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Despite its kiddie appeal, 'Babe' can hook teens

By Hilary Costa

On the surface, "Babe" could appear to be a child's movie, a sweet but dull heartwarmer that is essentially uncool. I understand that teen-



agers could turn a belittling or unenthusiastic eye toward it; when I first heard of it, I wasn't exactly thrilled, either. But once you're inside the movie theater, whether you were dragged in by your parents or went of your own free will, you'll probably think again.

Underneath this G-rated movie's

simple, innocent skin are woven the intricacies of morality – the things we all do, shamelessly, to maintain our dignity. The movie, based on the novella "Babe, the Gallant Pig" by J.K. Smith, can be compared to George Orwell's "Animal Farm." Although the latter is a deeper, more disturbing commentary on the skewed tyranny of the former Soviet Union, both use allegories involving animals to portray human struggles, values and aspects of our culture. Writers use these allegories because people of all ages and backgrounds can relate to animals – they have a universal appeal.

"Babe" is the story of a small pig who is sent to live on a farm in the beautiful, rugged Australian countryside. When Babe first arrives, he is shocked by the bigotry

exhibited between the sheep and the sheepdogs, and their unwillingness to respect one another. As the movie progresses, Babe – partly from naivete, partly because of his tolerance and altruism – transcends the animals' lack of mutual acceptance of and helps them learn to treat one another as they would want to be treated themselves. Along the way he is able to realize his dream of being a shepherd by using peaceful negotiation. If you think about it, this scenario is also allegorical, with Babe representing any great peacemaker and the animal species representing any conflicting races, classes or genders.

Although "Babe" is rich with moral value, it is also a satire on the trials of farm life and offers some surprising laughs. The mice are hys-

terical as the singers and introducers of new chapters. The dubbing for the animals is adorable. Each animal character is distinct and memorable, and James Cromwell is impressive as Farmer Hogget, a taciturn, emotionally isolated man who communicates more easily with animals than he does with humans.

"Babe," unlike many movies, does not manipulate your feelings. It allows you to enjoy it for its surface simplicity or its underlying meaning, and either way you will probably enjoy it. I strongly suggest that you battle the "uncoolness" factor and buy some tickets for this Oscar-nominated film.

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