



# Why So Serious? Planning Film Discussion Groups for your Library OR Build It and They Will Come

## How it all began

You like films, I like films. Wouldn't it be fun to...?

It all began with a few "why not?" questions from two newbie librarians (who may have had too much time on their hands).

- Why not host a cinephile salon of sorts within our service area?
- Why not show films at the library?
- After screening a film, why not discuss the film?

**A little research goes a long way.**

- Are there similar programs at other libraries? Call them and grill them on how it works for them.
- Literature search for similar projects? Has anyone published anything interesting on the topic?
- Visit and talk to those who are already doing it. We visited the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. UNC hosts a successful international film program. The UNC folks were extremely helpful and gracious.
- What would it cost & where can we secure the funds? This can be done on a dental floss budget (two steps below shoestring budget) but be realistic.
- How do we get this project approved and who needs to approve it? (Basically, who do you need to butter-up to grease this cockamamie scheme of yours?)

**Logistics where, how, when, who?**

- Where will you screen the film?
- What equipment do you need? Just a note – sound quality is just as important as picture quality.
- When will you screen the film?
- Who and how many will staff the screening & discussion?

# **Licensing & Film Rights**

## **What the law says about copyright:**

- The Federal Copyright Act (Title 17 of the U.S. Code) governs how copyrighted materials, such as movies, may be used. Neither the rental nor the purchase of a movie carries with it the right to show the movie publicly outside the home, unless the site where the movie is used is properly licensed for public exhibition.

## **But our library owns the title (several copies of the same title!). Doesn't matter.**

- Ownership of the movie and the right to use it publicly are two separate issues. The copyright holder retains exclusive public performance rights.
- This legal copyright compliance requirement applies to public libraries, schools, daycare facilities, parks, recreation departments, summer camps, churches, private clubs, prisons, lodges, businesses, etc.
- This legal requirement applies:
  - Regardless of whether an admission fee is charged
  - Whether the institution or organization is commercial or non-profit
  - Whether a federal, state or local agency is involved

## **Swank and Movie Licensing USA (a division of Swank) covers many titles from various Hollywood and independent studios.**

Swank Motion Pictures, Inc.

<http://www.swank.com/>

Swank Motion Pictures provides both public performance licensing rights and licensed movies to numerous non-theatrical markets, including worldwide cruise lines, U.S. colleges and universities, K-12 public schools and libraries, American civilian and military hospitals, motor coaches, Amtrak trains, correctional facilities and other markets such as parks, art museums and businesses.

Movie Licensing USA

<http://www.movlic.com/library/about.html>

Movie Licensing USA, is a corporate division of Swank Motion Pictures, Inc. They provide the Public Performance Site License to K-12 schools and public libraries which satisfies the copyright protection needed when entertainment movies are shown in the buildings. Fees are determined by the number of card holders.

## **The movie I want to show isn't covered by Swank. Now what do I do?**

- Find out who produced and/or distributed the title and call them. We've done it several times. It can be time intensive and may lead to a dead end but usually you'll eventually talk to someone that can make it happen – for a "small fee" of course.
- Licensing fees for titles outside of Swank's coverage vary. We had an unofficial \$200.00 cap. If a onetime screening license exceeded \$200.00 we would pick another title.
- There are a number of other options such as POV, Women Making Movies, and many PBS titles.

## **I really want to show a Star Wars film, yeah! Sorry, it's not going to happen.**

- We tried. We failed.
- You may have better luck. Tell us how you did it.

**Also, be sure to double, triple, quadruple check the license because titles can disappear and reappear without notice.**

# **Showtime!**

## **Pre Show Preparation: You do have the DVD, RIGHT!?**

**Planning and preparation may reduce stress and lower blood pressure. Do it right by planning and preparing for the program.**

- Make sure the DVD is clean and in your possession well before the screening date.
- Create a prescreening routine that includes testing all of your equipment. Then follow the routine prior to each and every screening.
- We made sure at least one of us had seen or previewed the film before screening for the public.
- If the film contains mature content and/or is rated R make sure this fact is clearly stated in all publicity material.
- Set-up the room – chairs, displays
- Set out the food & drink

## **During the show:**

- Mind the room temperature. You'd be surprised at just how quickly a large screening room filled with 50 people begins to feel like a sauna.
- Pay attention to the sound volume. A room filled with 15 people will not need the volume level of a room with 75 people.

## **After the program:**

- A room filled with 10 to 50 people for three or more hours will need attention. Remember that you'll need to clean up.
- Equipment will need to be put away.

**Sooner or later you'll get that call/email/suggestion form contesting/complaining about the film you are planning to (or have just) screened.**

- View this as an opportunity to hone your listening skills.
  - Without exception, every concerned patron that contacted me just wanted someone to take the time to hear them out.

# **How to Select Films**

**Plenty of great films exist - How do you choose?**

**Consider your:**

- Audience – adults only? families? teens?
- Objectives – education? discussion? relaxing time?
- Themes – academy award winners; musicals, anime, documentaries, Hitchcock tribute, etc.

**For our Film Discussion Group –**

- **Audience** – Adults  
(If we showed an “R” film, we made sure attendees under 17 were accompanied by an adult.)
- **Objectives** – variety of genres, educate on film literacy, generate good discussions
- **Themes** – only as it fit with community events

**In narrowing down our film choices, these are the questions we regularly asked ourselves...**

- Do we have (or can we obtain) the film rights to view publicly?

- Will it generate a good discussion?
- Is it shorter than 2 hours? (90 minutes preferable)
- Is there a community event we can connect with?
- Do staff, patrons, and guest speakers have any film suggestions?  
\*\* see Film stats and Brochures for examples \*\*

**Ask the RIGHT questions that will help YOU narrow down your film titles.**

## **Guest Speakers & Volunteers**

**Hosting guest speakers and using volunteers are great ways to enthuse your film group.**

- Find your local cinephiles!

**For our Film Discussion Group –**

We initiated a survey, which surfaced some eager volunteers. Then we contacted the director of the UNC International Film Series – he hosted a discussion for us and enjoyed what we were doing....and passed the word. Then one contact led to another: Dean of Humanities, retired UNC professors, local filmmakers, etc. They all offered diverse and insightful discussions – mostly for free!

**Where are the cinephiles in your community?**

- Local filmmakers
- Local theater owners or video stores
- University or College film professors
- Community organizations that want to partner with library
- Co-workers
- Patrons

## **Community Partnerships**

**Research and plan ahead for your community's events. Offer your support and partnership. For example:**

- Greeley is host to the Chautauqua – a popular and well-attended community event. We created a partnership with them...they pick a film that relates to their theme, provide discussion leaders, free publicity, guaranteed GREAT attendance
- VISTA volunteers – wanted to teach Greeley community about poverty issues. They selected the film, brought info, led the discussion
- UNC hosts a Spring community program (Pathways to China, Earth Reveries, etc.) We pick a film that promotes their theme, get included in their publicity. We also help promote their programs, creating community goodwill.
- Cindo de Mayo celebrations – Big celebrations in Greeley for this. We chose a film to coincide and support this theme.

## Discussion Questions

The discussion was important for us and the main reason why Jamie and I were passionate about hosting this program. We receive a lot of positive input about the discussions.

### Quotes from patrons:

*"Film Discussion Group at the library invites people to do more than merely watch a movie—we discuss the ideas in a movie as it related to our lives."* ~Brett

*"The High Plains Library District's film selection is excellent, and the discussions informative and thought provoking. The discussion leaders are well chosen for their knowledge, and enthusiasm for the film. We're still thinking and talking about two of the movies seen in the past months. Sophie Scholl, the true story of a courageous young woman who stood up to evil at the risk of her life. And Wings of Desire, whose theme of angels in human form and garb, working their shifts in modern Berlin was intriguing. Many thanks to HPLD for this wonderful program."* ~Sandy and Bob

*"I enjoy watching and discussing movies with other people who appreciate film. The movies selected are always the kinds that leave a lasting impact."* ~Kat

### Our evening format:

- Welcome, brief intro
- Show the film
- take a 10-minute break (some attendees will need to leave)
- put chairs in a circle for discussion (approximately 45 minutes, depending on the film)

### Discussion Tips:

- A film discussion group is very similar to a book discussion group –
  - informal setting
  - allow everyone an opportunity to speak (but don't force the shy ones)
  - all input is valid
  - don't let one or two people dominate (including your guest speaker)
  - avoid "yes" or "no" questions – get them thinking and talking
- Prepare questions as a handout so attendees have something to refer to (see examples).
- BUT -- Don't be limited to the printed questions. Keep the discussion organic.
- Include film trivia or background info, relating to the film.
- Display books that relate to the film.
- Let guest speakers provide their own questions.  
(They e-mailed these ahead of time. We created and printed the handouts.)

## Publicity

**If you promise to serve popcorn, you better serve popcorn, even if the bags are only half-filled!**

### **The Traditional Approach (a no-brainer):**

- **Flyers**---don't necessarily believe what you've been told: that flyers don't work. If they are *good*, they work! Don't have an internal publicity department that whips out wicked cool pieces of publicity for you? Then identify a staff member who is adept at Publisher and take them out to lunch! Or, cozy up to Publisher yourself and have fun on a slow Friday night!

- **Marquee display** ( psssttt...Demco and Highsmith aren't the only vendors for this kind of thing, don't ya know? Check out others from the tons of catalogs you undoubtedly receive, then recycle the catalogs)
- **Library website**
- **PAC screensavers**
- **TV screensavers**
- **Library eNewsletter**
- **Newspapers, local publications** (begging and persistence go a long way)

**Engage in shameless self-promotion! Advertise, advertise, advertise!**

**The Non-Traditional Approach (probably also a no-brainer but worth revisiting)**

- **Flyers**---get them out the door and into every gin joint, coffee shop, juice bar, sub sandwich shop, and taco bar in town! Pronto!
- **Flyers, Part 2**---yes, get those flyers onto college campuses, as well! Take them to the various academic departments, and not just the commons area. If you have student staff members, ask them for suggestions on where to post. Better yet, ask them to post flyers around campus for you. Make sure your budget can accommodate a small bribe for this purpose.
- **Flyers, Part 3**---but remember, post no more than 2 weeks prior to your screening and while flyers are important, consider the strategic placement of each flyer per this cautionary tale from Ray Milland...

**“One's too many an' a hundred's not enough!”**

- **Word of Mouth**---okay, so the stereotype of librarians is that we are a quiet bunch but you know better, right? We can actually be rather brazen and loud so get out there and promote your film group every time you sense an opportunity! Wear your nametag proudly the next time you pick up programming supplies at Wal-Mart or Michaels and talk about your film group!

**Final Words of Encouragement**

- Sometimes, regardless of how much we advertise and promote our film program, attendance may be low, especially at the beginning. Don't despair! Be persistent. Review community events in case there were scheduling conflicts you failed to notice. Timing is important, sure, but diligence is more important!

## **Showing Anime @Your Library**

**General Points to Remember:**

- Unlike working with Movie Licensing USA (Swank), which is a licensing clearinghouse for different studios, screening permissions for individual anime movies or episodes must be obtained through the various domestic anime distributors.

- Many of these sites have a form which you will need to fill out and submit via email or FAX. General inquiries are typically handled the same way. In other words, they don't necessarily offer a customer service department you can phone. Give yourself plenty of lead time; although many companies ask that you submit your screening permission request at least 10-14 days in advance of your showing, in reality it may take longer than that before you receive that permission. For example, Viz Media recently changed its timeframe for screening permissions to 3 months advance notice.
- Anime companies undergo a lot of industry change so make sure you keep up to date. Consider subscribing to the yahoo group, "Graphic Novels in Libraries." While there are a *ton* of online anime resources out there, this listserv is helpful if you have any questions about anime, manga or graphic novels: ***see resource list.***

### **Finally, It's All About the Swag! Sign Your Club Up Today!**

- ***Operation Anime, Your Anime Club Hub (FUNimation)***
- ***Stuf for Clubs, Anime Clubs Support Program (RightStuf, Nozomi Entertainment)***

**Note:** *Operation Anime allows you to choose from a selection of free titles for screening and keeping; the only thing they ask in return is for your club to fill out a questionnaire, now available online.*

## **Current High Plains Library District Film Groups**

Currently, the High Plains Library District supports eight active film groups. These groups serve all age levels and cater to a variety of interests. Some of these include:

- The Book-to-Movie group for children at the Farr branch has successfully partnered with various community members, most notably with the Candlelight Dinner Playhouse in Johnstown. When the group read the Wizard of Oz last summer, Dorothy and Toto paid a special visit to the book group!
- The original Farr Film Nights group for adults annually partners with the High Plains Chautauqua in July.
- The Page-to-Screen adult film discussion group is partnering with the International Film Series organizers at the University of Northern Colorado for guest speakers.
- Recently, a "cult film" group at the Farr branch library was launched which encourages attendees to dress up as favorite characters from the movie being shown.

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