

Time Out

New York

Kids

See free flicks
NYC's top spots for movie-loving tykes

Get spooked
We pick the creepiest haunted houses

Talk about sex
Where to find answers to their toughest questions

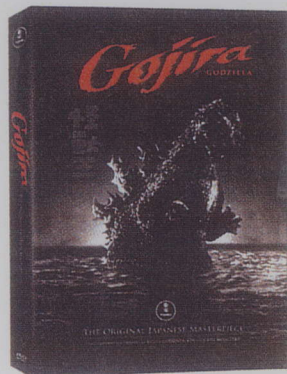
DVD

Godzilla's atomic breadth

When the original *Frankenstein* was released in 1931, Boris Karloff, the actor who played the hulking, zigzag-scarred experiment-gone-wrong, received scores of letters from children all over the world. "They wrote to Karloff to let him know that they identified with his character and felt sorry for him. Many of their parents didn't want them to see the movie, but they saw it anyway and weren't scared," says film historian Mark Vieira, author of *Hollywood Horror: From Gothic to Cosmic*.

Of course, it's easy to understand how such a quaint monster captured kids' imaginations in those nascent celluloid days. It's harder to understand why today, in the era of ultra-realistic CGI ghouls (think faceless, fanged Orc armies), there's any kind of market for classic monster mayhem. The recent release of the first *Godzilla* movie, 1954's *Godzilla: King of the Monsters*, on DVD gives rise to the question: Are kids now even remotely interested in that charming mutant lizard?

TONY Kids took our inquiry to a group of Brooklyn middle-school boys, who trampled all over the idea that old-school giant monsters no longer measure up.



"The old films are so much better. They're so cool," gushes Liam Sullivan, 13.

"*Godzilla* came out when people first used the A-bomb and stuff. The movie's all about how we'll all kill each other and kill ourselves," explains Teddy Miller, 13.

"And *King Kong vs. Godzilla* is about racism. The monkey doesn't want anything to do with the lizard," adds Jacob Ohrelsky, 13.

But wait a second: Monster movies as metaphors for the dangers of the nuclear age? As allegory for racism? Aren't kids supposed to dig these flicks because they feature creepy fiends attacking the world?

Yes and no. Sure, a good, clawed ass-kicking still has its appeal, but as Vieira notes, monster movies also play a social role, especially among children. "Kids use these films as a coping mechanism—as a way to deal with real threats too big to wrap their heads around. Instead, they thrash out that inner conflict with fantasy." Consider this: In the past 75 years, the popularity of horror films has spiked during hard times—*Frankenstein* was released during the Depression, audiences met *Godzilla* in the era of the Cold War, and now, there's a resurgence once again, in the post-9/11 "war on terror" world.



This might explain why, more than 50 years after its release, the original *Godzilla*—whose lead character looks like something a five-year-old might craft in art class out of papier-mâché—is still a hit with kids, as are his vintage brothers in the *Mummy* series, *Dracula* and the original *King Kong*. Yes, the giant apes and zombies do look cheesy, but that's the point: "They're unreal, unlike anything a child would see in real life," says Vieira. "They're monstrous, as opposed to scary."

They're also deliciously fun: Nine-year-old Pearl Joslyn's first horror film, at age seven, was *The Ring*, which spooked her so much she

decided that maybe fright-flicks weren't for her. But then she saw *Frankenstein* and things changed. "It's not too scary, and all these fun things happen. The villagers have a plan to get Frankenstein back to the castle, and he escapes and that spoils their plan," says Pearl, who likes *King Kong* and the Japanese film *Ringu*. And if things get a little too intense? Pearl, like generations before her, knows how to deal: Cover face with hands and watch the movie through spread fingers and squinted eyes.

Godzilla: King of the Monsters is available at amazon.com.

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