



FILM: **ISLE OF DOGS**

FDG RATING: 3.0 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Wes Anderson: *director*; *story by Wes Anderson and Roman Coppola*
Cast: Bryan Cranston (Chief), Koyu Rankin (Atari), Bill Murray (Boss), Edward Norton (Rex), Greta Gerwig (Tracy), Scarlett Johansson (Nutmeg) & more

DATE: April 22, 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **ISLE OF DOGS**

The stop-motion animated film, *Isle of Dogs*, is a multi-layered story; first, simply about a 12-year old boy, Atari, in search of his missing dog, Spots, during the internment of all canines in the fictitious, 20 years in the future, Japanese city of Megasaki due to an epidemic outbreak of snout flu.

Secondly, it is Wes Anderson's homage to the iconic visual universe of everything Japanese with a special nod to his favorite Japanese film makers such as Akira Kurosawa (*Seven Samurai*, *Stray Dog*, etc.) and Miyazaki whose penchant for stark, quiet moments had a direct impact on many scenes. The film is a delicious smorgasbord of Japanese images cleverly repurposed for the story line.

Add a third layer of political, historical, and cultural, social commentary about egotistical power, hateful prejudice, and loyalty. The allegory is universal but hits close to home with uncomfortable familiarity. As one published critic noted, "it's a fantasy that reflects no aspect of Japanese current events but, rather, the xenophobic, racist, and demagogic strains of contemporary American politics." Scenes in the film bring to mind deportation, internment in prison camps, and the purposeful extermination of a less desirable species. But done as animation, these heavy concepts become more palatable.

The story is literally about underdogs in society marginalized as outcasts by government propaganda. (Felines are the favored species.) Narrated by a band of five dogs (already banished to Trash Island garbage dump), who happen to be children's pets (the children are frantically searching for their dogs) except one stray, Chief, voiced by Bryan Cranston. He's tougher than the others and girds them to fight to survive. All the characters including a hodge-podge of canines, Atari, Mayor Kobayashi, the head surgeon, assistant scientist, and Tracy, the exchange student, are exceptionally colorful and are voiced by some of our favorite actors.

For those of us who especially appreciate the technical dexterity of well-done animation and understand the tedious manipulation of stop motion where every eye blink is moved into position by a human hand, *Isle of Dogs* excels and simultaneously offers a story that is entertaining for kids with elements of sophisticated relevancy for grown-ups.

Those who are less enamored of animated films were more critical. One discussion participant described *Isle of Dogs* as clever but choppy, was bored in the beginning and never was drawn into the story.

Another resident reviewer admired the animation, wonderful cast of actors for the voices, but thought director Anderson was being self-indulgent. Even so, admitted that a favorite scene was the overhead, bird's eye view of a sushi chef expertly, rapidly, slicing raw fish for a bento box lunch. And the surgery scene was equally impressive.

We agreed the story is heartwarming and timely. One participant who is a big fan of animation as well as of Wes Anderson films and of Japanese art and culture (and a dog lover), gave *Isle of Dogs* high praise in all aspects. A few less enthusiastic discussion participants tempered our collaborative rating to result in an inclusive 3.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best)



See you at the movies!

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