

Teen Programming Ideas

Nicholas Warren

Teen film programming is ripe with exciting opportunities. The popularity of film, combined with the concept of viewing a movie as a fun, cool, thing to do can make programming for teens more of a hobby than a job. What follows is a list of teen film programming ideas for library community programs, teen film clubs, teen advisory boards, youth groups and so on.

All of these programs share several common components of planning, including:

Budgeting

Make sure that your organization can actually sustain the program. Determine whether it can or not, and if it can't, consider acquiring funds by forming partnerships with local film groups, societies, and movie theatres.

Marketing

Be sure to market each program well. Do this by getting information to the teens actively, by personally inviting or having others invite them, and passively, by putting up posters, displays, sending group emails, posting on your organization's website, leaving out flyers etc.

Attracting and Retaining Teen Participants

It is important to devise strategies to attract and retain teens. For films, as compared to an interest group on recycling, this shouldn't be too big a problem. Two key tactics include always bringing food, both healthy and less so, for teens to enjoy, and acquiring the best facilities and equipment to view films which your budget and individual situations allow. Teens will appreciate a film programming session which takes place in a large room with a good-sized television or projector screen, good quality sound, and plenty of tasty snacks.

Using Teen Film Programming to Promote Other Services

It is a good idea to use the relatively mainstream cool film programs to promote both your institution as a whole, and programs which are lacking in attendance or interest. For example, if your organization is a library, promote the library as a place to acquire teen films and related literature, as well as any related programs, such as book clubs.

Gauging Program Success

After a program has had reliable attendance for a few months, and participation is at an active level, get your teens to fill out short surveys, and/or have informal brainstorming sessions as to how well the program suits their needs, what could be improved and other relevant factors.

Currency

While you should include 'classic' teen films and older films, try to keep abreast of the latest, most popular films as they are released. Teens are by nature on the cutting edge: they are constantly learning new things, adapting to new trends and fads, wearing new fashions, etc. Try to get new, popular films as soon as they arrive in the library, or rent from a local establishment. If you keep an image of being 'with it' by screening newer films in a good location with food, teens will want to keep coming back and will think your program is 'cool.'

Programming Ideas

1. LITERATURE/FILM COMPARISONS

In this program, teens are required to read literature such as a novel, comic book, or non-fiction work, view a film which was inspired by the literature they read, and then compare the two. This can be conducted with varying levels of formality—the discussions can be academic and

structured or just plain random discussion. Determine what your teen audience would prefer, and then go to town!

TIPS:

- If you are conducting a more formal comparison, have your teens bring in notes they took based on the literature they read, and have them take notes during the film. You could then allow time for comparison, ranging from a few minutes to a new meeting for actual discussion the next day.



- If it is less formal/structured, keep some structure by limiting discussion during the film and keeping a quiet, theatre-like atmosphere. Once the film has ended, open up a 'round-table' discussion with you as moderator

2. IMMERSIVE FILM NIGHTS

Don't just show a film, immerse your teens in it! This is a great way to give teens a lasting experience and immerse them in the world of a film's characters. If your group is going to watch *The Matrix*, presumably not for the first time, have them dress up like *Matrix* characters, complete

with sunglasses and suits. Play some of the soundtrack as teens come in, bake *Matrix* cookies, display and discuss *Matrix* literature and basic tenets of the philosophy behind it, decorate the room with *Matrix* code, and so on.

TIPS:

- If you truly want to immerse teens in a film, you must immerse yourself as well. Make sure you participate, dress up, be enthusiastic, memorize a few lines from the film, figure out which characters you think are cooler, be sure to bring along interesting facts relating to the film and more. Bring a party-like atmosphere and your teens will have one.

3. DOCUMENTARIES IN DISGUISE

Getting teens to view documentaries can be difficult. With the exception of more recent, popular titles such as *Bowling for Columbine*, it's hard to make a documentary on the environment or a historical figure exciting. Or is it? With this program, you focus less on the title of the documentary, and much less on the fact that it is a dreaded documentary. Instead, focus on issues surrounding the subject which might be appealing to teens, and then emphasize them. Before you know it, your teens will have watched something 'educational.'

TIPS:

- Advertise with the more exciting aspects of the documentary in mind

- Take breaks if it is a long documentary, and try to avoid screening longer documentaries in the first place
- If the teens decide which movies to watch, promote a relevant documentary the way you would a book at a book-talk: emphasize the characters involved and leave them wanting more
- Keep that food coming

4. FOREIGN FILM CULTURAL NIGHTS

Have a night, or series of nights in which you delve into a foreign, culturally profound film; for example, show your teens the film *Himalaya*, and have Nepalese snacks and Nepalese music to greet your teens. Learn and teach a few words in Nepalese, have a handout with further information on Nepal – such as books in your/the local library, and tie elements of their culture into your own if possible. "Foreign film" is quite subjective, and can be from the country next door, or, if you are not from North America, a Hollywood film.

5. OUTDOOR FILM

Tired of being indoors all the time for teen film programming? In the summer, why not take advantage of outdoor film opportunities? If your community has its own outdoor film venue, contact them about letting your group use it. If you need more people or money to rent it, combine with other local film/film interest groups. While such a program is harder to employ, getting teens

outside mixes things up and, in the case of libraries, gets away from a stuffy, cooped-up image.

6. TEEN FILM STUDIO

If you have access to a camcorder or equivalent device, a program where older teens can make their own films is an interactive and fun choice. You can act as the producer, help the teens decide on roles and provide handouts as to what each person generally does when making a film (e.g. Director – dictates actions of actors, controls scenes etc.).

TIPS:

- The teens can make a film which is both fun and promotional to your organization. For example, they could make a movie advertising your library, which could then be posted on the library website. The teens will take pride in knowing their work was put to good use, and will receive credit due to its promotion of their skills, as well as the 'hipness' of the library.
- Ensure that at least one of the teens in your group or club knows how to operate the film camera. If not, you will have to operate it yourself. Ensure that the camera comes with a shoulder/arm strap and emphasize its financial value to the student – you may have to deal with insurance waivers.
- Also try to include a teen who is familiar with video editing software, and familiarize yourself with it as well if you don't already know it

- Don't forget to schedule a screening for the film! You can also have a pre-screening, where teens can edit any last minute details of the film, and then have a main screening where they can invite their friends and family to watch as an exclusive engagement.
- If your teens are very enthusiastic about film-making, let them know about any local teen/youth film contests and encourage their participation. The rewards from this experience can be numerous.
- Teens can upload their film to YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>) and promote themselves, the film and the program that way.

7. SPECIAL FILM GUESTS

If you live in or near a film-making community, why not invite a local actor, director, producer, writer, or crew member(s) to a teen film event? Have them come in and talk to the teens about how films are made, how scripts are written, acting opportunities and so on.

TIPS:

- You could open this up to the wider public or wider teen audience. It could generate more publicity for your organization and your teen program, as well as provide even greater value.
- Consider combining the talk with a local film night, week or month. Focus on films made in your city, province/state/territory, or country.

Other Teen Film Programming Ideas

Below are references to some great sites with teen film programming aids and ideas.

Christopherson, S. et. al. (n.d.). *F.I.L.L.M. – Finding inspiration in literature and movies*. Retrieved April 3, 2007, from <http://www.youthfilmproject.org/film/contactus.htm>

This program is similar to the literature/film comparison program, except it is focused on a limited number of films and includes downloadable activity guides. While most of the films are designed for pre-teens, the program can be easily adapted for your use.

Mid-Continent Public Library. (2007). *Based on the book database*. Retrieved April 3, 2007 from <http://www.mcpl.lib.mo.us/readers/movies/>.

This is an excellent database which lists more than 1200 works of literature which have been turned into films. The film title and literature title are displayed side-by-side, and the database is searchable by movie title, release year, book title and book author. It is current up to February 7, 2006.

Skokie Public Library. (2007). *Movies based on books for teens*. Retrieved April 3, 2007, from http://www.skokielibrary.info/s_audiovisual/av_lists/av_ls_Movies/teens.asp.

This is a short list of movies based on books for teens. This library also has a great teen movie program. They have pictures of the films to be shown, include new and exciting movies, and have a list of their past movies, which gives anyone viewing a sense of the program's depth and currency.

