

by | Judith Snyder ●●●●



KEEP 'EM READING THAT'S A WRAP!

The best movies capture the imagination and send it flying toward the stars. Cares vanish for a while as we immerse ourselves into an alternative universe. We can go anywhere, do anything, be a hero, save the world. For that little bit of time we are transported.

Whether the movie originated as a screenplay or began as a book, it's often the story that provides this escape. Through gestures and dialogue, the characters come alive, drawing the viewer into the story.

Movies play a big role in our culture, so it's natural that we are curious about the actors and all the people who play a part in moviemaking.

Learning about movies and the methods used to create their magic can inspire creativity and expand thinking. Knowledge of how movies influence thoughts and ideas will give students the ability to make better personal choices.

Books and Movies

Grades 3-6

Many good books, whether modern or classic, have become great movies. Fairy tales furnished Walt Disney with a wealth of inspiration for songs and animation. By giving Heidi a face and a voice, Shirley Temple reintroduced this classic book to multiple American generations. Shakespeare's plays

have become more accessible to students when played by actors on the big screen.

Collaborate with classroom teachers to assign a movie/novel pair to reading groups. After reading the book, students can watch the movie for comparison. Make sure the movies chosen are readily available on several movie sites, or host movie showings in the library during student recesses or after school. Students should enjoy the movie as a good story but also recognize that, like a book, there is a message or theme.

Ask the groups to brainstorm the differences between reading the book and watching the movie. Compare elements of storytelling in each medium using a graphic organizer. What did one medium offer that the other did not? Did one do a better job at projecting the story's message or theme?

Culminate the study by assigning students to state their media preference in individual written responses. Encourage the use of data from the graphic organizer to provide details to support opinions.

Always preview the movie if showing it at school to be sure there are no language or content issues. Many excellent movies can have scenes deemed objectionable by some. Remember to check your school's movie regulations to make sure your choice complies.

GRADES
3-6

(The results may differ depending on whether the book is a novel or a picture book, the quality of writing, acting, directing, etc.)

Exploring Careers

Grades 5–6

Sometimes books and movies can plant a seed of inspiration in the heart of a child. Though few children will actually become the stars they see in the movies, they may be interested in behind-the-scenes jobs. An inquiry into film careers may produce a future stunt performer or makeup artist.

Capstone has several series highlighting careers. The *On the Job*, *Culture in Action*, and *Cooldest Jobs on the Planet* series each contain several titles about the film industry written at a grade 3–5 reading level. The book *Art That Moves: Animation around the World* by John Bliss gives a brief history of animation, describes the different types, and has student activities. *Being a Stunt Performer* by Isabel Thomas provides an overview of the skills and dangers of the job. It explains how stunts are performed and highlights the men and women in the profession. *Special Effects Make-Up Artist* by Jonathan Craig and Bridget Light is filled with captions and sidebars that tell the story of a makeup artist and detail the needed skills, tools, and education.

If your reference materials are limited, work with small groups of students with an interest in theater or film to investigate film careers and share the information with others.

Show the credits at the end of a movie. Task the group with identifying different types of jobs needed to produce a movie. Compile a list (e.g., photography, costume design, music, lighting, sound, special effects, set design, etc.). Or you can read aloud

Book / Movie Suggestions

Novel	Picture Book/Fairytale
<i>The Wizard of Oz</i>	<i>Shrek</i>
<i>The Secret Garden</i>	<i>Jumanji</i>
<i>Tuck Everlasting</i>	<i>Snow White</i>
<i>Coraline</i>	<i>Madeline</i>
<i>Because of Winn-Dixie</i>	<i>The Polar Express</i>

from *Who Rolls through Fire? Working on a Movie Set* by Mary Meinking. The simple text gives an excellent summary of many important film careers. After students choose several careers of interest, direct them to search for books or websites using the key words “film industry.” Get an explanation of seven major film careers at <http://tinyurl.com/lhc5ast>. The Get in Media website has an expansive list of careers with short explanations of each (<http://tinyurl.com/l458g5v>). Check to see if the reading level allows for independent reading, or make arrangements for assistance.

Students should read to discover

- Required skillsets
- Expected job duties
- Requisite education

Students can write notes about each career and attach them to a large poster entitled *Careers in the Film Industry*. Display this in the hallway to share with other interested students.

Movie Star Biographies

Grades 3–5

Students are often attracted to the lives of young actors and actresses because of the close proximity of their age or identification with the characters they play on-screen.

Several publishers, including Lerner, Capstone, and ABDO, have movie star biography series that include popular artists and are written at different reading levels. Books by Jody Jensen Shaffer, like other new books in this category, are filled with photos, captions, sidebars, and inviting text. These high-interest books can be used as a starting point for biography reports or for independent reading.

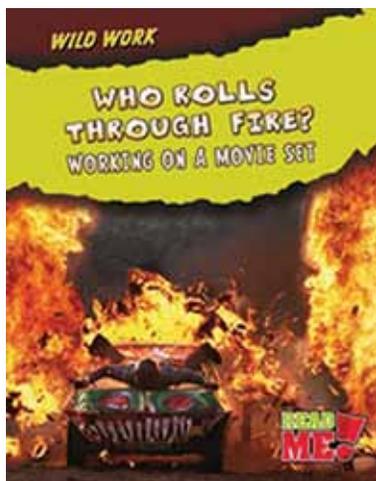
Pull a collection of movie star books from the shelves to create a center. Charge students with the task of skimming the books by reading the captions and sidebars to see what they can learn about the stars in a short amount of time. Create a Star Chart on which students can post interesting facts they discover about the stars. Also remind students that additional website references can be found at the end of most star biographies.

Reading a Screenplay

Grades 4–6

Introduce your future movie stars or movie writers to a different form of writing and reading—screenplays. These are written using a specific form and contain industry abbreviations and specific camera directions. Use the sample screenplay format on www.librarysparks.com to introduce students to this format

ONLINE



before directing them to read the first five to ten pages of the *Alice in Wonderland* script (<http://tinyurl.com/qemvfdy>). As students read the script, ask them to visualize what might be happening on a movie screen.

When screenplay writers convert a book to a movie, they try to interpret the story in a unique fashion. Directors and editors also influence the movie's creation. Show the first ten minutes of any *Alice in Wonderland* movie to compare with the written script and discuss student impressions.

Sample Questions from *Coming Distractions: Questioning Movies*

- Who made the message and why?
- Who is the message for?
- How might others view the message differently?
- What is left out of the message?
- How does the message get and keep my attention?

Screenplays of many other movies can be found at www.simpliccripts.com/movie.html.

Write a Movie Scene

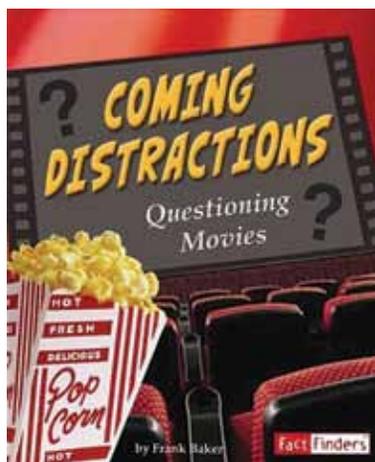
Grades 3–6

After students have practiced reading a screenplay, divide them into groups to try their hands at writing a scene that they adapt from a favorite book. Provide an example of the screenwriting format and let them write their script. Celebrate their hard work by reading scripts aloud. For those with a cinematic passion, offer extra credit for directing and filming the scene. Provide a copy of *Writing a Screenplay* by Liz Miles for students interested in learning more about this type of writing.

Questioning Movies

Grades 3–6

Children need to develop an understanding of the power movies have and the messages they communicate. This awareness comes with asking questions and making observations.



The book *Coming Distractions: Questioning Movies* by Frank Baker provides a list of questions for children to consider when watching a movie. Answers to each question are explained in separate chapters, along with an example and a "Try It Out" section.

Read this book aloud and discuss one chapter per class session. Show a few minutes of a movie with the explicit direction to watch for the concept discussed in the chapter. Where possible, engage students in the "Try It Out" activities.

Movies spin tales that dig into our psyche. They inspire creativity and dreams. They offer all of us a chance to see the world differently and experience something we normally wouldn't do or feel. Opening the doors to this industry may set a student on a path he or she never knew existed.

Judith Snyder is a seasoned teacher/librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of the *Jump-Start Your Library* series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from *UpstartBooks* (2008), and a picture book, *What Do You See?* (2009), from *Odyssey Books*.