



Adapting and Interpreting Drama



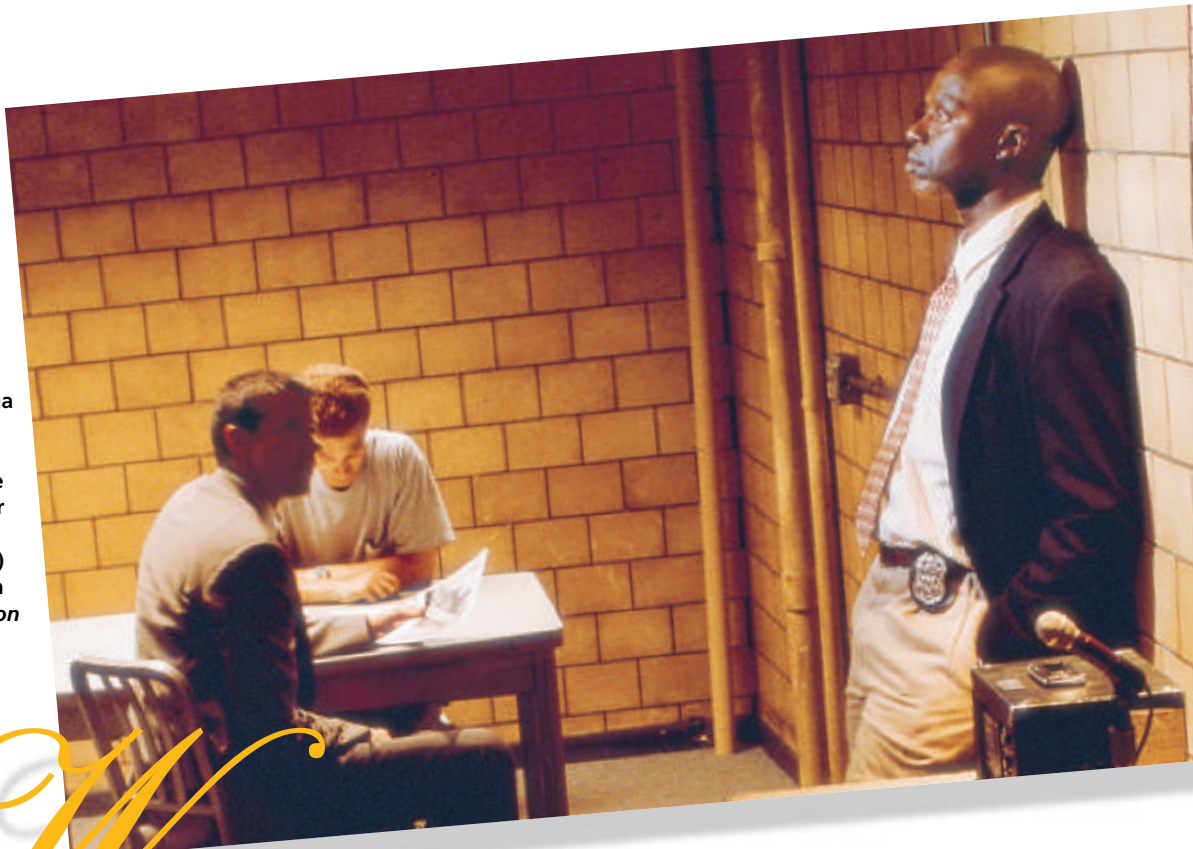
As movie and television technology developed, the essentials of drama were adapted to fit these new forms of entertainment.



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*Theater and
Other Media*

Television drama brings theater into the home. Shown here are Andre Braugher (standing) and Kyle Secor (left) with a guest on *Homicide: Life on the Street*.



Wherever there's magic and make believe and an audience—there's theater. . . . It may not be YOUR theater, but it's theater for somebody somewhere.

—CHARACTER IN ALL ABOUT EVE (1950)
WRITTEN BY JOSEPH MANKIEWICZ

SETTING THE SCENE

Focus Questions

How did moviemaking develop?

What is unique about movie production and acting?

How did television develop?

What is unique about television production and acting?

What roles do critics play in the success of productions?

How does the audience affect the success of productions?

Vocabulary

animation
live-action film
close-up
zoom

dissolve
crosscut shot
story idea
the treatment

storyboard
film editing
three-camera system
criticism

review
analysis
receipts
ratings

Films, televisions, videos, laserdiscs, cable, satellite dishes, CD-ROMs, and digital imagery have become part of our vocabulary and our daily lives. They have the power to bring the theater into every living room, but not without some adjustments. In making the transformation from stage to screen, the basics of theater have been modified, rearranged, compressed, stretched, and adapted to fit these new media. In the process, however, certain fundamental principles have endured and remained true to their origins. While new technologies have brought theater to millions of people throughout the world, one simple fact remains: the mission of the media, whatever its form, is to entertain, to amuse, and to educate.

From the Stage to the Big Screen

Up to this point, you have primarily studied the live theater, the skills it requires, and its history and development. Many of you, though, are familiar with drama in other forms. Most, if not all, of you have been to a movie theater or watched television. These vehicles for dramatic presentation are very similar to, but also somewhat different from, the live theater.

Film began its development prior to the invention of television, and provided much of the technology necessary for the evolution of television programming. If we were to look at the development of dramatic entertainment on a time line, then, film would follow live theater and come before television.

THE HISTORY OF FILM

In 1824, Peter Mark Roget, best known for his thesaurus, wrote a paper entitled “Persistence of Vision with Regard to Moving Objects.” In it he proposed that an image briefly perceived by the eye remains in sight for a fraction of a second even after the image is no longer present. This phenomenon, he reasoned, would allow the eye to blend a series of sequential images if they were presented quickly enough. If each image in the sequence were changed slightly from the one before, the illusion of movement could be achieved. The moving picture was born. Inventors raced to find a practical way to produce moving pictures, conceiving such devices as the exotically named zoetrope, a wheel that spun hand-drawn images in front of the viewer, and the kinetograph, an early forerunner of the motion-picture projector.

The development of moving pictures advanced further when, in 1885, George Eastman invented a paper film that could be used to create a set of sequential pictures in so-called “flip books.” He later developed an improved photographic film stock that consisted of a celluloid strip that substantially simplified the filmmaking process. Eastman called his new film “Kodak” because he liked the letter K and wanted the name both to start and end with it.

In 1891, Thomas Edison, along with W. K. L. Dickson, combined the technology of the photograph and Roget’s discovery of the persistence of vision to invent the first motion picture camera. He relied on popular theater acts of the time—jugglers, acrobats, and other vaudeville performers—to provide the subject matter for his new invention. One such performer was magician J. Stewart Blackton. After becoming interested in the notion of moviemaking, Blackton rented Edison’s equipment and started making movies under the name Vitagraph Film Company.



Blackton experimented extensively with the equipment and with the concept of **animation**, or making drawn or inanimate objects appear to live and move. He produced the first drawn animation, *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, in 1906. It involved drawing and photographing a series of chalk figures on a blackboard. He also experimented with the first stop-motion animation, which resulted in *Humpty Dumpty Circus* in 1906. In this experiment, he moved children's toys around, stopping them at various intervals and photographing each slight change in position. These films laid the foundation for the art of animation and eventually led to the sophisticated animation we now find in films such as Twentieth Century Fox's *Anastasia* (1997) and the first entirely computer-generated film, *Toy Story* (1995).

Not all early films were animated, though. **Live-action films**, those in which the action is provided by living creatures, were also developing. The earliest films in the United States were not intended to be projected at all. Short features such as *Kiss* (1896) were simply pieces of unedited film made to be viewed on a Kinetoscope—a hand-held device consisting of a light and a lens.

The craft of moviemaking continued to evolve through the early part of the twentieth century. A former projectionist for Edison, Edwin S. Porter, brought film closer to its modern style in *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). His innovations included the use of camera movements and the continuity of editing, which involves cutting pieces of film together to produce a smooth, straightforward story. Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein set the standard for other silent films when he produced *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which remains a classic.

Sound was always important to both theater and film. The old silent movies were anything but silent for the audience. A theater pianist would play music to accompany the film. Sometimes there was even a drummer to provide sound effects needed to enhance comedies. Charlie Chaplin went so far as to compose complete musical scores for his work. A full symphonic orchestra accompanied *Battleship Potemkin*.

▼ CUE

When Blackton became disenchanted with filmmaking, he sold his studio to Jack, Harry, Sam, and Albert Warner, who renamed the studio Warner Brothers.



Walt Disney was a pioneer in animated films. Walt Disney Studio's 1940 release of the innovative *Fantasia* marked a new era in animated feature films.

While sound was a major step forward in the evolution of film, it was disastrous for some established actors whose careers had grown out of film, which up to that point had been silent, rather than theater. Their voices lacked the character and quality theater-going audiences had come to expect. Consequently, many silent-film actors could not make the transition to “talkies.”

One of the most successful stories of transition from the stage to the screen is that of a family that was destined to become an acting dynasty—the Barrymores. John, Ethel, and Lionel Barrymore, a respected stage family, became a distinguished film family as well. Ethel and Lionel’s stage-trained voices allowed them to move from silent films into the talkies. John, one of the brightest stars on Broadway, easily made the jump to films. Because of his classically handsome side-view, he became known as the “great profile,” a tribute that would not have been possible in a theatrical setting because close-up views of stage actors were rarely possible. Despite their many successes, the trio starred in only one film together, *Rasputin and the Empress* (1932). The Barrymore tradition, however, continues to this day with Drew Barrymore, who has starred in films ranging from Steven Spielberg’s hit *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) to Wes Craven’s *Scream* (1996).

With the advent of sound on film, movies had all of the capabilities of the theater and few of its physical limitations. The first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), seemed to predict the future when Al Jolson uttered the now-famous words, “You ain’t heard nothin’ yet.”

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE STAGE AND FILM

Early filmmakers naturally borrowed heavily from the conventions of the theater. Webster defines a convention as “an established technique, practice, or device.” Setting, for example, is a theatrical convention. We know that the trees and flowers we see in the scenery are not real, but we accept them as being trees and flowers. We know that we are not actually looking into someone’s living room from which one wall has been removed, but we accept the set as a living room. Because of the differences between the stage and film, though, many theatrical conventions changed as they became conventions of moviemaking.

Early films were no more than theatrical works performed before a camera. In a sense, the movie camera simply assumed the position of a member of the audience in a theater. Like a member of the audience, the camera remained in a fixed position, sometimes turning left or right as one might move the head. In imitation of a theater environment, actors were placed thirty feet from the camera.

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Mickey Mouse made history in Walt Disney’s *Steamboat Willie* (1928) by becoming the first cartoon character to speak. Today, when sound is being added to a film, it is referred to as “Mickey Mousing.”

Key Events in the History of the Movies

- 1824** Peter Mark Roget advances the theory of persistence of vision.
- 1872** Eadweard Muybridge begins experiments on sequential photography.
- 1885** George Eastman invents paper film, replacing the cumbersome and fragile glass film.
- 1887** Thomas Edison and W. K. L. Dickson use a perforated film to capture sequential movement.
- 1891** Edison and Dickson invent the first movie camera.
- 1895** The Lumière Brothers publicly show a projected film in Paris—the birth of movies.
- 1920s** The number of movie palaces skyrockets. The Roxy in New York seats 6,200 people and employs a staff of 300.
- 1927** Sound comes to the movies in Warner Brothers' *The Jazz Singer*. Movie admissions in Europe rise from 60 million a week in 1927 to 110 million a week in 1929.
- 1930** Of 122 million people living in the United States, 95 million attend a movie each week.
- 1932** Technicolor™ is invented and begins to appear in movies.
- 1953** Wide screen CinemaScope™, stereo, and 3D challenge television's growing audience.
- 1982** The first totally computer generated sequence appears in a feature film, *Star Trek II*.
- 1993** Computer generated life forms are used to create special effects in *Jurassic Park*.

The famous director D. W. Griffith, however, changed all of that. One of the greatest innovators in film history, Griffith guided movies from the stage-proscenium style of filmmaking that was standard for the day to a style that used a variety of shots, light and shade composition, and film editing. He started to use the **close-up**, a shot taken at a very close distance, and the **zoom**, using a zoom lens to shoot the subject from a distance that makes the subject appear to be very close, in addition to other techniques that greatly advanced the art of moviemaking. In terms of both style and content, his 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*, became one of the most influential pictures in film history.

As the camera began to move around, no longer acting as a member of the audience, scenery had to become more three-dimensional, more real. The movie camera could go into a real room or outside beneath a real tree, so stage scenery could no longer give movie audiences the effects they demanded.

Because the audience is usually fairly distant from a stage actor, the stage acting style is usually a bit exaggerated or overly dramatic. This is necessary in order for the audience in the balcony to appreciate the action as much as those sitting in the first rows. A movie camera, though, can zoom in on the actor and record the slightest movement, expression, or word. Thus the stage style of acting does not appear natural to the film audience.

Another convention of the theater that changes with film is the ability to communicate time and place. On the stage, with some exceptions, time is fairly one-dimensional—it moves forward. To depict several actions occurring at once onstage, each action must be staged and spotlighted separately. Unfortunately, it is difficult for all members of the audience to focus on multiple sections of the stage at the same time. Filmmakers, however, can use camera shots, camera angles, and film editing to show jumps in place and time. Such radical techniques as the **dissolve**, which shows the passage of time by superimposing one shot onto another as the first fades away, and the close-up greatly improved the art of storytelling. Another technique, called the **crosscut shot**, switches abruptly from one scene to another to show events happening at the same time but in different places.

Application ACTIVITY

Describe how you would stage four familiar kinds of scenes—for example, a scene in a mall or in a kitchen—for a stage production and for a movie. Focus on the differences in the theatrical conventions.

FROM THE PROS

“The task I’m trying to achieve is, above all, to make you see.”

—D. W. GRIFFITH,
FILM DIRECTOR



Innovative use of a variety of camera shots made D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* a classic in moviemaking. In this scene, John Wilkes Booth, played by Raoul Walsh, jumps from the theater box after shooting Abraham Lincoln, played by Joseph Henabery, as Mrs. Lincoln (Alberta Lee) attends to her injured husband.

From Movies to Television

When moving pictures first appeared, audiences were amazed that they could walk into a familiar building in their hometown and through their imaginations go places and see things they had never thought possible. As movies became an accepted part of our culture, more and more people took advantage of the entertainment opportunity movies provided.

As Mickey Mouse was making history by speaking his first words in 1928, another entertainment breakthrough was on the horizon. When the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) began testing something called television, they were on the brink of discovering a medium that would forever change the way we live.

The development of television from moving pictures was somewhat less radical than that from the stage to movies because by that time, audiences were accustomed to recorded entertainment. Television, however, was a breakthrough because it made entertainment cheaper, more accessible, and more convenient. It brought tragedy, comedy, and information right into the living room.

Unlike the movies, which by their nature require time to film, edit, produce, and distribute to their audiences, electronic television signals (electromagnetic waves) are sent through transmitters and picked up by antennas that feed them to television sets, allowing for almost instantaneous transmission of programs. That is why early television specialized in live events such as sports, disasters, and important speeches.

Technological progress was slowed during World War II because technicians were focused on the war effort, but interest in



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In 1939 the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) was showing a Disney cartoon, *Mickey's Gala Premiere*. When war was declared, the screen went dark. When the war ended six years later, the station signed back on and picked up the cartoon exactly where it had left off.

Twelve Angry Men, written by Reginald Rose, was presented on live television in 1954, winning three Emmy awards. Rose's teleplay was adapted to the screen for the 1957 film, shown here, starring Henry Fonda, E. G. Marshall, Martin Balsam, and Lee J. Cobb.



developing television came back stronger than ever after the war to begin what we now know as the Golden Age of Television. The concept of the television show as we know it appeared after World War II when programming expanded to include news, comedy, drama, and sports. Early television had two major drawbacks: it was black and white, and the screen was extremely small. These initial limitations, however, were no problem for vaudeville-style variety acts and nightclub performers who were accustomed to the small stage. The popularity of Milton Berle, Phil Silvers, Red Skelton, and Jackie Gleason caused sales of television sets to soar.

Often performed live, early teleplays such as *Marty*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, and *The Miracle Worker* benefited from the experiences and experiments of moviemakers. Close-ups and movable camera shots were employed from the start. Even so, when these teleplays were redone for the big screen, the moviemakers' advantages of unlimited settings, multiple takes, and crosscutting enhanced the production.

In the last fifteen years, television has experienced what some critics refer to as the Second Golden Age. The one-hour drama format suddenly made leaps forward in tone and quality. The writing on such shows as *Hill Street Blues*, *MASH*, *Seinfeld*, and *E.R.* seemed to adopt the issue- and character-driven style of playwrights such as Arthur Miller. In fact, many distinguished writers who have written in other media,

Andy Griffith and Ron Howard starred in *The Andy Griffith Show*, which ran for 249 episodes starting in 1960. Still in reruns, the program is representative of the type of wholesome family entertainment made popular on television.





Recent dramatic offerings on television are receiving critical acclaim for their quality and creativity. Pictured left to right are Jerry Orbach, Carey Lowell, and Benjamin Bratt in *Law and Order*.

including Woody Allen, Neil Simon, Rod Serling, Paddy Chayefsky, and Gore Vidal, have written dramatic works for television. Television has become the new home for the kind of thought-provoking, issue-centered material usually reserved for serious live theater.

Highly innovative form-stretching shows and unusual hybrids of absurdity and drama such as *Picket Fences* and *The X-Files* illustrate future possibilities for increased complexity of tone in television writing. None of these shows were content to stick to a single format. The story might be based in a law office, hospital, or police station, but the problems and relationships at their core are reflections of contemporary life. Shakespeare might say these programs are indeed “holding the mirror up to nature.”

Application ACTIVITIES

1. Find out more about television history. Choose a television program or a star and find out all you can. Share what you find with the class.
2. Do you prefer watching productions made for film or productions made for television? Explain your answer. What are the differences and the similarities?

Dramatic Structure and the Screen

Whether for live theater, film, or television, all drama has the same basic structure. First the characters and their situation are introduced to the audience (exposition). Then an incident or problem arises that drives the plot. The conflict is then played out through a series of incidents. Finally, the conflict or problem is resolved in some manner (see Chapter 5 for an explanation of the development of plot).

WRITING AND FILMING MOVIES

Movies and television productions are generally written in several stages. In the first stage the **story idea** itself is expressed, usually in a few sentences. For example, the story idea for *Jurassic Park* might have been expressed in the following way:

An island becomes a computerized theme park that uses cloned dinosaurs. A storm hits the island and allows the dinosaurs to escape. These dinosaurs threaten visitors. Some visitors are killed, and others eventually escape from the island on a helicopter.

The second stage, known as the **treatment**, involves telling the story in narrative form without the use of dialogue. The amount of detail included in the treatment varies, but an average treatment for a two-hour film can run anywhere from four to twelve pages in length. Because film executives are bombarded with film ideas, treatments allow them to view ideas quickly and to choose ideas worth pursuing without reading entire scripts.

Next is the script stage, where the treatment is fleshed out and the narrative is converted to dialogue. There are two basic script formats: a film format used for movies and a tape format used for many television shows. One major difference between film and television is that filming for a movie usually takes place on location while taping for most TV programs takes place in a studio. This is, however, not as universally true as it once was. Many television programs now occasionally shoot some of their scenes on location as well as on a set in a studio. Generally, though, writers like to think that “film goes anywhere, tape stays in the studio.” Film scripts are normally about 120 pages long. The assumption is that if each page represents one minute of the performance, the film will run about two hours.

To help the filmmaker visualize the screenplay, a useful tool called the storyboard was developed in the 1920s by Webb Smith of the Walt Disney Studio. The **storyboard** is simply the depiction of the script in

comic-book form. Disney used it to help artists make short cartoons and eventually to develop feature-length animated films. The storyboard was later employed for the development of live-action as well as animated films. Today its use is commonplace among filmmakers. Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, James Cameron, and Robert Zemeckis all use storyboards to help them stage stunts, develop special effects, and combine different techniques on film.

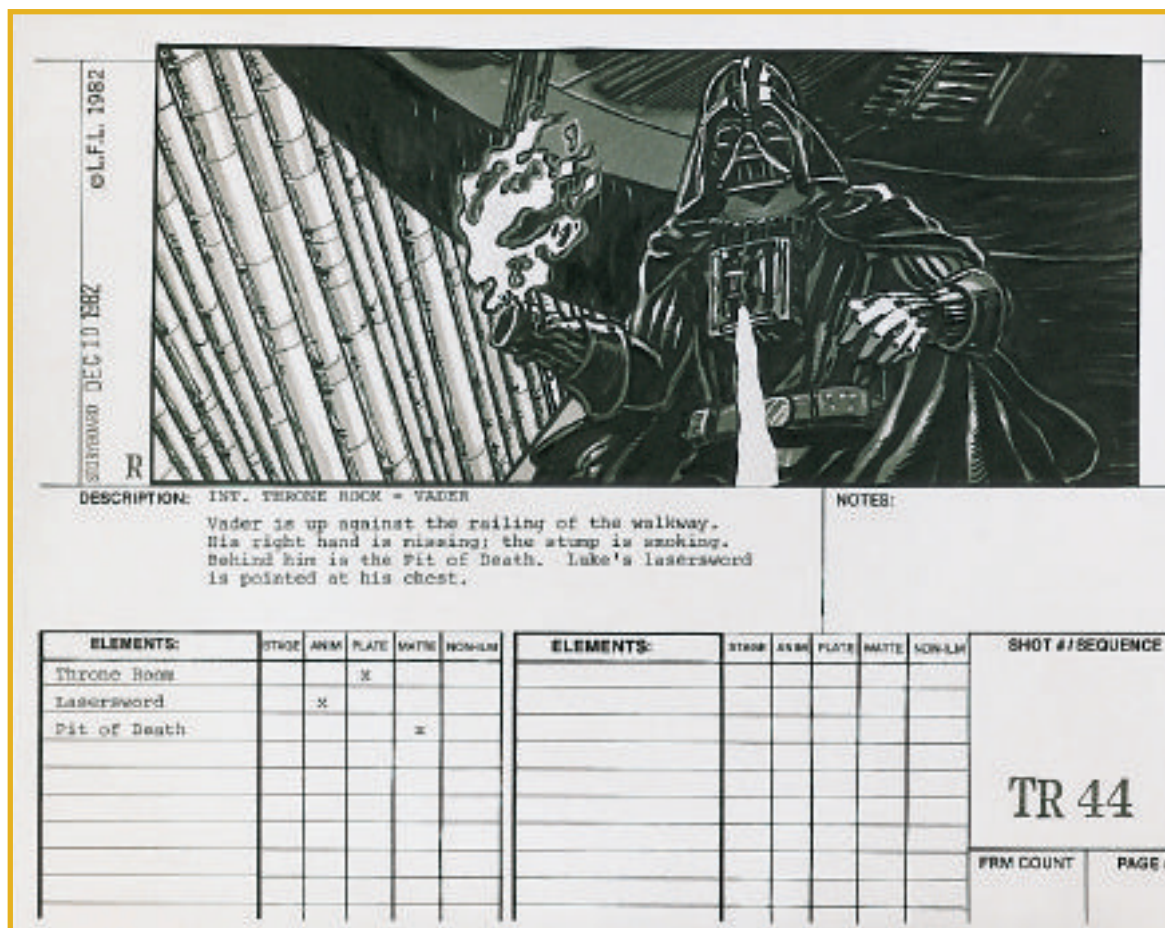
The storyboard for a special-effects film becomes a blueprint for each scene. Each drawing lists what effects will be used in the shot. *The Empire Strikes Back* had almost five hundred panels in its storyboard, while *The Return of the Jedi* had almost one thousand. Dennis Muren and the other special-effects wizards at George Lucas's special-effects company, Industrial Light & Magic, took the storyboard process one step further in *The Return of the Jedi* by filming three-dimensional storyboards called animatics.

Unlike live drama, in which action and dialogue proceed from beginning to end in sequence with no chance of a retake, a film is rarely shot in sequence, and multiple takes are commonplace. Which elements of the script are filmed may depend on the locations, the weather, and the availability of the actors. In the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, Judy Garland's singing of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" was the last scene to be filmed, yet it appears early in the final version of the film.

Film editing, done by the editor in conjunction with the director, involves choosing and sequencing the various pieces of film so that the end



In 1980, George Lucas released the second part of the *Star Wars* trilogy, *The Empire Strikes Back*. Among its stars were Billy Dee Williams who plays Lando Calrissian. He is shown here with Darth Vader (David Prowse) and Bobba Fett (Jeremy Bullock). Lucas used storyboards to plan the special effects in the movie.



Shown here is a storyboard used in the production of George Lucas's *The Return of the Jedi*.

FROM THE PROS

"Special effects are a means, a tool for telling a story. A special effect without a story is a pretty boring thing."

—GEORGE LUCAS
WRITER, PRODUCER,
DIRECTOR

product tells a coherent story. Editing can make two people filmed at different times appear to be in the same room. Many an aspiring new actor has labored through take after take of his or her scene only to find the film on the proverbial "cutting room floor."

In an animated film, the various voices of the animated characters are recorded separately and then edited together. The sound editor makes it seem as if the characters are carrying on a conversation, even though the actors might have recorded the dialogue weeks, months, or even years apart. Similarly, the graphic elements are "layered." The characters and the settings in which they appear are created separately and later merged to create what the audience sees.

Application ACTIVITY

Working in a small group or with a partner, choose a scene from a movie, a television program, or a play. You might want to choose a scene from "A Treasury of Scenes and Monologues." Assume that the scene will be part of a movie, and draw a series of storyboards for that scene. Using the storyboard from *The Return of the Jedi* as a model, include the description of the setting and action directly below the picture.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF TELEVISION

Television has some special dramatic considerations. Much television programming is made up of comic or dramatic series. The same characters with the same personal traits appear in the same basic setting week after week. A television situation comedy (called a sitcom, for short) or a drama normally requires a writer to address only the development and resolution of the plot. Since the exposition (the characters and their situations) is already established, the writer can advance quickly to the problem faced in the episode.

Writing a television script presents one obstacle not found in film: commercials. Writers must make sure the program is written in segments that can be broken up by commercial advertisements. He or she must make interest in the show so compelling that the viewer will sit through the almost eight minutes of commercials aired in a half-hour program. Ideally, a point of high interest will come just prior to each commercial break so viewers will want to return to the program. Integrating these breaks into the dramatic structure is not an easy task. Remote-control channel changers have made it easier for viewers to check, and become interested in, other programming during commercial breaks, adding to the challenge of the script writer's task.

The introduction and the common use of taped programming in television allows television producers to do retakes of scenes much as moviemakers do. Television programs, however, tend to occur on a tighter schedule than movies do, so timesaving tactics are sometimes employed. For example, when taping a television show, some production companies tape the dress rehearsal before a live audience and then edit the dress rehearsal into the final tape. Some directors prefer to keep the live audience's reaction in the final version. Because of multiple retakes

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At a cost of \$200 million, the 1997 film *Titanic* became one of the costliest films of all time. However, it had already grossed that amount by its twenty-fifth day of release. The high cost was due in part to its spectacular special effects.

The Miracle Worker is an example of a script that has been adapted for theater, film, and television. Patty Duke played Helen Keller in the 1962 movie. She is shown here as Annie Sullivan with Melissa Gilbert as Helen Keller in the 1979 television presentation.



resulting from actors' miscues, prop or technical problems, and the many other situations associated with a performance, a thirty-minute taped show may take two or three hours to tape.

Most television shows are taped using a **three-camera system** that was developed by Desi Arnaz and cameraman Karl Freund while taping *I Love Lucy*. This use of multiple cameras allows the director to switch from close-ups to wide-angle shots and to get various camera angles on the same actor during just one take. This

form of taping offers greater coverage of shots and remains an industry standard to this day. Although this system now usually includes more than three cameras, the term *three-camera system* is still used.

Application ACTIVITIES

1. Choose three of your favorite movies and write the story ideas that might have been presented (see the story idea for *Jurassic Park* on page 546).
2. Watch a television sitcom or drama. What techniques does the writer use to get audience members to continue watching after the commercial break?

Performing Before the Camera

The success of all acting, whether it is on the stage, in film, or on television, depends on preparation. Even a brilliant improviser must be familiar with the character and the situation he or she is portraying. It is safe to say no actor can be too familiar with the text. Rehearsing thoroughly and diligently is crucial. Nevertheless, preparing and performing before a live audience is not the same as preparing and performing before a camera. Although some aspects remain the same, such as moment-to-moment truthfulness, full investment, focus and relaxation, acting for the stage requires different skills than those required for film or TV. The challenges are related but distinctly different.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STAGE AND FILM ACTING

Perhaps the fundamental differences arise because the performer onstage has a live audience. The playwright, actor, and audience have a more personal relationship. Audience reaction is immediate, and the actor is able to make adjustments as the play unfolds. Before a major new play or musical is performed before New York critics and audiences, for example, it is often tried out and refined in places like Boston, St. Louis, or Cincinnati and adjusted according to audience response. Plays that run for weeks, months, and even years are constantly evolving. Lines may be rewritten and interpretations refined. Unlike actors before a camera, actors onstage can reach out to and win over their audiences during the course of the play. Constantly making adjustments based on the individual audience means that a stage play for an actor and a director is never really finished or “in the can” in the sense that a movie is.

FROM THE PROS

“Theater is a writer’s medium, television is a producer’s medium, and film is a director’s medium.”

—JAMES LIPTON
HOST OF BRAVO
NETWORK’S *INSIDE
THE ACTOR’S STUDIO*



Dustin Hoffman is known as a film actor, having been nominated for an Oscar six times and winning Best Actor twice. In 1985 he turned his acting skill toward television, appearing in *Death of a Salesman*, written by Arthur Miller, which also starred John Malkovich.

Sometimes the ever-present camera can be quite helpful. In filming the famous chariot race in *Ben Hur*, a serious accident occurred, and the title character, played by Charlton Heston, was nearly thrown to his death. The camera caught all of the action. The scene was so compelling that it was kept in the final version of the film.

Moviemakers face a somewhat different challenge. While they may also try out a film on test audiences, their options are somewhat limited by costs and the patchwork manner in which movies are put together. Test audiences prompted Warner Brothers to revise the ending of *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986) and turned a potential box office flop into a success. Such examples are fairly rare, however. While an actor may be asked to repeat a scene again and again, fundamental changes rarely occur once production has begun.

The audience's physical perception is also an important distinction between acting onstage and acting onscreen. A person viewing a stage play always has a wide-angle view of the action. There are no close-ups to focus attention on one actor, a detail of the setting, a twitch of the lip, or a nervous movement of a hand. This challenges key performers in the theater to fill the stage with their voices and their presence at appropriate times and requires minor performers to be mindful of their important but supporting roles. Any member of the audience might focus on any character at any time.

Film actors must be constantly aware that the camera records everything they do—no matter how small or subtle the action. The actor's every muscle twitch, hesitation, breath, and gesture is exactly recorded. The lens of a camera is a much finer point of focus than a theater audience is. A blink, the flare of a nostril, or the curl of a lip can speak volumes in a close-up. Film acting requires subtleties that would be lost onstage.

Physical acting onstage must be energized and fully driven, involving voice, body, and gesture. The audience agrees to make believe that the story told in front of them, live, in the same room, is wherever and when-

ever they are being told. The playwright paints with words, but the filmmaker paints with visual images. Film and television have the capacity to present real locations, properties, and even weather. The accompanying acting must therefore be equally real.

With time and experience, a film actor can become quite skillful at playing for the single eye of the camera. The stage actor, on the other hand, must strive to open up his or her performance to all of the eyes filling the theater.

Film acting calls for control and understatement. Morgan Freeman's quiet style won an Oscar nomination for Best Actor in 1989 for *Driving Miss Daisy*. He is shown here with his co-star in that movie, Jessica Tandy.



Like the camera, the presence of highly sensitive recording equipment and microphones on the sets of films and in television studios requires some adjustments on the part of the performers. Because members of a live stage audience might be in the last row or balcony two hundred feet away, strongly projected voices are sometimes necessary to the stage actor's technique. This is not true in film.

Stage acting has become far less theatrical and more naturalistic over the last fifty years. This change may be due in part to changing expectations because of long-term exposure to the realistic acting in film and television. Another factor of the change in style is modern microphones that are virtually undetectable but allow voices to be projected and amplified. Consequently, the distinction between film acting and stage acting has diminished. Even so, the crucial differences in voice projection, physical acting, size and openness of the performance, and the relationship between actor and audience remain.

FILMING OUT OF SEQUENCE

In addition to audience, performers on the stage or the screen are profoundly affected by the manner in which the final performance is put together. The stage play is presented to a live audience from beginning to end. Even though individual scenes and acts may be rehearsed time and time again in isolation, there is always a strong context for the scene, a continuity provided by an ongoing and healthy collaboration with the director and other members of the cast. Preparation proceeds strongly from the whole to the parts and back to the whole. The stage actor has rehearsal time to build a character scene by scene over a four-week period of eight-hour days and six-day weeks.

Film or television dramas, on the other hand, are shot wildly out of sequence, often in random snippets. Actors read scripts in isolation without the benefit of discussion with the director or the other actors. Sometimes only in the first take of a scene, called the "master shot," are all the actors present with the full set. Future takes of close-ups and specifically chosen set-ups are filmed later and edited in. Scenes planned for filming on a given day may be shuffled due to weather or schedule changes with little notice. Performing in such piecemeal fashion requires an actor to work hard to keep the order of the story and the development of character in mind. He or she must be familiar with the entirety of an assigned role from the first day of shooting, drawing on what stage actors call the "emotional memory" of the master shot.

All acting requires imagination and focus, but in film special demands are made on an actor. He or she may be called on to address a rolling camera as though speaking to another actor, but, of course, no one

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During the making of *Jurassic Park*, sound designer Gary Rydstrom had to make sounds for a creature that no human being had ever heard—the dinosaur. Rydstrom looked to nature for a solution. The frightening sounds of the raptors in the film are actually a combination of sounds made by a dolphin and a walrus. Rydstrom fed the sounds into a computer and created the combination on a keyboard.

In 1996 Michael Jordan appeared with a cast of animated characters in Warner Brothers' *Space Jam*. In order to appear to be interacting with cartoon characters, Jordan was first filmed in a scene with a person acting in place of the cartoon character. Later a computer was used to substitute the animated character, in this case Bugs Bunny, for the actor.



is there except the camera operator, director, and a crew of technicians. In many recent, big-budget, state-of-the-art special-effects films, the other actor will be added in later by computer or other technical means. The actor filming his or her “half” of the scene must rely purely on concentration, instinct, and imagination. Moreover, attention to the details of the actions and tasks being performed is vital in film since a scene might be filmed over and over. Each shot and take must match precisely, down to the placement of a drinking glass or the fold of an actor’s clothing.

Application ACTIVITIES

1. Explain how acting on the screen differs from stage acting. Think of some actions that can be done on-screen that are impossible onstage.
2. Choose a famous actor, male or female, and find out what kind of training or experience he or she had before becoming successful. How did he or she get the first “big break”?

Assessing the Success of a Production

The art and craft of drama have always been subject to review and analysis, called **criticism**. When drama moved onto the movie and TV screen, critics continued to offer their reviews and analyses. Modern media present us daily with critical reviews. Newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and even television itself provide us with critics' opinions and recommendations concerning new movies and upcoming television programs. These criticisms can affect the audience's response to a production and therefore the ultimate success of that production.

TWO TYPES OF CRITICISM

Although individual critics may approach a work from widely varying perspectives, their criticisms can be roughly divided into two types: reviews and analyses. Critics whose **reviews** appear in newspapers and popular magazines and on TV or the Internet might include some analysis of the works to support their opinions, but their primary function is to recommend or not recommend a movie or television program to their audience. Some would prefer to call such people reviewers rather than critics. The review type of criticism is probably the type that is most familiar to the viewing public.

The growth of criticism in the media has been accompanied by a change in the role of the critic. Some critics today have become personalities in their own right. Roger Ebert and the late Gene Siskel are thought by many to have influenced this trend. Both began by writing movie reviews for different newspapers. They were later paired in a syndicated television show on which they reviewed and discussed current movies. Their insights and frequently sharp differences of opinion made them immensely popular. Their well-known mark of a good movie, "two thumbs up," has found its way into the vocabulary of film.

Positive reviews can help boost ticket sales. Caution should be exercised, however, when considering the advice or opinion of a reviewer as a factor in deciding to attend a movie or watch a TV show. Many a moviegoer has been disappointed by a movie that critics and reviewers have raved about.

Consider that, as all people do, reviewers have individual tastes. Rarely is it possible to find a reviewer whose taste exactly matches yours. Moreover, a popular critic or reviewer may be more interested in advancing his or her own career and celebrity status than in offering a carefully weighed assessment of a film or a TV program. There might be many

Many people consider the opinions of professional critics when deciding whether to see a movie. Critics such as Roger Ebert (left) and the late Gene Siskel (right) have accustomed viewers to “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” reviews.



reasons, but questions concerning the fairness and impartiality of reviews offered in such contexts are reasonable. You must decide.

Critics who write for journals and film industry publications tend to be analytical in their approach. They are less interested in a production's popular appeal than in its literary value or artistic appeal. A person writing this type of review would carefully look at individual aspects of both the script and the production and how they work together.

A detailed **analysis** of a production might include describing and evaluating these aspects of the script: theme, plot, dialogue, and characterization. The production, which is the result of combining the script with the creative efforts of the participants, can be examined by looking at the set design, direction, acting, and audience reaction. When analyzing a given movie or program, you might find the need to evaluate other aspects of the production, but those listed provide a basis for a comprehensive analysis. An additional category for film and television analysis might be the editing—are there unexplained or illogical jumps in the action? For more information about each of the categories, see “How to Judge a Play” on pages 530–534.

THE AUDIENCE AND THE PRODUCTION

Producers of stage plays must be very sensitive to critical reviews and to audience response, rewriting shows if necessary to please audiences. Movies that are not well received can be released to television or the video market. By doing so, a filmmaker can save the enormous costs associated with distributing and promoting a film. Some movies, like Disney's *Honey, We Shrunk Ourselves*, bypass the theaters entirely and are released

straight to video. By acting quickly, it is sometimes possible for a movie studio to recover its costs and turn a profit on a poor movie.

A stage production, however, has nowhere else to go. The huge investment in a play must be recovered through ticket sales. Therefore, the producer is more inclined to refine, revise, and do whatever is necessary to turn a weak play into a successful one.

Just how much a critical review affects the success or failure of a film is difficult to say. Numerous factors come into play. *The Lost World*, Steven Spielberg's sequel to the highly successful *Jurassic Park*, received some terrible reviews but went on to earn more than 200 million dollars. Perhaps the success of the earlier *Jurassic Park*, provided it with a built-in audience. Maybe by opening in some six thousand theaters at once, the film became "critic proof." By the time the critics had their say, tens of thousands of people had already seen the movie.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Measuring the commercial success of stage plays and movies is not necessarily a simple matter. In the case of the traditional stage play, the **receipts**, or money taken in from ticket sales, by and large tell the story. The same is more or less true of movies. Some movies, such as *Star Wars* and *The Lion King* spawn a secondary source of income from the sale of toys, games, T-shirts, and a host of related items.

For commercial television, the process of measuring success becomes more complex. With no ticket sales to calculate, television networks rely on outside firms to assess the size of the viewing audience. These **ratings**, as they are typically called, are determined by monitoring a relatively small number of homes that are theoretically representative of national viewership. Based on the findings, these ratings services project the size of each show's audience and rank shows competing in the same time slot accordingly. Using these rankings, television networks set the prices for commercials. The higher the rating, the more costly a minute of commercial time.

The ratings process is not without controversy. Critics of the process argue that the sample is too small and by its nature unrepresentative, since



The movie *The Lion King* increased its profits substantially when the production company authorized sales of merchandise carrying the movie logo and pictures from the movie. Many other movies have likewise profited through merchandising.

Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* probably holds the record for an opening scene without dialogue: 22 minutes and 30 seconds.

it ignores the thousands of people who do not watch television because of the lack of quality programming. The critics point to dozens of programs that enjoyed superb critical reviews but were canceled because they lost the ratings wars.

The competition for audience has become quite fierce in recent years. The person searching for entertainment today has many options. With the advent of the rental video, pay-per-view movies, and the multiplex theater, film lovers can choose among several current movies or elect to wait for the video or television showing. A TV viewer has scores of channels to choose from and can exercise that choice with the touch of the handy remote control. When satellite dishes, direct TV, and cable television are added to the entertainment mix, today's audience faces an almost unlimited number of choices but has only a limited amount of money to spend on them.

THE CHANGING AUDIENCE

Perhaps because of so many options, the attention span of the public has steadily declined since the turn of the century. In response, movies have become more quickly paced. Television programs are more action packed than ever. TV news shows have replaced the single reporter with a succession of cuts from the anchor desk, to the field, to a co-anchor, always punctuated with a liberal sprinkling of visuals. The audience of the nineties, for example, who are accustomed to quick cuts and fast-moving cameras, have a difficult time sitting through a film like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* because its pace is slow and its shots are relatively long.

Whether television and the movies influence society or reflect it is an age-old argument, but it is one that still applies to today's audiences. Depending on their point of view, critics either blame or praise networks like MTV and Nickelodeon for the quick editing and bold images that have found their way into the general media. Whether networks are to blame for the audience's decreased attention span or are just capitalizing on it is an issue that continues to be debated. One thing is certain, however: people want fast-paced, instant entertainment, and they are getting it.

The modern audience has changed in another way, too. Thanks to large-screen televisions, theater-style sound systems, and videotapes, people have become accustomed to enjoying the theater experience in their living rooms. Talking may be acceptable in the privacy of one's home, but it is not appreciated in a crowded theater. The on-screen requests to remain silent and clean up any trash serve as reminders to observe proper theater etiquette.

The audience, however, need not take all the blame. The theaters themselves are at least partly responsible for audiences' seeming indifference



Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, released in 1968, is a classic science-fiction production. Shown in this scene are Gary Lockwood (left) and Keir Dullea (right).

to their surroundings. The early movie houses were referred to as “palaces” because of their grand scale and lavish interiors. The elaborate curtains, lushly carpeted lobbies, large restrooms, and uniformed ushers all transported the audience to a special place to watch a special event. Audience members dressed up as if they were going to watch a live performance, and they were on their best behavior.

The movie palaces of the past have been torn down, converted to other uses, or remodeled to contain numerous small-screen theaters. These multi-picture complexes, or multiplex theaters, are austere in contrast to the elegant surroundings, amenities, and large staffs of the old palaces. The smaller screens, fewer seats, and stark atmosphere of today’s theaters contribute to the lack of spectacle and awe. Because many of the new theater complexes are very large, crowds and parking can be a problem, which might even work to keep more people watching films at home.

Even though luxury and atmosphere in theaters might have been sacrificed to progress, films and television continue to improve the quality and quantity of entertainment available to all of us. Technology and the creativity of moviemakers and television producers make the entertainment business one of the most dynamic areas of our modern culture. Advancements in film and television affect not only critics and audiences, but also influence the traditional stage drama from which they sprang.

Application ACTIVITIES

1. Find two or more reviews of a current movie in newspapers or magazines. Identify points of agreement and disagreement between two of the reviewers. Then view the movie yourself and decide which reviewer most closely reflects your assessment of the movie.
2. Using the information found on pages 530–534, write an analysis of any movie or television program you choose.



CHAPTER

14 REVIEW

Summary and Key Ideas

Summarize the chapter by answering the following questions.

1. What was Mark Peter Roget's contribution to the invention of the moving picture?
2. Explain how the camera was first used in filmmaking; then describe the changes made by D. W. Griffith.
3. What were the limitations of early television?
4. What is a storyboard and what purpose does it serve?
5. What special problems do commercials pose for the TV writer?
6. How is the success of productions assessed in theater? Film? Television?

Discussing Ideas

1. How do the acting skills required of a movie actor differ from those required of an actor on the stage?
2. Discuss the following statement: "Unlike the film actor, the stage actor can reach out and win over an audience."
3. What is meant by the expression "Less is more" as it applies to the film actor?
4. Discuss what factors affect your decision to see a movie.

FOCUS ON

Criticism

Critics play an important role in the culture of theater and film. To strengthen your own critical abilities, read dramatic criticism—and write your own. Using your own experiences and understanding to analyze theater will help you build closer connections to drama that you see and read.

Exploring Criticism Some critics—known as literary critics—take a literary approach to drama, examining the scripts of plays primarily as literary works. Critics referred to as drama critics generally choose an approach that pays equal or nearly equal attention to the script and the production. Choose two published critics, either literary or dramatic,

to investigate. The critics may write about live theater, film, or television. Find out if the critics belong to any particular schools of criticism. Read several pieces by each critic to help you get a sense of their style. Then compare and contrast the work of the two critics in a short presentation to the class.

Be the Critic Write a two-page critical analysis of a movie, play, television program, or other dramatic production of your choice. Be sure that your analysis evaluates aspects of the script as well as the creative effort involved in the production. See pages 530 to 534 for more information on how to evaluate drama.

REVIEW WORKSHOP

THEATER AND OTHER MEDIA

INDEPENDENT ACTIVITIES

Situation Comedy Select two or more situation comedies currently appearing on television. Watch several performances of each; then write a description of the “situation” and the character types that repeatedly occur in each episode. Decide which situation is more successful in generating comedy. Create a plan for a new situation comedy by describing a situation and several character types that have the potential for multiple comic plots. Provide one example of such a plot.

Film Adaptation A scene from a play must ordinarily undergo some adaptation before being brought to the screen. A director must decide when to use close-ups or wide-angle shots. He or she must decide which actor, action, or object to focus the camera on. Music might also be used to underscore a scene.

Choose one of the scenes provided in Part Two of this book, and adapt it for a screen presentation. Write directions for the camera crew and decide on any music you wish to add. You may choose to make several rough sketches to show how you imagine the screen appearing during particular parts of the dialogue.



Cooperative Learning Activity

Demonstration

Work with a partner to create a simple demonstration

of the persistence of vision theory proposed by Roget. This can be accomplished by drawing two images on either side of a card, attaching the card to a pencil or similar long, narrow stick, and spinning the card rapidly. The two images will appear as a single image to a viewer. For example, if a drawing of a bird appears on one side and a bird cage on the other, the bird will appear to be in the cage.

Across the CURRICULUM Activity

Language Arts

Attend a showing of a new movie, preferably on the day of its first showing. If possible, sit through several showings of the film. Then write a review of the film assessing its strengths and weaknesses and decide whether you would recommend the film to others. Summarize your review by awarding it from zero to four stars, with four stars being the highest rating. Compare your rating with those of professional reviewers.