

Navigating SIFF with Kids: Picks and Tips for Every Age - ParentMap

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Navigating SIFF with Kids: Picks and Tips for Every Age

Plus, 3 DIY film festivals to do at home

By Gemma Alexander



The **Seattle International Film Festival** (SIFF) is the largest film festival in the United States, showing more than 450 films to 150,000 people. Attendees can choose their movies by browsing the 55-page print catalogue; searching online by country of origin (there are 80) or director; or finding specific programs like "Ambiente: New Spanish Cinema." The choices are exhaustive, even overwhelming.

Unless you plan to do SIFF with your kids. A standard rule of parenting is that you should give children choices, but not too many. SIFF has applied that rule to its main family program, the **Films4Families special program**. Ten or fewer movies is the size SIFF usually targets for special programs, but while other programs tend to balloon past initial targets (*Face the Music* includes 16 films this year; *Culinary Cinema*, in its first year, has 17), Films4Families consistently hovers around eight.

This is partly due to the unfortunate nature of children's entertainment distribution in the U.S., in which many releases go straight to video, making them ineligible for consideration for SIFF (and let's be frank, not good enough to include anyway). "Parents who bring their children to SIFF are looking for something that is going to be extraordinary and worth pulling their child away from the usual films that are promoted effectively through the media," says Dustin Kaspar, Educational Programs Manager for SIFF.

Which leaves international films, usually in foreign languages — excellent picks but, as Kaspar explains, generally "more appropriate for older children than those in pre-reading age."

But while SIFF's options for families with young children are limited, adventurous, film-loving parents can still find great choices. Depending on the ages of your kids and your film tastes, here are three main tactics for navigating the festival.

1. Stick to Films4Families, a small selection of excellent choices

Like all movies screened at SIFF, the eight films in the **Films4Families** are new films that are not available on video and have never played in Western Washington. "When constructing the program, we are looking for diversity of content, countries of origin represented, and also films for a variety of age levels of youth," says Kaspar.

Three of the eight F4F selections this year are subtitled, but each of the F4F are specifically created for a family audience, rather than incidentally appropriate for younger viewers. It's a small selection of excellent choices; all will be screened in daytime slots on weekends.



The Family Picture Show 2015, playing May 23

If You Go

When: SIFF runs from Thursday, May 14, through Sunday, June 7.

Where: Films are screened almost around the clock at 12 different venues.

Tickets: Buy tickets [online](#); call the box office at 206-324-9996; or buy tickets in person at a SIFF box office on the day of the show as long as tickets are still available (but often they sell out).

Prices: Most films are \$13 but there are various discounts available. Try a ticket package if you are bringing a group or will attend many movies.

Picks: An all-ages highlight is sure to be [The Family Picture Show 2015](#), an 85-minute collection of 13 charming short films, including a variety of live action and animation styles and stories ranging from nonfiction to the surreal (Sat., May 23, 11 a.m., at Uptown).

Another all-ages pleaser with its message of empowerment for anyone who feels small is [Maya the Bee Movie](#) from Germany (Sat., May 16, 11:30 a.m.; Sun., May 17, 11 a.m., both at Uptown).

If your kids are ready for subtitles, don't miss the latest from Studio Ghibli (of *My Neighbor Totoro* fame), [When Marnie Was There](#) (Sat., May 16, 10 a.m.; Wed., May 20, 7 p.m., both at the Egyptian).

Pro tip: Beyond Films4Families, look for the list of family-friendly films in the index of the print catalogue, which includes a few films that are not part of the F4F program because they were not specifically intended for children. My 10-year-old soccer player was thrilled when I found the documentary [Messi](#) listed there (Thurs., May 21, 7 p.m.; Sun., May 24, 4 p.m., both at the Egyptian).



Messi, playing May 21, May 24

2. Catch the FutureWave, SIFF's teen program

Like Films 4 Families, [FutureWave](#) is a small program with fewer than 10 selections. The films are chosen by a jury of seven local teens from high schools around Puget Sound. These movies are all chosen for teens by teens, and many involve themes and subjects that may not be appropriate for younger siblings.

Picks: Coming-of-age stories are requisite, but you can also find films addressing social issues, like [My Skinny Sister](#) (Sat., June 5, 6:30 p.m., Uptown; June 6, 5:30 p.m., Kirkland Performance Center; Sun., June 7, 6:30 p.m.); documentaries like [Romeo is Bleeding](#) (Sun., May 17, 5 p.m.; Mon., May 18, 3:30 p.m., both at Uptown); the Italian science fiction film [The Invisible Boy](#) (Tues., May 26 at Pacific Place; Mon., June 1 at The Egyptian, both at 7 p.m.); and even a contemporary Korean homage to John Hughes in [Seoul Searching](#) (Fri., May 15, 6:30 p.m., Pacific Place; Sat., May 16, 3:30 p.m., Pacific Place; Wed., May 20, 8:30 p.m., Lincoln Square).



Romeo Is Bleeding, playing May 17 and 18)

Pro tip: If the festival inspires your teens, they can follow FutureWave on [Facebook](#) to keep up on events and film-making opportunities. They might even apply for a position on the 20-person FutureWave Committee youth board or become a youth juror for next year's festival.

3. Attend a gala, special screening or workshop

SIFF hosts a number of [parties, galas and special screenings](#), only some of which are called out on the web. While some parties may not be appropriate for children, a surprising number of the films they celebrate are. Where noted, movies can be viewed independently from or in tandem with an associated party. Here are a few highlights:

Shaun the Sheep: Who can resist the nonverbal shenanigans of Aardman Animation's Shaun the Sheep and the Grommit-like sheepdog Bitzer? Perfect for all ages. *Fri., June 5, 7 p.m., The Egyptian; Sat., June 7, 11 a.m., The Uptown.*



Shaun the Sheep, playing June 5 and 7

Mr. Holmes: Ian McKellen as the elderly Sherlock Holmes struggling with retirement on a farm with his housekeeper and her inquisitive son? Yes, please! **Ages 6 and up.** *Fri., May 29, 7 p.m., The Uptown; Sun., May 31, 4 p.m., Pacific Place.*

Inside Out: Yes, this Pixar movie about one child's inner emotional landscape will be all over the multiplex this summer, but now is your chance to see it before everyone else does. Like all Pixar movies, expect a few visual images that may be intense for the youngest viewers, but an overall experience that works for **all ages.** *Thurs., June 4, 7 p.m.; Sat., June 6, 10 a.m.; both at Pacific Place.*



Inside/Out, playing June 4, June 6

Good Ol' Boy: SIFF will kick off its Eastside programming at the Kirkland Performance Center on June 1 with this sweet, funny film about fitting in – or not. A reception precedes the Kirkland screening. **Ages 6 and up.** *Mon., June 1, 8 p.m., Kirkland Performance Center; Fri., June 5, 8:30 p.m., Uptown.*

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl: Both as flippant and as depressing as the title implies, this Sundance audience and Grand Jury prize-winning film will show your young teen what non-commercial film is capable of. **Ages 12 and up.** (Note: A reception follows the Sat., May 16, 6:30 p.m., Pacific Place screening. The film will also be shown Sun., May 17, 2:30 p.m. at Uptown as part of the the FutureWave program.)



Me and Earl and the Dying Girl, playing May 16, May 17

Excuse My French: Dealing with complex social issues from the perspective of a child in another culture, this movie is the perfect introduction to the eye-opening and mind-broadening possibilities of film. But since it's in Arabic with English subtitles, it's best for strong readers. The African Pictures Party to celebrate films from and about the African continent is held separately at the Northwest African American Museum. **Ages 10 and up.** *Fri. June 5, 6:30 p.m.; Sat. June 6, 4 p.m.; both at Pacific Place; Sun., June 7, 8 p.m., at Kirkland Performance Center.*

FutureWave/Best of NFFTY: This special presentation celebrates the work of young filmmakers. In 79 minutes, find out where the next generation of filmmakers will take us in 15 short films created by artists under 18. **Ages 12 and up.** *Mon. May 25, 3 p.m., The Uptown.*

Crash Kids: On **Saturday, May 16**, kids ages 9–12 can watch from behind the camera in a full-day program where participants go from concept to screening with professional mentors. If the program is full, don't despair. Crash Kids is offered again in June. SIFF will also offer summer camps in animation and film-making beginning in June.

Pro tip: If you've decided to expand beyond the family programming into special events or the general festival, know that films from non-English speaking countries are rarely dubbed. **You can verify the language and availability of subtitles by clicking on "show all" at the bottom of each film's description online.** Most SIFF films have not been reviewed on CommonSenseMedia, but the SIFF website includes trailers for most movies that can help you decide if they are appropriate for your children.

DIY SIFF: 3 film fests you can do at home

Whether or not you decide to sample part of SIFF this year, you can still replicate the film-fest experience at home. To unearth a treasure trove of family-film gems, consider a visit to [Scarecrow Video](#) in Seattle's University District, the largest independent video store in the country. Simply wandering the shelves of their specialized genre rooms is sure to introduce your family to something new, but if you get lost the knowledgeable staff will be happy to help you build a home festival program from an inventory of over 120,000 titles.

1. DIY Studio Ghibli fest



Studio Ghibli's Ponyo

This Japanese film company produces movies with universal appeal: whimsical, meaningful, beautifully animated and with complex characters and stories. For the youngest viewers, try [Ponyo](#), [My Neighbor Totoro](#) and [Kiki's Delivery Service](#). Older children will enjoy the heavier themes and more complicated stories of [Spirited Away](#), [Princess Mononoke](#) and [Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind](#).

2. DIY Hollywood classics fest

Thanks to the Hays Code, most classic Hollywood movies are sanitized enough for kids. Try a mix of genres with [Singing in the Rain](#), Errol Flynn's [The Adventures of Robin Hood](#) and [Bringing Up Baby](#). See if you can find a copy of the excellent book [The Best Old Movies for Families](#) by Ty Burr for inspiration and age guidance.



3. DIY animal tales fest

There are plenty of great movies about animals to capture kids' attention. Pull out the tissues for [Old Yeller](#) and [Where the Red Fern Grows](#), or stick to happier fare with [The Incredible Journey](#) (1963) or its 1993 remake [Homeward Bound](#). [Charlotte's Web](#) (another classic with a [quality remake](#)), [Black Beauty](#) and [Benji](#) are obvious choices. Don't be afraid to try a documentary like [Arctic Tale](#). If the idea of documentaries meets resistance try a thematic double feature like [Happy Feet](#) and [March of the Penguins](#) or [Lion King](#) and [African Cats](#).



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