So You Wanna Be a Critic? Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**ASSIGNMENT**: We will write a film critique on our blog using the criteria and example below. After writing the critique on your blog, please comment on **THREE** other students’ blogs in their comments section.



How would you like to get paid to watch movies? What a cool job! Let’s see if you’ve got what it takes to write a movie review. Your task is to review *the film \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.* Here are some keys to a good review.

\* Start off with a catchy introduction. Consider a quote, a question, or a dramatic statement.

\* Give the reader a clear sense of the plot but no spoilers!

\* Make sure you mention the director’s name as well as the actors’ names and the characters they play.

**\* The most important element is to back up your opinion with specific examples.**

\* Comment on three specific aspects of the film.

\* Five short paragraphs. Introduction, three ideas, conclusion.

\* Make sure your conclusion is creative.

\* See the example on the back.



The most compelling thing about “Winter in Wartime,” the Netherlands’ official entry for Best Foreign Language Film at this year’s Oscars, is not the story. And the story is pretty darn compelling.

Based on a novel by Jan Terlouw, and set in Nazi-occupied Holland in 1945, the film concerns the efforts of 13-year-old Michiel (Martijn Lakemeier) to smuggle Jack, a wounded British airman (Jamie Campbell Bower), to safety after Jack’s plane is shot down near Michiel’s hometown, which is now crawling with Germans. It’s a gripping, edge-of-your-seat thriller, involving romance — between Jack and Michiel’s older sister (Melody Klaver), who is a nurse — and enough suspense, secrets and betrayal for two war films.

Despite all that’s going on, the story, directed by Martin Koolhoven, is impeccably paced and lean, with a visually gorgeous, icy blue pallor that underscores the cold, hard choices that its characters must make. But what makes “Winter” really special is its complex exploration of the theme of heroism.

Michiel, you see, is caught between a rock and hard place, and another hard place. On the one hand, there’s Michiel’s father, Johan (Raymond Thiry), the town’s mayor and a man whom Michiel sees as just this side of a collaborator for the way he sucks up to the occupying Germans. On the other hand, there’s Michiel’s Uncle Ben (Yorick van Wageningen). Ben seems to be everything that Johan is not: a member of the resistance willing to put himself on the line for his countrymen. Ben is brave and willing to break the rules. To a 13-year-old boy, that’s nothing short of cool.

But Michiel can’t entirely forget that his father is his father, despite what appears to be a politician’s infuriating tendency to accommodate his Nazi oppressors. Consequently, the boy’s loyalties are buffeted this way and that way and this again by his hatred of the Nazis­­, his sense of filial duty and a rash longing for ad­ven­ture instilled in him by a role model who may or may not deserve that honor.

What’s more, he’s 13 and scared. By helping Jack, Michiel is not just putting himself at risk, but his entire family. Jack knows that all too acutely, and he is torn between his own survival mechanism and a reluctance to endanger his civilian protectors.

Michiel will soon learn, all too harshly, that these competing interests cannot all be satisfied and that the definition of honor sometimes involves a quieter — and more tragic — form of heroism than his uncle’s blustering heroics.

How Koolhoven plays this cold lesson out is the chief pleasure of this tale, whose moral ground is as crystalline, as multifaceted and as slippery as the ice covering the frozen streams and canals that crisscross Michiel’s once simple world.

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A couple of things went really wrong in the making and marketing of *Winter In Wartime*, a coming-of-age tale set in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands. The first is a relatively minor beef, but one that sticks nonetheless: the U.S. title translation from the Dutch title *Oorlogswinter*, meaning "War winter." I'm not sure what Sony Classics was thinking rechristening the film *Winter In Wartime*, but, if you'll forgive a bit of inside baseball, it's been written several different ways in the story-planning phase at the *OW* offices - *War In Wintertime* was the most common mistake, but at one point, someone wrote it in the schedule as *War In Maritime*.

So the title's a problem. But here's the film's biggest obstacle: It's patently ridiculous. I'll get to that later. First, a summary: Co-writer-director Martin Koolhoven's story of Michiel (Martijn Lakemeier), a teenage boy who discovers a wounded British soldier hiding out in the woods outside his small town in the Netherlands and helps him hide as he recovers, begins auspiciously enough. The snow-blanketed area provides a conflicted viewpoint of WWII: The town has a mayor, Michiel's upstanding father, and its people are not starving or put out much by the SS officers who have taken over the town hall. Although Michiel observes some key figures around town being  rounded up and detained, the true horrors of the war don't seem to have reached his borders yet.

Michiel is also accident-prone, and he feels tinges of bitterness when the Germans come to his aid on more than one occasion. When a British plane is shot down in their woods and an SS officer is found shot dead nearby, the hunt is on for the plane's missing, presumably British occupant, Jack (*The Twilight Saga*'s Jamie Campbell Bower). Michiel finds him and discovers that he's a sweet, handsome lad in a lot of pain from a gunshot wound to the leg. Michiel enlists his nurse sister (Melody Klaver) to assist with his covert operation.

Unable to find either Jack or the townspeople helping him, the German leadership decides to make an example out of the mayor. The noose tightens around Michiel and his family, so the race is on to get Jack out safely and to save his father. This propels the film into its third act and out of any sense of reality. As Michiel and Jack are pursued, shot at and chased through the woods - their horse-drawn carriage somehow evading the Nazis' sidecars and rifles so efficiently that the pursued have time for slow walks and chats - the plot gets further muddied by clumsy twists and preposterously convenient turns.

By the time Koolhoven attempts to bring it all back to Michiel's loss of innocence, the mood has been irrevocably broken. Why this story needed to become a low-speed, low-stakes *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is beyond me.