



What does Quality mean in Films for Children?

Discussion:

- Introduction
- Some examples
- Do not underestimate the Children
(Hans Strobel)
- Six good Arguments for Quality in Films for Children
(Molto Menz)

What does Quality mean in Films for Children?

The discussion what is a good film for children has been going on for many years. Many controversial arguments have come up, mostly from the negative side, trying to explain from which kind of films do we have to protect our children.

One of the results of the 1st Conference on the Distribution of Films for the Young Audience at Konstanz/Germany in 1999 was to define positive criteria for the quality of films for children. Those films that meet these criteria should receive a certain label of quality in order that this label can be used as an instrument for their promotion.

However: Films basically are individualistic and can hardly be compared to one another. And one half of the film is created in the mind of the viewer, who is an individual as well. Knowing that films create emotions, entice the taking on of new identities and give information we must not define strict rules for high or low quality, but have to find an open collection of ideas which can bring us closer to a common valuation of a film.

ECFA wants to start this as an open discussion on an international basis and invites everybody to contribute - via E-Mail to the European Children's Film Distribution Network, where we intend to collect all contributions:

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As a start and to provoke contributions we want to give some - at the moment very unsorted - examples:

High quality films for children

- should take the view of the children instead of watching children from the perspective of adults;
- should tell their stories in a way that children can understand them: related to their own experiences, with a mostly straight story and without or with not too many backflashes;
- should show children that they are not alone with their problems and offer them opportunities to solve these problems;
- should point out the children's special power, phantasy and spontaneity as their advantage in the world of adults;
- should create communication among the children and between children and adults;
- should respect that especially younger children do not want to sit in front of the screen for more than an hour;
- should show the reality of life, even if it is hard, but leave the children some hope at the end;
- can help the children to understand even complicated interrelationships in their lives;
- can give the children the chance to confront and experience different cultures, to identify themselves with people who live in other countries or societies;
- may give the children the chance for pure entertainment, pleasure, fun and/or suspense
- may lead them away from their reality into a world of phantasy;

- should tell their stories in characters that are able to develop themselves (as the children develop themselves) instead of static clichés;
- should convey some basic standards within our society as for example liberty, tolerance towards those who are different, non-violence, anti-racism, solidarity;
- should respect that children can identify better with one or a few strong main character(s) than with a larger number of characters;
- should pay attention to the fact that half of the viewers are girls who need their movie heroes as well as the boys.

To some of you these examples may appear old as the hills. But for one of ECFA's main goals is to promote high quality films for children it is useful to have a collection of criteria defining this quality. Finally ECFA has the advantage to bring together cineasts, businesspeople and media educators. This wide range of experience offers the unique chance for criteria that are adequate to the variety of good films for children. So if you feel inspired to add some more ideas or are provoked to contradict any, please send us your mail:

RTSchoeffel@BJF.info

Do not underestimate the Children

We must not underestimate the children, their own view on what surrounds them and their capability to understand. You have to take the children seriously, trust and challenge them and inspire their reflections. Good films for children must offer the opportunity for identification, leave the children their hopes and dreams, but in the same time offer them some information on the world they live in. The films should inform them about social problems and suggest to them some solution for conflicts. Authentic stories, told in a professional way that touch the children and create their cineastic consciousness for high quality - these are the standards we aspire to.

Hans Strobel, director of the children's film section at the Munich film festival and editor of Kinder- & Jugendfilm-Korrespondenz

Six good Arguments for Quality in Films for Children

Molto Menz, managing director of Beaufilm Distribution, suggests a specific age group recommendation as very important criteria of quality. At Beaufilm he used the following reflections:

1. Modern and produced during the last years

Our films are modern and up-to-date. They connect the virtues of Astrid Lindgren without being old-fashioned. They offer a view on our world and try to reflect the children's own experiences. There is a need for programmes with familiar surroundings, for films that continue the European tradition and preserve this identity. High quality films are the opposite of the numerous cheap TV-serials and those speculative films for the cinema which were only made for the money.

2. Adequate Productions for Children

There are adequate films for each age group. Contrary to the mainstream films, that often dazzle us with high speed and special effects, quality films avoid deformations and violence. They prefer the cineastic way without artificial and speculative hysteria. Children and their own view are taken seriously.

3. To avoid Violence and impart values

The explicit performance of violence can usually be avoided so as to not horrify or frighten the young spectators. The evil character is mostly harmless and gets its punishment by its own stupidity. At the same time values like friendship, solidarity and loyalty are imparted subconsciously. Not the strongest or the loudest one is the winner but the more wiser or thoughtful one.

4. European Origin and selected by Children

Films of European origin give the European children chances to recognize their own reality. Ambition is combined with commercialism. The films should be prescreened and tested by a child audience who decide if they are suitable for their age group.

5. Combination of Fun and Meaning

High quality films for children should first be fun, but in the same time leave some thoughts and traces in the minds of the young spectators. They should have learnt something about themselves and the world as it is and how it could be, by watching the film.

6. A Programme for Kinder from three to 13 Years old

High quality films offer children some orientation in a world that is more and more difficult to

understand. They impart values without being obtrusive and without using old-fashioned didactics. In the same time they are amusing and use contemporary and very attractive aesthetical means.

High quality films are the alternative to the majority of low-level-TV-programmes that we find nowadays for children and young people.

Molto Menz

Translated with the help of Anna-Michele Hantler (Thanks!)