



Article: [The View from the Balcony](#)

Classroom Discussion Questions College Level

Cultural Authority and Media Gatekeeping: Siskel and Ebert became two of the most influential cultural critics of their time, shaping public taste and film industry reception. What does their rise suggest about the role of media gatekeepers in constructing cultural value, and how has the democratization of criticism through digital platforms challenged or reinforced this dynamic?

Professional Tension as a Narrative Device: The article highlights the duo's dynamic of camaraderie, disagreement, and intellectual friction. How did their on-screen tension function as both entertainment and critical discourse? To what extent can conflict-driven presentation enhance or distort the aims of cultural criticism?

Shifts in Critical Institutions and Media Ecosystems: The timeline of the show—from its PBS origins to its syndicated iterations—reflects broader changes in media ownership, commercialization, and entertainment journalism. How does the evolution of their program illustrate shifts in the American media ecosystem from the 1970s to the 2000s, and what implications does this have for the current state of film criticism and its institutional legitimacy?

Classroom Discussion Questions Grades 9-12

Media Influence and Criticism: The article explains how Siskel and Ebert became two of the most influential movie critics in America, even shaping which films audiences chose to see. In what ways do you think film critics—or influencers today—affect public opinion and cultural trends? Is their impact mostly positive, negative, or a mix?

Professional Rivalry and Collaboration: Siskel and Ebert famously disagreed often, yet their back-and-forth became part of what audiences loved about the show. How can rivalry and disagreement in professional partnerships strengthen (or weaken) the work being produced? Provide examples from the article or other fields.

Evolution of Film Criticism: The timeline in the article shows how their show changed networks, formats, and hosts over several decades. What does their long career say about how entertainment, media, and criticism evolved from the 1970s to the early 2000s? How is film criticism different today with online platforms, YouTube reviewers, and social media?

Classroom Discussion Questions Grades 6-8

Why Critics Matter: Siskel and Ebert helped people decide which movies to watch by giving “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.” How do you think movie critics—or online reviewers today—help people choose what to see or do?

Agreeing and Disagreeing: The article shows that Siskel and Ebert didn’t always agree, and sometimes their arguments were what made the show fun to watch. Why do you think hearing different opinions can help people understand a movie better?

How Movie Reviews Have Changed: Their show moved through different TV stations and changed over time. How do you think movie reviews today (like YouTube videos, TikToks, or blogs) are different from the TV show Siskel and Ebert had?

Classroom Discussion Questions Grades 1-5

Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down: Siskel and Ebert watched movies and told people if they were good or not. Why do you think it helps to hear what someone else thinks about a movie before you watch it?

Different Opinions: Sometimes Siskel and Ebert didn’t agree about whether a movie was good. Why is it okay for people to have different opinions about the same movie?

How We Learn About Movies: A long time ago, people watched Siskel and Ebert on TV to learn about new movies. How do you find out about new movies today?