



# EFA Young Audience Award 2019

**Educational handout for the moderator  
including an introduction for valuation**

**The three nominated films (*screening order*):**

**OLD BOYS**

## YAA 2019

For the first time, the nominations were chosen in a two-step procedure:

- 1.) An **international committee** consisting of EFA Board Member Vanessa Henneman (Netherlands) and experts Fabia Bettini (Alice nella Città/Italy), Keld Mathiesen (UCN - University College of Northern Denmark), Rajko Petrović (Five Stars Film Distribution/Serbia) and Lina Užkuraiytė (International Vilnius Film Festival for Children and Youth/Lithuania) pre-selected six films.
- 2.) A jury of **13-to-14-year-old former YAA participants** Jesse (London/UK), Konstantin (Chemnitz/Germany), Maria (Lisbon/Portugal), Friederike (Luxembourg) and Milica (Podgorica/Montenegro) then watched these six films and chose the three nominations.

On 5 May, the three nominated films will be screened simultaneously to audiences of 12-14-year-olds in the following 35 countries across Europe and beyond:

AUSTRALIA: Brisbane	LATVIA: Riga
AUSTRIA: St. Pölten & Vienna	LITHUANIA: Kaunas & Vilnius
BELGIUM: Brussels	LUXEMBOURG: Luxembourg
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA: Sarajevo	MALTA: Valletta
BULGARIA: Sofia	MONTENEGRO: Nikšić & Podgorica
CROATIA: Zagreb	NORTH MACEDONIA: Skopje
CZECH REPUBLIC: Prague	POLAND: Gdynia, Poznań, Warsaw & Wrocław
DENMARK: Aalborg, Aarhus, Copenhagen & Stege	PORTUGAL: Lisbon
ESTONIA: Tallinn	ROMANIA: Cluj-Napoca
FINLAND: Espoo	SERBIA: Gornji Milanovac
FRANCE: Bourg Saint Maurice – Les Arcs	SLOVAKIA: Bratislava
GERMANY: Berlin, Chemnitz & Erfurt	SLOVENIA: Izola
HUNGARY: Budapest	SPAIN: A Coruña, Barcelona, Madrid, Seville & Valencia
ICELAND: Reykjavik	SWEDEN: Malmö
IRELAND: Dublin & Galway	SWITZERLAND: Bellinzona & Zurich
ITALY: Florence, Rome & Turin	TURKEY: Istanbul
KOSOVO: Prizren	UK: Lewes, London & Sheffield

The EFA Young Audience Award is organised and presented by the European Film Academy and EFA Productions with the support of Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung (MDM) and the Creative Europe – Media Sub-Programme of the European Union. The national YAA events are organised with the support of the respective national partners. Media partner is FRED FM Film Radio.

## **Please note:**

The following handout for the three films selected for the EFA Young Audience Award focuses on the essentials and does not claim to cover all (noteworthy) aspects of a film. In addition to thematic aspects for assessing the film, cinematic aspects are equally important. However important and significant a topic may be, the film has to also have succeeded in finding the appropriate form and the appropriate choice of cinematic means or (sub)genre.

First, the basic information of a film is conveyed on an overview page, whereby all films are given equal weight. It also briefly refers to possible triggers that could result from personal (traumatic) experiences or from cultural and religious backgrounds. Next, you'll find the most important thematic aspects as well as information on the cinematic rendition.

The tips and notes for the introduction of the film are always kept short and refer to useful preliminary information about the film and to the inquiry of relevant prior knowledge. After all, the young people should all have an equal chance to see a film without prejudice and any pedagogical influence and to form their own (first) opinions. These can of course be put into perspective and differentiated during the subsequent discussion.

The discussion points are also to be understood as mere suggestions. They do not have to be „processed“ in sequential order. Since every event is, above all, influenced and shaped by its participants, this circumstance must be given sufficient consideration. In other words: It is what particularly moves the young people and what they themselves bring up which should determine the discussion about the film.

The standardised guideline for the evaluation of a film (jury booklet for participants) is not a requirement for well-founded judgement. But it is an option, no more and no less.

As different as this year's three films, pre-selected by a young jury, may be in form and content, they also have a whole lot of similarities, which in the end give an important indication of what is of particular interest to young people right now and what kind of stories they would like to see in cinema beyond the international mainstream. All three films are great coming-of-age stories in which young people rebel against the rules and expectations of adults, seek and find their own way, and, in doing so, surpass themselves. Artistic and especially musical possibilities of expression are not always the focus of these stories, but in all three films, they play a role that goes far beyond chance. It is always the young people, who, without particular help from adults, are able to solve their own problems and face the challenges of their environments and to grow up with courage, imagination and creativity.



## **OLD BOYS**

United Kingdom/Sweden, 2019, 95 min.

**Directed by:** Toby MacDonald

**Written by:** Luke Ponte, Freddy Syborn

**Produced by:** Luke Morris

**Director of photography:** Nanu Segal

**Editor:** Sam Sneade, Mark Trend

**Sound Design:** Stevie Haywood

**Music by:** Andrew Hewitt

**Main Cast:** Alex Lawther (Amberson), Jonah Hauer-King (Winchester), Pauline Etienne (Agnes), Joshua McGuire (Huggins), Denis Ménochet (Babinot) a. o.

**Recommended** from 12 years on

**Awards (selection):** Dinard British Film Festival 2018 (Audience Award Best Film)

**Genre:** comedy, coming of age-film, high school-film

### **Summary**

'Survival of the fittest' is the philosophy at all boys boarding school Caldermount. If you're not a champion on the sports field, you're a nobody. No one knows this better than bright Amberson, the only one at school with a scholarship. When the French teacher's fiery daughter Agnes arrives, Amberson's life is turned upside down. He suddenly finds himself playing matchmaker for Winchester, the school's handsome but spectacularly dim school-hero who is in love with Agnes too.

### **About production and filmmakers**

Toby MacDonald started working on film sets as a runner at the age of 16. His short film 'Je t'aime John Wayne' about a young Englishman obsessed with the French New Wave was BAFTA-nominated and won the European Academy Award for Best Short. His next short 'Heavy Metal Drummer' was also nominated for the BAFTA. OLD BOYS is his directorial feature debut and had its world premiere at the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2018.

### **Subjects**

Gender, sports, adolescence, courage, bullying, tradition, identity, friendship

### **Triggers**

In a world that strictly separates boys and girls, suppressed feelings are expressed in sexual allusions. Those who have been victims of bullying themselves will certainly perceive the film differently.

**Website**

<https://www.oldboysmovie.com/>

## Essential topics

### Against the old British school system

In an interview with the publication 'HeyUGuys', Toby MacDonald talked about why his film is set in a boys' boarding school in the 1980s: "I think we set it at that time because it was the last glory era of those schools before they had to let girls in eventually in the '90s and then fell on hard times later. The look of them had stayed the same since the '60s, so we felt like it was very archetypal and quintessentially British so it allowed us to give it a kinda scuffed worn down quality."

Following the old British tradition, male adolescents are sent by their usually wealthy parents to such boarding schools so that they can later pursue a career and be educated to become "real" men. Sporting and physical excellence are considered important indications of such misguided masculinity, but other knowledge and especially artistic skills are less important. In this strictly hierarchical system, Amberson, the only student to be awarded a scholarship to the boarding school, doesn't stand a chance. The consistent exclusion of women, even during their leisure time, turns such boys into emotionally impoverished creatures who are neither able to deal with their own feelings nor to perceive women as equal partners. The new French teacher, who stands for a francophone way of life, and above all his open-minded daughter Agnes, who is very mature for her age, become an immediate threat to this hermetically sealed system. The film, with a lot of ridicule and humour, depicts this system as dangerous and backward as it runs counter to all human needs.

### 'Cyrano de Bergerac', reinvented

This is another motif which turns the socio-critical basic approach of the film into an exciting and equally entertaining film for a young audience. Toby MacDonald uses a motif from the classic French play 'Cyrano de Bergerac' by Edmond Rostand from 1897, but modifies it considerably. Amberson is by no means as ugly as Cyrano with his long nose, who hides completely behind his friend and doesn't have the courage to reveal his love and true self to Roxanne. Despite the open end, 'OLD BOYS' is far more optimistic here, especially since Amberson's whole life still lies ahead of him and he - not without moments of delay - actually manages not to be untrue to himself any longer, but to find himself and to stand by this identity. These are typical elements of a coming-of-age film, especially as all three young main characters manage to break away from the rigid rules and expectations of adults and find their own path. Winchester leaves school and joins the military, Agnes leaves her father and goes to Berlin, and Amberson leaves the playing field, previously dominated by the coach and the school management, and turns his back on the school.



### Friendship

In a hierarchical system characterised entirely by the law of might, true friendships are not supposed to emerge. One submits, becomes a follower, or strives to be the leader. When Amberson senses his chance to break out of this system by helping Winchester meet with Agnes and win her heart, he does not do so out of friendship or charity. He does it out of calculation, for

his own benefit and in the quiet hope of getting to know Agnes better and winning her over. Winchester, on the other hand, does not want to openly admit his own weaknesses and therefore proposes a deal to help Amberson with his physical education classes in return for his help. It's all the more astonishing that the two become not only comrades but real friends with time and that Winchester finally has a significant part in Amberson "outing" himself to Agnes. The education system, at first only threatened from the outside, now corrodes from the inside. Agnes, on the other hand, at first sees Amberson as a real friend with whom she gets along splendidly, but then feels betrayed and lied to by him when she realises his true feelings. In the end, she has to decide what their friendship is really worth to her.

## Film literacy

### A comedy

Already the first slow-motion scenes of the film make it clear that the director had no social drama about bullying, violent excesses, exclusion, oppression or inappropriate pupils in mind, but a comedy. The game Streamers, invented especially for the film, which evokes associations with a rugby game and is staged in the middle of a river, begins martially and with brute force. But even these first scenes are counteracted by the slender-looking main character Amberson with his large glasses, unsuitable headgear and asthma inhaler, which he uses at every opportunity, inconvenient as it may be. When he is hit on his head by the ball at the end of the sequence and tips into the river like a tree trunk, it is more reminiscent of slapstick than drama.



Also in the following scenes, Amberson is depicted as a sympathetic clumsy fellow who loses his shoe in the mud and lands, completely soaked, at Agnes's feet. Feelings of pity for him, of course, are limited, especially since Amberson seems to have accepted his fate, although not feeling devastated by it. The in reality already 23-year-old actor Alex Lawther embodies this role in a very believable way, immediately making the clumsy teenager believable without making him look ridiculous. Almost imperceptibly, the movie slowly takes on more serious tones, until Amberson discovers a completely different side to himself and, in a dramatic showdown, has to decide what and who he really wants to be.

### The function of music



The comedic quality of the production is particularly evident in the music. It points out humorous scenes and, in addition to the musical background, sometimes even gains a dramaturgical function in which the story is grossly exaggerated. This applies in particular to the scenes showing the

advances between Agnes and Winchester, which take place in an (un)musical manner. Agnes wants to be “conquered” in a poetic sense and therefore blocks his superficial sexual interest with the words: “Take me to the moon and then you can kiss me”. Amberson takes up this metaphor in his video message, which of course officially comes from Winchester, in which he unmistakably quotes the sci-fi film classic ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’ by Stanley Kubrick from 1968. The school's youth brass orchestra improvises the piece ‘So sprach Zarathustra’ by Richard Strauss to images of the Earth and the Moon, which stands for a new beginning from a music-historical point of view – but in completely unmelodious tones. And just like Kubrick's waltz, Johann Strauss's ‘An der schönen blauen Donau’ follows a short time later, after Winchester jeopardises Agnes’s good first impression of him with a more than amateurish guitar solo. How close Agnes and Amberson are to each other on the inside, on the other hand, is later musically emphasised by a French chanson full of poetry.

### Video messages and flip-books



Filmic cross-references can also be found in other parts of the film. The boarding school for boys, for example, reminds of Hogwarts from the ‘Harry Potter’ films in equipment, colour and cadrage. The headmaster even shows a slight resemblance to Severus Snape. The differences are all the more important, especially the purely male dominance and the paramilitary upbringing, which is ridiculed by scenes of recruits exercising next to the school grounds.

On closer inspection, the film even briefly reviews the entire development of the moving image, from the pop-ups that Agnes creates, to the wall projections by Amberson, to home video technology (VHS recorder and the school's semi-professional u-matic system), which, even before the smartphone was invented, allowed everyone to be their own filmmaker. The flip-book as a precursor of cinema even serves an action-oriented dramaturgical function. Amberson draws his experiences and wishes several times as phase-shifted line drawings in the corners of a magazine, flips the pages with his thumb and makes them “run”. In the beginning, they are still black-and-white-drawings, but later, in analogy to his real life, more and more colour is added. The last flip-book scene may even anticipate a glimpse of the future.

### Film language

In order to visualise the emotional world of the young protagonists, the film works with numerous catchy metaphors. This starts with Amberson, who, in the beginning, is always soaking wet and falls from the frying pan into the fire at every opportunity. The barbed-wire fence limiting the boarding school grounds, on which hangs a piece of a sports uniform, suggests that the pupils feel like criminal offenders. A later scene shows how difficult it is for Amberson to overcome even this small hurdle and enjoy a bit of freedom with Agnes. Later, they enjoy it timidly but still to the fullest as they ride with two older bikers and touch each other’s hands at full speed as a sign of their connection.





## **SUGGESTED QUESTIONS**

### **Before screening:**

- What is considered particularly "British"? What comes to mind first?
- Who knows the play (or a film adaptation of) 'Cyrano de Bergerac', and what is it about?
- What is a flip-book, and what does it have to do with cinema?

### **Basic talking points (after screening):**

- Who does the title "OLD BOYS" refer to?
- Why was the film staged as a comedy rather than a social drama?
- How does the film arouse interest in a story that takes place in an outdated time? Or did this time period have positive aspects as well?
- What impression did the game Streamers, invented for the film, leave on you?
- How are Amberson and Winchester initially characterised, how do they change, and how credible/relatable is this depicted in the film?
- Which effect does Agnes have in this social environment, which ideals are associated with her and why does she question the entire educational system?
- What is the function of the interspersed flip-book scenes? Were there any other cross-references to film history, such as music?

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