

In the matter of three weeks, my opinion about books turned into films for children has been transformed. When I entered this course, I believed that films would have to show fidelity to the original book in order to be successful. Luckily (for me), the first films that we viewed in the course, the two versions of *Charlotte's Web*, both showed fidelity to the original novel by E.B. White. The plot, characters, and setting were all intact with the novel. Though each film expressed its differences (especially in the matter of cartoon vs. live action), the inserted and omitted factors by the director's did not significantly deter the fidelity towards the book.

However, after reading *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum, I could not help but feel a bit deceived when I watched the 1939 MGM production. It became evident just how much of the story had been edited out or manipulated in ways that Baum did not originally express. Another case is seen when viewing the 2009 production of *Where the Wild Things Are*, after reading the picture book by Maurice Sendak. This was instead an instance when the producer added in so much material, that the film became almost unrecognizable when compared to the picture book. When a film is released that is based on a book, my expectations as a viewer and reader expect the film to match the book. As a viewer, I crave for the movie to have fidelity towards the book. I believe that the producers owe it to the authors of the stories to maintain their integrity as a whole.

In my view, I thought audiences would be more engaged with a film that reflects a classic tale that they know and love. This course however has brought about a vast change in my opinion. When watching *The Wizard of Oz* film production by MGM, it was apparent that the film was immensely different than the original novel written by L. Frank Baum. Yet, the film to this day still receives renowned recognition, while the book "flies under the radar." Another example of this is found within the film and book *Where the Wild Things Are*. The picture book by Maurice Sendak is a mere thirty-six pages with scarce use of text, but is full of color illustrations. Film director Spike Jonze was able to transform this picture book into a ninety-minute feature film. The film however, does not show much fidelity to the original book by Sendak. The movie does utilize the same characters, the boat that Max floats away in to the land of the wild things, and the return him to his mother. But outside of those aspects, there is little else that reflects the original. It proves just how far a producer's imagination can take them with such little material to base it on.

In her article "Skills & Strategies for Media Education," Elizabeth Thoman informs us that, "Different people experience the same media message differently." It has been interesting to see how my personal preferences play a great role in how much I "enjoy" each of the movies we have seen. When comparing the two versions of *Charlotte's Web*, it was evident early on that I greatly preferred the 2006 version by Paramount. The live action, updated version of the movie was more appealing to me than the animated version full of musical numbers. As I am not a great fan of musicals, it was interesting to see how something that was added in to the movie to add themes and messages was actually a deterrent for me. Everyone interprets the

films they see differently, and it was interesting to read the feedback my discussion group had noted about each film.

As a reader (and an educator), I had always thought that the audience desires films that show fidelity towards the written work they are based off of. Yet with the movies we have viewed, I have come to see that the director is also a storyteller, and they bring on a new meaning to the story. Producers create their own messages, which may or many not fit with those told in the book. Personally, I still feel an attachment to the original stories in the book, opposed to the film productions. After spending a great deal of time immersing myself in stories, taking the time to get to know each of the characters, and engaging in every detail of the story, I feel as though the films just do not measure up to the details that can be provided by a written text. While it is nice to have a visual to reference via the movie market, I cannot help but be disappointed when I see so much of a story edited out of a movie. Our task as viewers is to determine why the director's decided to include items that show fidelity to the original book, what they enhance or create, and also, why they omit aspects from the original when designing the film. While viewing we ought to consider what messages or themes are being promoted, and which are disapproved of. Then we must consider what influence this has on the movie as a whole.

When a movie becomes more famous than the book it's based on, the book takes a back seat and remains on library and bookstore shelves. The audience generally does not bother to revisit the novel, because they have already seen the live action representation of the story. In some cases, the movie may encourage the viewer to then check out the book and read the original text. We've seen the movie become more popular than the book in the case of *The Wizard of Oz*. While most of us have seen the movie at least once, few have taken the time to read the book. The book then becomes a thing of the past, as the digital media takes center stage. With our focus and reliance on technology, we often accept the movie as the "status quo" and fail to take time out of busy life to explore the alternative narrative found in books. The printed text versions of books have already gave way to the digital revolution as well. Kindles, Nooks, and other e-readers are now dominating the market place. Not only has our generation changed our recreational hobbies (as we gradually see reading fading from the spotlight), but the way we partake in such hobbies has changed as well.

As we saw in the Elizabeth Thoman article, "Media are primarily businesses driven by a profit motive." All movie producers and directors are in the business to make a buck. Without the promise of box office sales, potential sequels, merchandising, and building an audience base, there would be little drive for most movie producers to continue on with their work. As our culture is significantly driven by consumerism, movies geared towards children (as we've seen thus far in the course) can be a profitable field. With children convincing their parents to buy them things they "need" (which is more realistically a "want"), parents spend plenty of money on merchandise that is covered with movie and TV characters. Of course, the more popular the movie is, the greater the potential profit. So the media uses

selective marketing during kids' shows to make sure it is reaching their target group. Children can be powerful influences!

It seems to be a trend that our pop culture is interested in seeing live action movies that are full of action. We need stimulus to keep us engaged and interested in a film. As filmmakers continue to transform books into movies (*Hunger Games*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, the upcoming release of *Maze Runner*), to satisfy our need to witness a story in ninety minutes, instead of spending hours reading a book. It does appear that movies are generally based on chapter books, instead of children's picture books, such as *Where the Wild Things Are*. This is likely because of the amount of content that is available for the producers to reference when creating their production. Michael Wohl introduced us to some of the techniques used by movie producers in his article "The Language of Film." Through this article we are able to better see what types of camera angles, music, camera shots, and plot elements create a piece of work for us to interpret. Each director is able to put their own "spin" on the film, and the elements of film vary by director, and also by film. Though directors may have characteristics that they are known for including in their films, each still remains a unique piece of art.

Throughout the past three weeks, my view of books turned into films has been altered. Before entering the course, I held on to my nostalgic roots (I do not always welcome change so easily!) and believed that films should show fidelity towards the books they are based off of. We have seen an example of this in the films based on the book *Charlotte's Web*. These movies contain the same characters, setting, events, climax, and resolution as seen in the novel by E.B. White. Though they display a number of differences that make them unique, they are a testament to White's work. We've then ventured on to the picture book film *Where the Wild Things Are*, and the film production of *The Wizard of Oz*. These two films have been fundamental to reshaping my thinking. They are dramatically different from the book, and have helped me to realize that the movies do not have to follow the original book in order to be successful. Each movie is also a distinctive story lead by the director that includes messages and themes not mentioned in the book. We have seen the popularity of the film *The Wizard of Oz* far surpass the popularity of the titled novel by L. Frank Baum. The media business seeks to create a profit market, and it was found in *The Wizard of Oz*. The lasting influences on our current culture are still seen today with songs, lines, and even costumes that reflect the film. As we are a culture that embraces rapid change, especially with the technological revolution, the film market is quickly replacing our need printed text. We are a culture that loves live action, and time saving media. As we continue to spend billions a year at the box office, we are losing touch with the printed text that may offer more details, and different messages and themes promoted by the storybook author.