Writing a Film Review



**Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**The Odds Are Always in Your Favour**

Here is a professional review of ‘The Hunger Games: Catching Fire’. Annotate the review and explore the Purpose, Audience, Language and Layout (PALL).

Ever seen it rain blood in a kids’ film before? How about a pensioner getting executed in front of his family? Or Lenny Kravitz being slapped in the face? The first *Hunger Games* caught flak because it dared to treat its YA audience like A’s – but things aren’t exactly looking any rosier in the sequel.

Following the unwritten lore of movie trilogies, the middle chapter of Katniss Everdeen’s sci-fi survival story is darker, moodier, meaner and, yes, better than Part 1. Outgrowing its *Battle Royale* meets *Twilight* meets *The X Factor* comparisons, *Catching Fire* expands Suzanne Collins’ novel beyond the confines of the arena to tackle some seriously brutal truths – plugging gaps and sowing seeds for a two-part finale that will have to work hard to match its grit.

And it’s Jennifer Lawrence’s performance that takes centre stage. Taking her post-Oscar fame publicly in her stride since she last picked up her bow, the 23-year-old actress has grown up as fast as her character. As mopey as the teenage love triangle almost gets, it’s the boys that do all the moping. Well on her way to becoming one of the greatest sci-fi heroines since Ripley, the avenger of District 12 is as undefined by her hidden vulnerability as she is by her inner strength; anchoring the series with an emotional realism that upstages everyone else in the film.

True, most of them are stuck in roles that haven’t developed much since we last met them. Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) is still an unlikeable wimp who cries every time he gets a paper cut, Gale (Liam Hemsworth) is still a gormless hunk who doesn’t do anything, and Donald Sutherland, Woody Harrelson and Elizabeth Banks are still hiding beneath candyfloss hair and panto outfits.

It’s all change behind the camera too, with new director Francis Lawrence (*Constantine, I Am Legend*) upping the menace both in and out of the arena. Marauding monkeys and axe-wielding gladiators might be pretty scary, but it’s nothing compared to an armed policeman beating a political dissident to death. In fact, *Catching Fire* often reflects real world horrors so impassively it’s easy to forget you’re watching a kids’ movie. Until you see Stanley Tucci’s hair, that is…

Yes, the Capitol still looks like the Emerald City, the big spinning thing in the arena comes straight out of *Total Wipeout* and the film’s cutting edge is dulled down and camped up whenever things get too gnarly. Some obvious concessions are made to appease the book’s devout fans too (At 146 minutes, it seems like they tried to fit *every* bloody page in), but it’s hard to see how anyone could be too disappointed with the incendiary results.

Then again, if the rousing finale of *Catching Fire* is anything to go by, *Mockingjay* is going to burn the house down…

 Rating: **\*\*\*\*\***

Here is a review written by a pupil in the exam. It received an A\*. Annotate the review and explain why. What does it have in common with the professional review?

**Star Wars Episode Three: The Revenge of Mediocrity**

So, after the disappointment of 1999’s highly anticipated prequel ‘The Phantom Menace’ and the excess of 2002’s frankly quite terrible ‘Attack of the Clones’, the question on everybody’s lips is “has George Lucas redeemed himself with Episode Three: Revenge of the Sith?”

 The answer, judging by the noisy, shallow and virtually pointless mess I have just had the misfortunate of sitting through for two hours, is a resounding “no”! Part of the problem, if you have been following the whole Star Wars Saga, is that we know the outcome of the film before it even begins, therefore undercutting any potential tension from the start.

 It’s all about the transformation of the clean-cut Anakin Skywalker (teen heartthrob Haydn Christenson) to the evil dark lord Darth Vader, along with some incredibly tedious stuff about the shifting of the Jedi’s political climate.

 Ultimately, though, the plot takes a back seat to the action, becoming nothing more than a skeleton on which to hang endless battles in outer space and lightsabre fights on various planets. This may sound like a good thing; sometimes a brainless, action-packed rollarcoaster ride is just what we need. However, Episode Three’s action sequences do not differ that greatly to those we were treated to in Episode One and Two, and the spectacular, mind-numbing overuse of CGI means you’d probably be better off sitting at home staring at a computer screen.

 As a result, Episode Three is not an engaging film. It does not make you care about any of the characters. None of the actors are remotely charismatic or even convincing. Even the usually dependable Ewan McGregor turns in an emotional performance, while Christenson does little other than spare at the camera menacingly.

 What should have been the most horrific scene, Skywalker killing a group of defenceless children (or ‘younglings’ in Star Wars speak) was made amusing simply by the poor effort put into the scene by any of the actors. Admittedly, the film is not without strengths - the attention to detail is often quite stunning, the backdrops are rich and colourful – but these are not enough to carry the film on their own.

 I’m sure you could have done better Mr Lucas.

Rating: \*\*

**Writing a Film Review**

Imagine that your review is to be posted on an Internet film website. It will be read by people of all ages. It should be at least one A4 page.

1. Identify an interesting title that references the film in some way.
2. Introduction: what you expected from the film.
3. Genre: what type of film is it? Does it have a message?
4. Plot: what happens in the film? Does the plot make sense? Is it easy enough to follow? Is it believable?
5. Characters: Who are the main characters and what are they like? Who are the actors playing these parts, and are they effective in their roles?
6. What is the camerawork/ animation like? If there are special effects, what are they like? Are there beautiful scenes? Are there moments when the camera is used in an interesting way?
7. Did you enjoy the film? Why/why not? What were its good and bad points?
8. Write about a scene you particularly enjoyed or remembered. Why was it good/ memorable?
9. Would you recommend this film? To what sorts of people? Why?
10. Are there any other films you can compare this film to?

**When you have completed your planning by answering all the questions, you should write the review. Remember:**

* Set your work out in **paragraphs**
* Take care with **spelling** and **punctuation**
* Make the review **interesting** to read by choosing your language carefully
* Write in the **first person** and try to **address the reader directly**. For example: ‘**I** urge **you** to go and see this film- it’s brilliant!’
* Write in a style that is informal, but **not too informal**.

**Language Writing Paper Mark Scheme**

This is what the examiner is looking for when they mark your review:

**Content & Organisation (up to 13 marks)**

Band 4 (10-13 marks)

* shows sophisticated understanding of the purpose and format of the task
* shows sustained awareness of the reader / intended audience
* content coverage is well-judged, detailed, and pertinent
* arguments are convincingly developed and supported by relevant detail
* ideas are selected and prioritised to construct sophisticated argument
* paragraphs are effectively varied in length and structure to control progression
* confident and sophisticated use of a range of stylistic devises adapted to purpose/audience
* a wide range of appropriate, ambitious vocabulary is used to create effect or convey precise meaning

**Sentence structure, grammar and punctuation (up to 7 marks)**

Band 4 (6-7 marks)

* there is appropriate and effective variation of sentence structure
* there is a sophisticated use of simple, compound and complex sentences to achieve particular effects
* accurate punctuation is used to vary pace, clarify meaning, avoid ambiguity and create deliberate effects
* virtually all spelling, including that of complex irregular words, is correct
* tense changes are used confidently and purposefully

Horrendous

Dunce

Horrific

Disgraceful

Needless

Idiocy

Meaninglessness

Desperation

Fearfully

Despicable

Beastly

Contemptible

Degrading

Loathsome

Infamous

Wretched

Sordid

**Negative Vocabulary Word Bank**

Pitiful

Shameful

Vile

Skanky

Obnoxious

Rotten

Revolting

Worthless

Hideous

Repugnant

Repulsive

Foul

Unsightly

Feckless

Filthy

Notorious

Vicious

Nauseating

Repellent

Squalid

Corrupt

Inferior

Delinquent

Tacky

Appalling

Dire

Disagreeable

Poisonous

Vexing

Mischievous

Obscene

Churlish

Miserly

 Oafish

Commendable

Marvellous

Precious

Stupendous

Superb

Exceptional

Stunning

Majestic

Alluring

Glorious

Sensational

Peerless

Astonishing

Incredible

Miraculous

Phenomenal

Striking

**Positive Vocabulary Word Bank**

Stunning

Spectacular

Astounding

Breathtaking

Prominent

Powerful

Supreme

Energetic

Convincing

Engaging

Timeless

Prevailing

Staggering

Prodigious

Fantastic

Tremendous

Grand

Colossal

Immense

Mammoth

Monumental

Capacious

Plentiful

Canny

Gracious

Meticulous

Scrupulous

Infallible

Unequivocal

Palpable

Reputable

Ingenious

Copious

Wondrous

Planning Sheet: draft your ideas here and use a computer to write them up for next lesson.

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