word processing software and have prior understanding of and practice in all parts of the writing process, including invention, drafting, revision, and proofreading.
- Students should have a lifetime of experience watching movies to draw from.

Key Concepts and Terms

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| • Aesthetic | • Idiosyncratic |
| • Cinematography | • Point of view |
| • Consensus | • Score |
| • Criteria | • Shooting angle |
| • Crosscut | • Standards |
| • Genre | • Taste |

Time Frame

This assignment will require about two weeks to complete in its entirety. The initial exercise, contextualizing discussion, and presentation of follow-up assignment should take 60-90 minutes of class time. Students should use three days outside of class to prepare their revised list of preferences and the 1-page analysis of their revised list. Writing the persuasive letter and receiving feedback from a peer group should take about 90 minutes of class time. Students should take one day outside of class to revise the persuasive letter and put it into formal letter format. Class discussion regarding consensus standards for greatness should take 60-90 minutes of class time. Students should then take three days outside of class to prepare the 2-page essay in which they argue that one or their own favorite films qualifies as "great," according to the class standards. If you have students revise this essay after peer and/or instructor comments, they should take two days outside of class to do so.

Instructional Plan

Getting Started

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Generate an off-the-cuff list of their 10 favorite movies.
- Explore the factors involved in how they chose their favorites.
- Become more conscious of the criteria that underlie their choices and those of their classmates.
- Understand that different sorts of criteria are possible, such as aesthetic criteria; political, religious, or moral criteria; and personal or idiosyncratic taste preferences.

Procedure

Without any prior preparation, give students five minutes to complete the following in-class exercise:

List your 10 favorite movies, with #1 being your very favorite. Do not include more than one movie from a single series (e.g., no more than one Harry Potter movie).

1. Begin discussion by explaining that each student's list reflects her or his own criteria for what makes a movie a "favorite." Ask students to describe the process they went through as they decided to include or to exclude certain movies. As students respond, put down on the board some of the reasons they give for their choices. Try to make the list as diverse as possible and try to include something from each student.
2. Ask students to look for patterns in the collective feedback they have given. What commonalities and what differences emerge? For example, does genre seem to be an important factor (e.g., horror, comedy, romance)?
3. Explain to students that different sorts of criteria are possible. Examples include aesthetic criteria; moral, religious, or political criteria; and personal tastes (e.g., "I like movies with horses in them.").
4. Ask the class to label or categorize (as "aesthetic," "moral," personal," etc.) some of the reasons already listed on the board for individuals' favorite movies. Students should recognize that some reasons for liking a movie are easily classifiable as aesthetic ("beautiful cinematography," "good acting"), moral ("good message"), or personal ("lots of horses"). Other criteria may be hard to place or may seem to fit into more than one category. For example, "I don't like movies where every character is super-attractive" may be an aesthetic judgment (too much regularity or sameness is boring) or a moral

judgment (these movies make regular people feel bad about their looks), or both. Similarly, a genre preference (for horror, etc.) may be simultaneously aesthetic and personal.

5. Here are two possible ways to deepen the discussion even further.
 - a. Point out that personal preferences are themselves often influenced by external sources, such as advertising and popular media, discussions with peers and relatives, or personal experiences (a movie you saw on your first date, for example). Ask students if they can identify external sources that have influenced their personal movie criteria.
 - b. Discuss how a list of a person's favorite movies may say something important or revealing about the person. Ask students to speculate about what their preferences communicate about them. Possible prompts:
 - i. Are some lists restricted to movies featuring only female protagonists? Male protagonists? In other words, is gender a criterion?
 - ii. If a person favors a certain genre, might that communicate anything about them?
 - iii. Do some students like best movies they first saw as children? What might be some reasons for this?

Investigating

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Revise and refine their list of 10 favorite movies based on critical rethinking, consideration of feedback, and additional research.
- Describe insights about their own aesthetic preferences.
- Construct a clear argument directed to a targeted audience defending one of their favorite movies.

Procedure

1. Give students one or two days outside of class to rethink and revise their list of personal favorites, building on what they learned from the exercise and consulting additional resources. Explain that this process will require them to develop a deeper awareness of their own personal preferences and aesthetic standards as well as to become more familiar with aesthetic standards associated with movie professionals.
2. Discuss techniques for arriving at a final list:
 - a. Visit a video store or an online resource, such as the Internet Movie Database, to recall other possible favorite movies.

- b. Browse through resources noted on the handout, including “top 10” or “top 100” lists compiled by film reviewers or professional film organizations.
 - c. Suggest that students who are really interested in the exercise re-watch the two films competing for the number one spot on their list. Does one clearly rise above the other? For what reasons?
3. Have students turn in their final list, accompanied by a 1-page essay that explains 1) how they arrived at their final list and 2) what they learned about themselves (or what they think specific choices on the list say about them).
 4. In class, have the students compose a letter to a specific audience, such as a relative, a teacher, or a friend, who they suspect might object to their favorite movie or another movie on the list. The letter, which should defend the choice in terms that are likely to convince its addressee, is an exercise in argumentation.
 5. Ask students to include, as an attachment to the letter, a one-paragraph rhetorical analysis defining the chosen audience and explaining the letter's strategies for persuading that audience.
 6. Ask students to share their letters in small groups.
 7. Assign an out-of-class revision of the letter, based on peer and instructor feedback, to submit in formal letter format.

Drawing Conclusions

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Explore the difference between personal preferences and more widely accepted standards for “greatness.”
- Reach and “publish” a class consensus on criteria for a “great” movie.
- Write and revise a formal essay in which they argue that one of their own favorite movies is also “great,” according to the class standards.

Procedure

1. Discuss with students what the word “great” means in a variety of contexts (e.g., as applied to athletes, restaurants, a novel). How is considering something to be “great” different from considering something to be your “favorite”? Discuss the difference between personal preferences and wider standards for judging “greatness,” especially in art and literature. (The undisputed greatness of Shakespeare is a good example.)
2. Conduct a class discussion of what constitutes “greatness” in a film. Ask students what they learned from the previous exercise about the aesthetic

standards for greatness as evinced by film professionals and other resources listed on the handout.

3. Have students compile their own class-wide criteria for what makes a movie great. Push them to go beyond platitudes such as “universal themes.” Below are some possible criteria, but you should encourage students to use their own words:
 - a. Memorable or complex characters
 - b. Compelling plot or story line
 - c. Well-written dialogue
 - d. Insightful treatment of complex issues
 - e. Originality
 - f. Outstanding acting
 - g. Striking or beautiful cinematography
 - h. Historical significance
 - i. Technological breakthrough
 - j. Awards received
 - k. Effects of movie stay with spectators beyond the next day
 - l. Movie retains interest or appeal to audiences decades after initial release

During this brainstorming session, encourage students to recognize that there may well be differences of opinion on what counts as great. Point out that even film professionals do not necessarily share the same criteria for evaluating greatness, which is one reason why film reviewers may sharply disagree about a movie's merit. The students' goal will be to arrive at a working consensus.

4. Publish the class standards for greatness in film as a large poster to which students can refer while working in class and/or as a handout that they can use when exploring films on their own.
5. Assign students a formal essay in which they choose a film (preferably, but not necessarily, from their earlier list) and construct a defense of its greatness, based on the class standard.
 - a. Instruct the students to plan, generate content for, and compose a first draft.
 - b. If feasible, hold a brief conference with each student to provide feedback on content, organization, audience accommodation, and style. Remind students to take notes on this conference.
 - c. Allow the students to share their work with peers, either in small groups or with the entire class.
 - d. After students have made final revisions and edits, have them turn in the draft they presented at the conference, the notes they took at the conference, and a formatted, clean copy of their finished work.

Scaffolding/Instructional Support

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- To allow students to focus on the core aspects of the lesson, you could remove one of the more peripheral assignments, such as the letter of persuasion.
- If students struggle to come up with a list of 10 favorite movies, you could reduce the required number to eight, six, or five favorite movies.
- Construct group and whole-class discussions that will elicit response and participation from all the students. While the last assignment is individual, it is based on a consensus idea built from class-wide participation. Students who do not participate are less likely to buy into the task at hand.
- Identify at the draft stage students who are struggling and provide them with additional instructor support.
- If students have difficulty using professional criteria for evaluating a movie, you can omit that part of the procedure and have students construct a “top 10 recommended” list of movies.

The suggestions provided here are intended to address problems you may encounter when using this assignment or when evaluating student work associated with it.

- Several websites rank films:
 - The American Film Institute website has numerous lists, including 100 Greatest American Movies of All Time: <http://www.afi.com/>
 - The Greatest Films: The Best Movies in Cinematic History website includes a variety of lists and a section devoted to criteria for selection (click on “Greatest Films” for both). Also, students may also click on “Best of” to see how different criteria are used for various “Best of” lists, such as best “Chick Flicks” or best “Robots in Film”: <http://www.filmsite.org/>
 - Roger Ebert’s website includes his Great Movie rankings as well as numerous reviews: <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/>
 - *The New York Times* offers a list of the top 1000 movies of all time, and the interesting introduction by A.O. Scott addresses the fact that highly revered movies may fall out of favor while movies initially judged lacking may later be reclaimed as classics: <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/movies/1000best.html>
 - The Internet Movie Database has a Top 250 list of movies based on user votes, a list that offers an interesting perspective on favorite films vs. great films: <http://www.imdb.com/chart/top>

- It is possible there will be students who are not permitted to see films. In this event, ascertain whether books, television shows, or comics would work. It will be difficult to involve these students equally in the class discussion portion, but they can still be included in the overall assignment (and the class standards should apply with modification).
- The following factors may be considered when assessing students' performance on this assignment. All assessment factors should be made clear to students at the beginning of the lesson.
 - The degree to which students do not merely assert but instead analyze their own movie preferences.
 - The quality of the students' attempts to grasp the preferences of others and the degree of thoughtfulness students bring to the task of revising and refining their list of favorite movies in light of new insights regarding their own criteria and the criteria of others.
 - The quality of the students' participation in the process of developing a class consensus regarding criteria for "greatness" in a film. Here you might consider such factors as students' abilities to articulate their own opinions in discussion and to listen to the opinions of others as well as the flexibility and integrity students demonstrate in actively helping the class to reach a workable group consensus.
 - The ability the students show in their formal essays to use the class's agreed-upon criteria as a framework for evaluating a personal favorite movie, especially if students have previously discussed the same film using different terms.

TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>			
A.2. Accept constructive criticism and revise personal views when valid evidence warrants.		✓	✓
B.1. Consider arguments and conclusions of self and others.		✓	✓
E.1. Work independently.	✓	✓	✓
E.2. Work collaboratively.		✓	✓
<i>II. Foundational Skills</i>			
B.1. Write clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions.			✓
B.3. Compose and revise drafts.		✓	✓

TCCRS English/Language Arts Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Writing</i>			
A.1. Determine effective approaches, forms, and rhetorical techniques that demonstrate understanding of the writer's purpose and audience.		✓	✓
A.2. Generate ideas and gather information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources.		✓	✓
A.3. Evaluate relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organize material generated, and formulate a thesis.		✓	✓
A.4. Recognize the importance of revision as the key to effective writing. Each draft should refine key ideas and organize them more logically and fluidly, use language more precisely and effectively, and draw the reader to the author's purpose.		✓	✓

A.5. Edit writing for proper voice, tense, and syntax, assuring that it conforms to standard English, when appropriate.		✓	✓
<i>II. Reading</i>			
A.8. Compare and analyze how generic features are used across texts.	✓	✓	
A.11. Identify, analyze, and evaluate similarities and differences in how multiple texts present information, argue a position, or relate a theme.	✓	✓	
D.1. Describe insights gained about oneself, others, or the world from reading specific texts.	✓	✓	✓
<i>III. Speaking</i>			
B.1. Participate actively and effectively in one-on-one oral communication situations.	✓	✓	✓
B.2. Participate actively and effectively in group discussions.	✓	✓	✓
<i>IV. Listening</i>			
B.1. Listen critically and respond appropriately to presentations.		✓	✓

TEKS Standards Addressed

<i>Evaluating Art: What's Your Favorite Movie? - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading</i>
110.34.b.6. Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Literary Nonfiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the varied structural patterns and features of literary nonfiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the effect of ambiguity, contradiction, subtlety, paradox, irony, sarcasm, and overstatement in literary essays, speeches, and other forms of literary nonfiction.
110.34.b.7. Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Sensory Language. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about how an author's sensory language creates imagery in literary text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze how the author's patterns of imagery, literary allusions, and conceits reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works.
110.34.b.9. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to: 110.34.b.9.A. Summarize a text in a manner that captures the author's viewpoint, its main ideas, and its elements without taking a position or expressing an opinion.

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English Language Arts and Reading

110.34.b.9.C. Make and defend subtle inferences and complex conclusions about the ideas in text and their organizational patterns.

110.34.b.10 Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Persuasive Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about persuasive text and provide evidence from text to support their analysis. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.10.A. Evaluate the merits of an argument, action, or policy by analyzing the relationships (e.g., implication, necessity, sufficiency) among evidence, inferences, assumptions, and claims in text.

110.34.b.10.B. Draw conclusions about the credibility of persuasive text by examining its implicit and stated assumptions about an issue as conveyed by the specific use of language.

110.34.b.13. Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.13.A. Plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea.

110.34.b.7.B. Structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices to convey meaning.

110.34.b.7.C. Revise drafts to clarify meaning and achieve specific rhetorical purposes, consistency of tone, and logical organization by rearranging the words, sentences, and paragraphs to employ tropes (e.g., metaphors, similes, analogies, hyperbole, understatement, rhetorical questions, irony), schemes (e.g., parallelism, antithesis, inverted word order, repetition, reversed structures), and by adding transitional words and phrases.

110.34.b.7.D. Edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

110.34.b.7.E. Revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

110.34.b.15. Writing/Literary Texts. Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts. Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.13.A. Write an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes:

110.34.b.13.A.i. Effective introductory and concluding paragraphs and a variety of sentence structures.

110.34.b.13.A.ii. Rhetorical devices, and transitions between paragraphs.

110.34.b.13.A.iii. A clear thesis statement or controlling idea.

110.34.b.13.A.iv. A clear organizational schema for conveying ideas.

110.34.b.13.A.v. Relevant and substantial evidence and well-chosen details.

110.34.b.13.A.vi. Information on all relevant perspectives and consideration of the validity, reliability, and relevance of primary and secondary sources.

110.34.b.13.A.vii. An analysis of views and information that contradict the thesis statement and the evidence presented for it.

<i>Evaluating Art: What's Your Favorite Movie? - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading</i>
<p>110.34.b.17. Oral and Written Conventions/Conventions. Students understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:</p> <p>110.34.b.17.A. Use and understand the function of different types of clauses and phrases (e.g., adjectival, noun, adverbial clauses and phrases).</p> <p>110.34.b.17.B. Use a variety of correctly structured sentences (e.g., compound, complex, compound-complex).</p>
<p>110.34.b.18. Oral and Written Conventions/Handwriting, Capitalization, and Punctuation. Students write legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions. Students are expected to correctly and consistently use conventions of punctuation and capitalization.</p>
<p>110.34.b.19. Oral and Written Conventions/Spelling. Students spell correctly. Students are expected to spell correctly, including using various resources to determine and check correct spellings.</p>
<p>110.34.b.24. Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:</p> <p>110.34.b.24.A. Listen responsively to a speaker by framing inquiries that reflect an understanding of the content and by identifying the positions taken and the evidence in support of those positions.</p> <p>110.34.b.24.B. Assess the persuasiveness of a presentation based on content, diction, rhetorical strategies, and delivery.</p>
<p>110.34.b.25. Listening and Speaking/Speaking. Students speak clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to formulate sound arguments by using elements of classical speeches (e.g., introduction, first and second transitions, body, and conclusion), the art of persuasion, rhetorical devices, eye contact, speaking rate (e.g., pauses for effect), volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively.</p>
<p>110.34.b.26. Listening and Speaking/Teamwork. Students work productively with others in teams. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to participate productively in teams, offering ideas or judgments that are purposeful in moving the team towards goals, asking relevant and insightful questions, tolerating a range of positions and ambiguity in decision-making, and evaluating the work of the group based on agreed-upon criteria.</p>

Evaluating Art: What's Your Favorite Movie?

Introduction

Have you ever thought about *why* you like your favorite books, movies, or works of art? This assignment requires you to think about, talk about, and write about your personal preferences regarding your favorite movies. Later, you will write about the same subject from a broader perspective, considering not what makes a movie your personal favorite, but what makes it “great” in the eyes of a wider community.

Directions

Getting Started

1. Take five minutes to list 10 of your favorite movies, with #1 as your very favorite movie of all time.
2. Participate in the class discussion about what your list reveals about your own and your classmates' criteria for favorite movies.

Investigating

1. Using guidelines from your instructor, revise your list outside of class. Use problem-solving techniques to arrive at a list that truly represents the movies you love.
2. Turn in your favorite movies list, along with a paragraph explaining how you arrived at the final list and what you learned about your own tastes and preferences in the process.
3. Discuss your final results with the class.
4. Draft a letter to a particular audience (a parent, relative, or friend, for instance) whom you suspect would not approve of your favorite movie (or one of the others from your list if it will work better for this letter). Explain to that person why you like this movie, and try to persuade that person to accept your point of view.
5. Workshop your letter in class with directions from your instructor.
6. Outside of class, write a final version of the letter in formal letter format.

Drawing Conclusions

1. Participate in a class discussion regarding the difference between “personal favorite” and “great.” With your classmates, reach a consensus about standards for greatness in a movie.
2. Draft an essay outside of class in which you use the class consensus standards for great movies as the basis for classifying one of your favorite movies as being truly great.
3. Workshop your essay draft as directed by your instructor.
4. Revise your essay, and turn in the final copy.