

Ashes in the Snow: Write a Film Review

First and foremost, a movie review is you asserting your opinion of the movie using a personal, more casual tone. Movie reviews are relatively short (about 600-1200 words) and more than whether or not you liked the movie. A good movie review shares your opinion about the movie and what the movie was trying to accomplish. Of course, what the movie is trying to accomplish is up for debate, and is woven into what you believe is the quality of the film. So, take risks when you write your review to make sure your opinion is clear and compelling.

Writing the Film Review-- Although there is not a set formula to follow when writing a film review, the genre does have certain common elements that most film reviews include. These are:

- 1) **Introduction** – In the opening of your review, provide some basic information about the film. You may include film’s name, year, director, screenwriter, and major actors. - Your introduction, which may be longer than one paragraph, should also make it clear whether or not you thought the movie was effective in what it’s trying to accomplish. In this specific case where the movie is made from the novel, you may want to assert whether or not the movie is complimentary to the novel or whether it goes in an all-together different direction. A film review does not have to contain a specifically stated thesis or main claim at the end of the introductory paragraph, but it can. Either way, your opinion should be clearly discernable.
- 2) **Plot Summary** – Remember that many readers of film reviews have not yet seen the film. While you want to provide some plot summary, keep this brief and avoid specific details that would spoil the viewing for others. You may, however, focus on what was different from the novel. For example, the train ride was a central part of the first 1/3 of the novel. It was a cramped and horrifying experience. But it was not that way in the movie. Whatever summary you choose, make sure that it contributes to your opinion expressed in the review.
- 3) **Description** – While the plot summary will give the reader a general sense of what the film is about, also include a more detailed description of your particular cinematic experience watching the film. This may include your personal impression of what the film looks, feels, and sounds like. In other words, what stands out in your mind when you think about this particular film and how it was made? You may want to check out the Purdue OWL [link](#) to learn terms that movie reviews use to talk about films.
- 4) **Analysis** – How does this film act as a representation of the novel? Is the film an accurate account of what Sepety's created in her book? What was changed? What was added? What did they leave out? Did the changes make the movie better than the novel? Did the movie oversimplify the novel? What do you think? Use this space to discuss the relation between the movie and the novel and share your overall opinion.
- 5) **Conclusion/Evaluation** – The closing of your film review should remind the reader of your general thoughts and impressions of the film. You may also implicitly or explicitly state whether or not you recommend the film. Make sure to remind the reader of why the film is or is not worth seeing.

A model of a book-to-film adaptation is on the reverse side of this handout. Please review for ideas about how to write a title, hook, plot summary and positive / critical analysis.

Due Date: Please submit your film review on my website by **Thursday, February 14th at 11:59p.** Make sure you offer “Permission to Edit”

*Assignment explanation adapted from the Duke Writing Studio

The New York Times Review by Aisha Harris

In ‘The Hate U Give,’ a Police Shooting Forces a Teen to Find Her Voice

The rapper [Tupac Shakur once broke down](#) the acronym for his mantra “T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E.”: “The hate you gave little infants [expletive] everybody,” he said of systematic injustices. “What you feed us as seeds, grows and blows up in your face.” More than two decades after his death, his message was worked into “The Hate U Give,” Angie Thomas’s best-selling 2017 novel about a black teenager who experiences those inequalities firsthand.

“Pac’s gonna always be relevant,” Khalil (Algee Smith) insists to his childhood friend Starr Carter (Amandla Stenberg) in this uneven film adaptation directed by George Tillman Jr. Moments later, Khalil will be dead, shot by a jittery white police officer who pulls them over and mistakes his hairbrush for a gun.

The film opens with a powerful affirmation of blackness, both in the beauty of it and the burden. In voice-over, Starr recalls her father, Maverick (Russell Hornsby, excellent), giving “[The Talk](#),” a familiar rite of passage for many black Americans about navigating (and surviving) a predominantly white world, to her younger self and two brothers. He wants to instill in them a sense of pride and the tenets of the Black Panther Party’s Ten-Point Program.

As a teenager, Starr is a sneakerhead who uncomfortably straddles opposing worlds — Garden Heights, a predominantly black and lower-income neighborhood, is the place she’s always called home; Williamson Prep, a fancy predominantly white private school, is where she and her siblings, Seven (Lamar Johnson) and Sekani (TJ Wright), attend school. She works hard every day to keep them separate, hiding her white boyfriend, Chris (K.J. Apa), from her father, while policing her own appearance and actions at school. Black vernacular makes her white classmates cool, she observes. “Slang makes me ‘hood.’”

Her code switching is the most intriguing story line here, partly because young black female protagonists in popular culture are still few and far between. (A majority of recent films and TV shows starring black characters, like “Insecure” and the “She’s Gotta Have It” TV remake, have focused on 20- and 30-somethings.) Ms. Stenberg strikingly embodies Starr’s dichotomies — self-doubt and bouts of confidence; introversion and outspokenness — but the film’s driving plot is Khalil’s death and how it pushes Starr to come into her own as an activist.

Yet the script struggles to effectively weave this all together with the kind of thoughtful complexity that Ms. Thomas brought to her young-adult novel. Mr. Apa’s Chris, for instance, makes for a bland if earnestly supportive boyfriend, and the film glosses over his troublesome recitation of the tired axiom “I don’t see color” when expressing his disappointment with how Starr has kept her connection to the shooting a secret.

Elsewhere, the rapper Common has a small role as Starr’s uncle Carlos, a police officer. There’s only a vague understanding of the tension that comes with being in such a position, condensed to a conversation late in the film in which he defends police shootings to Starr by explaining what an officer might be thinking when interacting with a civilian. Thankfully the moment doesn’t end on a #BlueLivesMatter note, though it comes close. But it’s a missed opportunity; after a succinct rebuttal from Starr, the plot pushes on.

That’s the thing about cultural relevancy — if you rely on it too much at the expense of deep characterization, you’ll barely scratch the surface. Ms. Stenberg, Mr. Hornsby and others in the ensemble (including Regina Hall as Starr’s mother, Lisa) are more than capable of exploring their characters’ depths, but a wonky script gets them only so far.