

**ADAPTATION****NCTE/IRA Standards:**

**Objective:** Understand the relationship between film and other literary forms.

**Procedure:** Display and distribute the student pages of the guided learning unit one at a time. The components include:

- A discussion of adaptation with some keys to adapting books for movies.

Allow the students a few minutes to skim each component before reading the text aloud. Reading the text aloud increases the likelihood that all students will be able to understand and participate. Pause appropriately to explain concepts contained in the instructional text, especially concepts that may be unfamiliar. Solicit comments from the students and ask questions to promote their thinking or evaluate their understanding. Elaborate on the instructional text according to the needs of the class.

Read this quote from Jeremy Leven, a noted American screenwriter. It will help students understand that adapting a screenplay from a book is not as easy as it sounds:

*“Adapting a book into a movie is a piece of cake. All the screenwriter must do is take five hundred pages, thirty characters, twenty chapters, and volumes of internal thought and convert it to a hundred and twenty pages (at most), three characters (at most), three acts (no more, no less), and make it all visual.”*

Elaborate as necessary on the important points in the quote and ask students what they think about what Leven has said.

**Introductory Activity:** As a group activity, have students discuss some familiar movies that are adaptations of books. Write the names of the movies on the board. The students will probably name contemporary films. You might find it useful to point out some well known movies that have been adapted from books, such as *The Godfather*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Charlotte’s Web*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Twilight*, *Holes* and *Jaws*. You might encourage the students to do an Internet search on other titles and to look for Oscar winning film adaptations.

Encourage the students to discuss some movies they think are good or bad adaptations of a movie. You might also ask them to consider parts of movies that were consistent with the book and those that were not.

Continue the activity as a whole class by asking the students to discuss how they would adapt a book with which they are all familiar. They should evaluate which characters should stay in the movie, which events would convert well to the movie, and which dialogue would work in the movie. Ask them to support their decisions to include or exclude a character, events, and dialogue.

**Extended Activity:** As a whole class or small groups, have the students choose a book they would like to adapt to a movie. They should select four major and four minor characters to include in the movie along with ten events they think are critical. The setting for each event should be described, and the events should be in the order they would appear in the movie. One of the scenes should be the climax of the story. The students should also identify at least one line from the book to be spoken by each of their characters. Ask the students to identify at least five events that can be eliminated when the book is adapted to a movie.

**Internet Search Suggestion:** Have the students search for information about books that have been adapted to movies.

## ADAPTATION

Some movies are original ideas. An example is *Bandslam*. Many movies, however, are *adaptations* from other forms of literature like books or plays. An adaptation is something that has been modified for another purpose.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awards Oscars for both the best original screenplay and adaptation. That is because adapting a movie from a book is very different from writing a screenplay from scratch.

At first, it seems that adapting a book would be easy. You have the title, the plot, the characters, and some of the dialogue. Unfortunately, books *tell* stories, and movies *show* them. The first challenge that the screenwriter faces in adapting a book is describing the scenes so they can be filmed.

Next, the screenwriter must think about the aspects of a book that will make a good movie. That means deciding which parts of the book and characters will work best in a movie and appeal to an audience. An important part of this process is deciding what about the book will touch the emotions or feelings of a movie audience.

Most books are too long for a movie. A typical movie script is between 90 and 120 pages long, and that's double-spaced typing with big margins. Books are twice as long or more. In addition, a book may have more characters and settings than will work in a movie. The screenwriter must make a lot of decisions about cutting material from the book while keeping the important parts of the story.

In a few cases, a book is shorter than a typical screenplay. The writer must add material that is true to the book. Some writers think this is easier than cutting material because they feel guilty about removing parts from a book, especially if it is a classic or best seller.

Finally, be creative with your adaptation. When you are adapting a book, it is easy to think of your job as rewriting. This is true to some extent, but the best screenwriters are very creative. Use the book as a starting point, but always let your creativity come through.

### Keys to Adapting Books for Movies

Read the book thoroughly and take notes. Be sure to put the page number on your notes to show where in the book the notes refer. Refer to the book often.

Divide the book into three parts that match the parts of a movie, Act I (or the setup), Act II (or the main conflict), and Act III (or the resolution).

Make a list of the settings for each part of the movie. Be careful that you don't use too many settings. The more settings a movie has, the more expensive it is to shoot.

Make a list of the characters for each part of the movie. Label them as primary, secondary, tertiary, and extras. Eliminate characters that are not critical to the movie.

Make a list of the events for each part of the movie. Label them as 1 (important), 2 (somewhat important), and 3 (not important).

Create a rough draft of the "storyboard" for the movie. This is a list of the most important events in the movie.

Identify the climax of the book. Think about how you can adapt the climax for the movie so it is very visual and makes the resolution very clear for the audience.

Be prepared to write several drafts of the screenplay. The drafts will be necessary to get the screenplay to the right size while keeping the parts of the book that work best for a movie.

Think about the author of the book as your partner. When you have decisions to make, consider what you think the author might say about your decisions.

Remember that good books have very devoted fans. These fans will want the movie to be true to the book. Be sure that the best parts of the book are in the movie so these fans will enjoy it.