

Introduction to our Project:

For our project, we decided to research the features of films that have previously won the Best Picture Award at the Academy Awards and investigate what features of films are most likely to win the award, based on our research of previous winners.

We chose this topic for our project as all three of us have a great interest in the film industry. We all enjoy watching the annual Academy Awards Ceremony and so this inspired us to base our project on what makes a film likely to win the Best Picture Award.

Objective of our Project:

When we decided to undertake this topic for our project, we wanted to learn about the common, recurring features of films that have previously won the Best Picture Award at the Academy Awards. We wanted to see whether certain aspects of films, such as previous accolades of lead actors, genre, run-time or directors were recurrent amongst those that had won the award in the past.

We also wanted to be able to use our newfound knowledge in the hope of being able to predict winners in the category in future editions of the award ceremony.

Types of Research for our Project:

Most of the information that we gathered about the films that have previously won Best Picture came directly from both the Academy Awards website which is a reliable and reputable source of information. It was especially useful in our research as it allowed us to delve further into the details and features of each individual film. These features included lead actors, genre, run-time and directors. The main type of data that we were able to collect from this website was categorical data, but we also collected numerical data in the form of the run-times of each Best Picture winner.

As well as this secondary desk research, we also carried out some field research in the form of a survey. We carried out this survey in order to see whether the views of a group of our peers would correlate with the data we had collected from the Academy Award website.

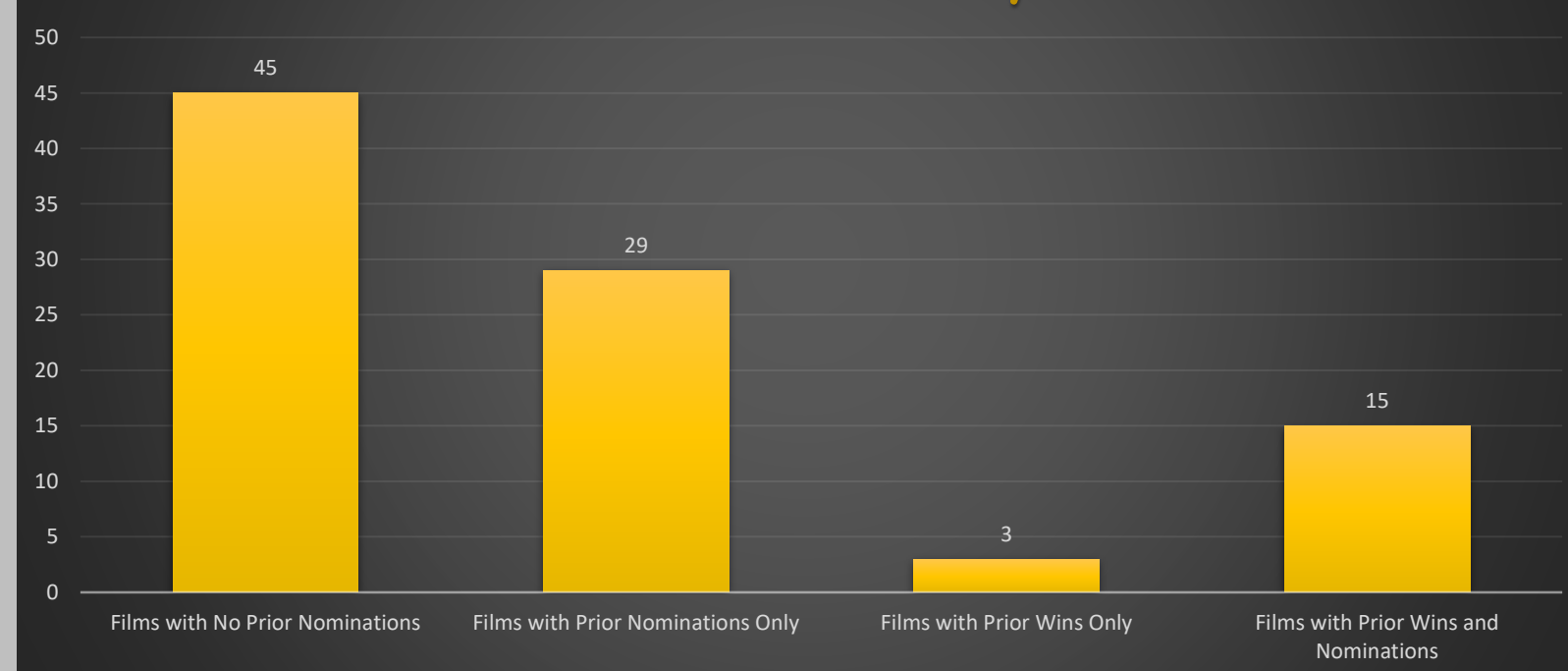
Most of our collected data is descriptive statistics so it can mainly be displayed in graphs like pie charts and bar charts. We also used standard deviation to portray the average of numerical data we had collected for the run-times of these films.

Lead Actors:

From completing our research, we learned that there is a strong correlation between the lead actors in films and the film's chances of winning the Best Picture Award at the Academy Awards.

Our research showed that, out of the 92 Best Picture winning films since the first Academy Awards, 45 had lead actors with no prior nominations or wins in the Best Actor/Actress categories. This is compared to 47 films which had prior nominations or wins in the Best Actor/Actress categories for their lead actors. While this may seem like an insignificant margin, we must consider the fact that 12 of the 45 films with no prior nominations or wins for lead actors came before 1945, when the awards were still in their infancy.

Performance of Lead Actors of Best Pictures at the Academy Awards



Out of the 92 films that have won Best Picture at the Oscars, only 6 have had lead actors who have never been nominated for the Best Actor/Actress Award, before, in the same year or after the film winning Best Picture, showing that the lead actors in films have an impact on that film's chances of winning Best Picture.

However, in the last two decades, there has been a large decline in the number of films who have had prior lead actor nominations or wins. This would appear to indicate that there is now less emphasis on the lead actors in a film in relation to its chances of winning the Best Picture Award at the Academy Awards.



What Makes a Best Picture Winner at the Oscars?

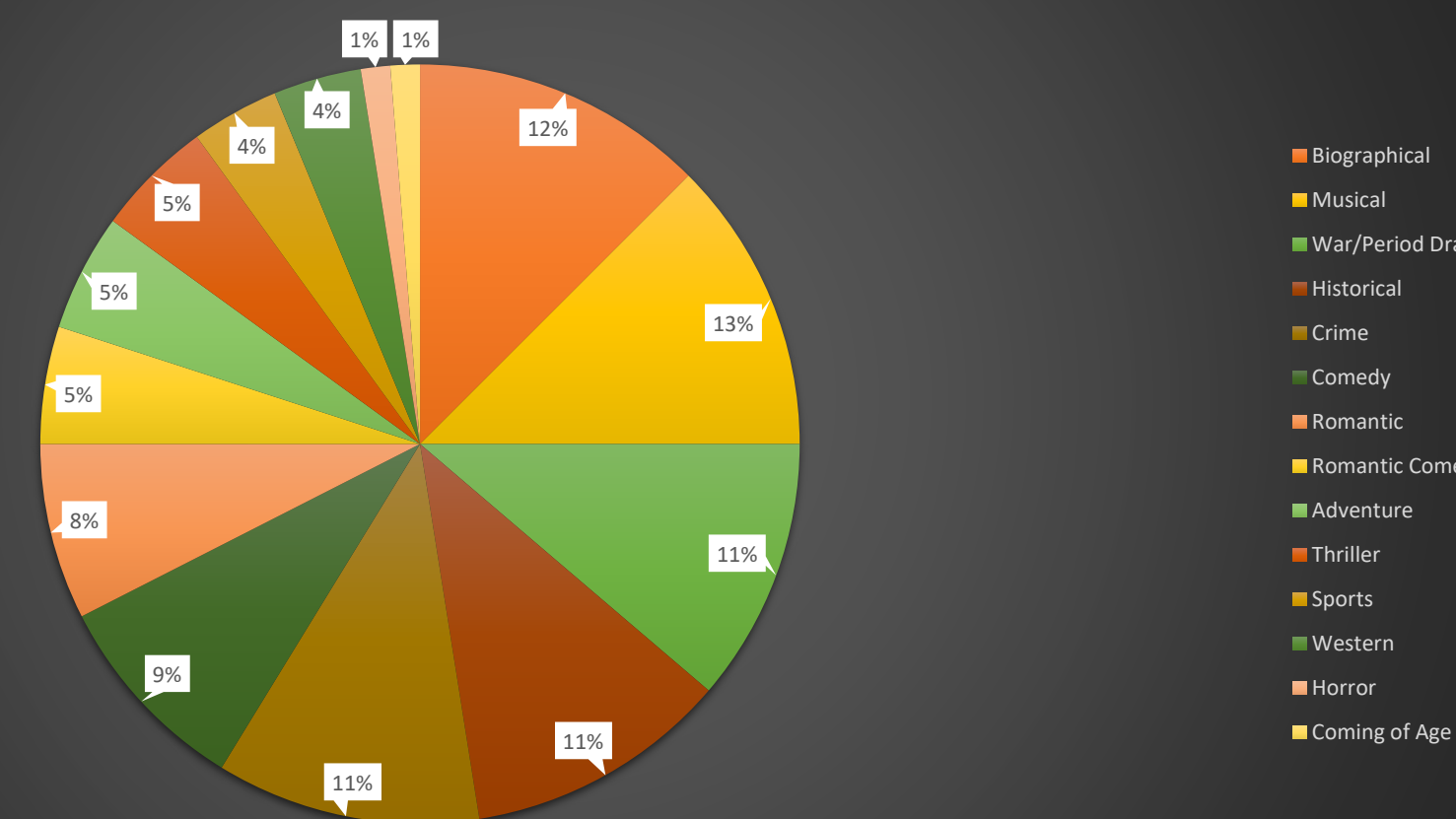


Genre:

From our research, we learned that the most popular genre of film that has traditionally won the Best Picture Award at the Academy Awards is drama.

- In total, 12 drama films have won the award since the ceremony first began in 1929.
- 10 musical films and 10 biographical films have won Best Picture at the Academy Awards.
- Historical films, crime films and war/period drama films have won the award 9 times each.
- Comedy films have won the award 7 times previously.
- Romantic films have won the award 6 times in the past.
- The cross-over genre of romantic-comedies have seen 4 Best Picture winners, as have thriller and adventure films.
- Sports, horror and western films have each won the Best Picture category 3 times each.
- Coming of Age films have only won the award once in the past.

Genre of Best Picture Winning Films



It is worth noting that in the last five to ten years, films with alternative and experimental genres have started receiving more recognition from the Awards. For example, in 2020, the South Korean film, "Parasite," which has a dark-comedy and thriller genre won the award. In 2018, the romantic, dark-fantasy movie, "The Shape of Water," was successful, while in 2017, the coming-of-age film, "Moonlight," was announced as the winner of the category. These films were the first ever films in those genres to win the award, perhaps an indication of a new direction of film to come in future years. This is what prompted us to create our own survey and analyse the data of

Run-Time:

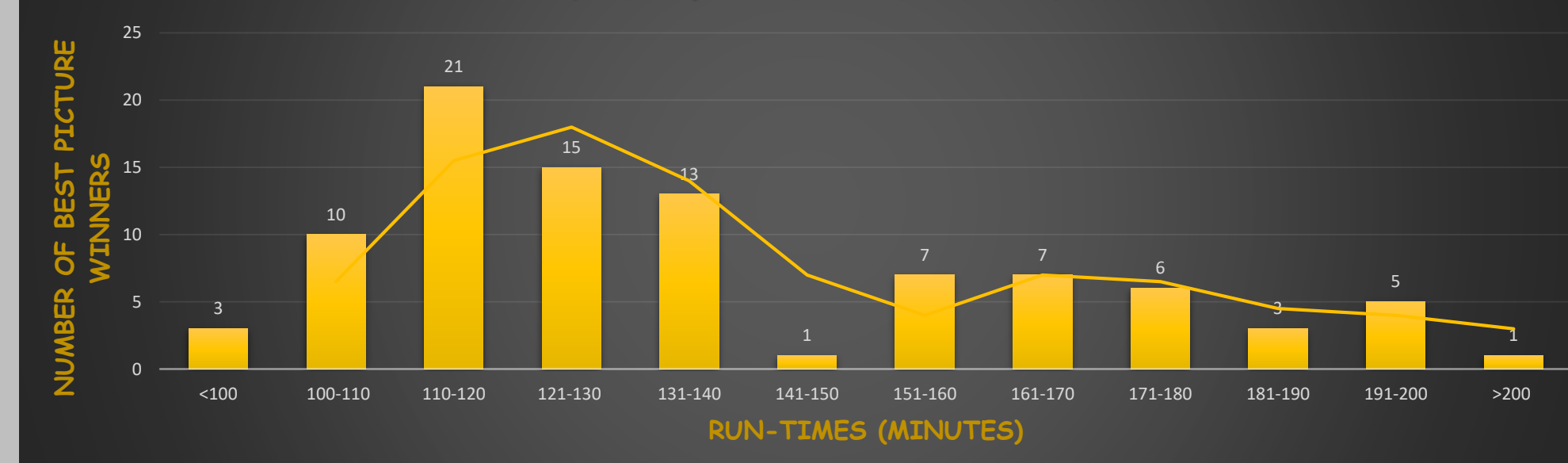
In our research, we identified the run-times of the 92 films that have won the Best Picture award and we calculated the average run-time using the mean and the standard deviation formula.

The mean run-time of the films that have won the award is 136 minutes.

Using this information, we were able to find the standard deviation for film run times using the formula. We found the standard deviation for the 92 films to be 29 minutes.

We have grouped the films with similar run-times together to display a rough trend of what the approximate lengths of the Best Picture winners were. The results are detailed in the table and graph below.

Run-Times of Best Picture Winners



As shown in the graph and according to the trend line, most Best Picture winning films are between 100 and 140 minutes long. This means that the data in this graph is skewed right. Therefore, films that are approximately two hours long generally win the Best Picture Award. This trend has been reflected in the last ten years of the award ceremony, with the shortest film to win the award being 100 minutes long (z-score of -1.2) (2012 Best Picture Winner, "The Artist") and the longest film to win the award being 134 minutes in length (z-score of -0.07) (2014 Best Picture Winner, "12 Years A Slave"). This recent recurring theme amongst Best Picture winning films would seem to suggest that in years to come, films with an overall run-time of approximately two hours will triumph at the awards. This data was also reflected in the results of our survey which will be outlined later in the project.

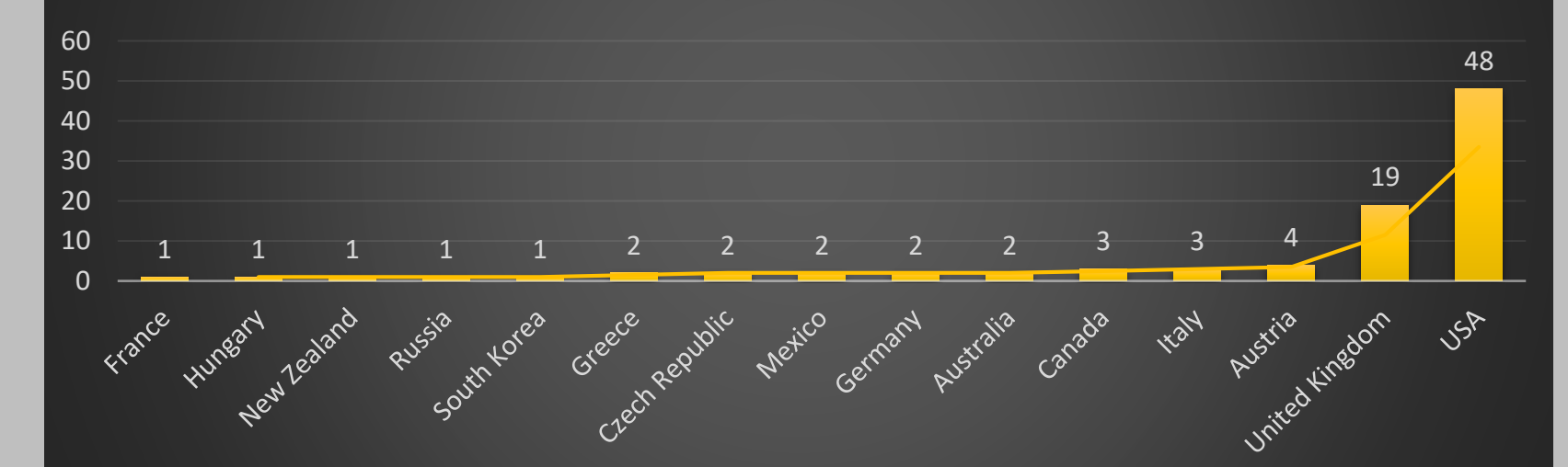
Directors:

Of the 92 Best Picture winners at the Academy Awards, only one has been directed by a female director; 2009 winning film, "The Hurt Locker," which was directed by the American Kathryn Bigelow. From this information, it is clear there is a favouring of films that have been directed by males, with an overall majority of 91 out of 92 Best Picture winners being directed by male directors. This can be attributed to the fact that film direction is a male dominated industry. In 2018, female directors accounted for only 8% of Hollywood films. In 2019, female directors accounted for 12% of Hollywood films showing there is a possibility for more female directed films winning Best Picture in the future with more females entering the field.

An interesting analysis of data relating to the directors of these films is the nationality of the director. In total, 48 directors of the Best Picture winning film were from the USA, making American directed films the most popular type of film to win the award. It also means that over half of all films that have won the award have been directed by an American person.

Films directed by a British director have won the award 19 times, making British directed films the second most acclaimed films in this category. The most recent British directed film to win the award was the 2013 biographical drama, "12 Years a Slave," which was directed by Steve McQueen. A representation of the nationalities of all directors of Best Picture winners can be seen below in a graph.

Nationalities of Directors' of Best Picture Winners



In the last 10 years, 5 of the films that have won the Best Picture category have been directed by American directors. In 2020, Bong Joon-ho became the first South Korean director to have their film win the award. Two Mexican directors, Alejandro G. Iñárritu and Guillermo del Toro, have also seen their films triumph in the category to become the first two Mexican directors to have won the award with their respective films, "Birdman (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)," and "The Shape of Water." In 2012, French director Michel Hazanavicius became the first French director to have their film win the Best Picture award with his comedy-drama film, "The Artist."

Survey Results and Correlation to Researched Data:

For our survey we asked a group of 50 Transition Year students to answer a few short questions about what they feel makes a good movie. We understood that our data may be biased as it is based on the answers from one age group, however, it is the opinions of our peers that we wanted to collect.

We analysed the results and found that;

- 30% of students stated comedy as their favourite film Genre
- This was followed by 20% for each action and horror as favourite genres
- 54% of students said the perfect run time was between 1.5 and 2 hours
- 84% of students said that the lead actors in films influence their decision of whether to watch them.

These results show a great contrast in the students' opinions and the Best Picture Award's previous winners in relation to genre. Comedy, action and horror films have all won relatively few Best Picture Awards compared to the number of people who state it as their favourite genre. However, this could be due to the appeal of these genres to this age group.

However, the survey results confirm our previously collected data that a run-time of between 1.5 and 2 hours seems to be a perfect film length as most students stated this as their preferred run-time option.

Our survey results also show that students agree with the idea of lead actors in films having an influence on the success of those films. This would confirm that this aspect of film is in fact a very real indication of the success of a film in the Best Picture category. It would also encourage directors and producers to secure esteemed actors before the production of a film begins if there is hope for a Best Picture award.

Conclusion:

From undertaking this project and analysing the previous 92 winners, we discovered that there is no set "winning formula" for a Best Picture winner. However, elements such as a drama genre, a two-hour run-time, an American director and esteemed lead actors have proven to be the most rewarded and critically acclaimed in their individual fields. We also learned that trends have changed over time, perhaps due to changes in society, and from the box office hits this year so far it is evident that these changes look set to be sustained as the Academy Awards progress into future years.