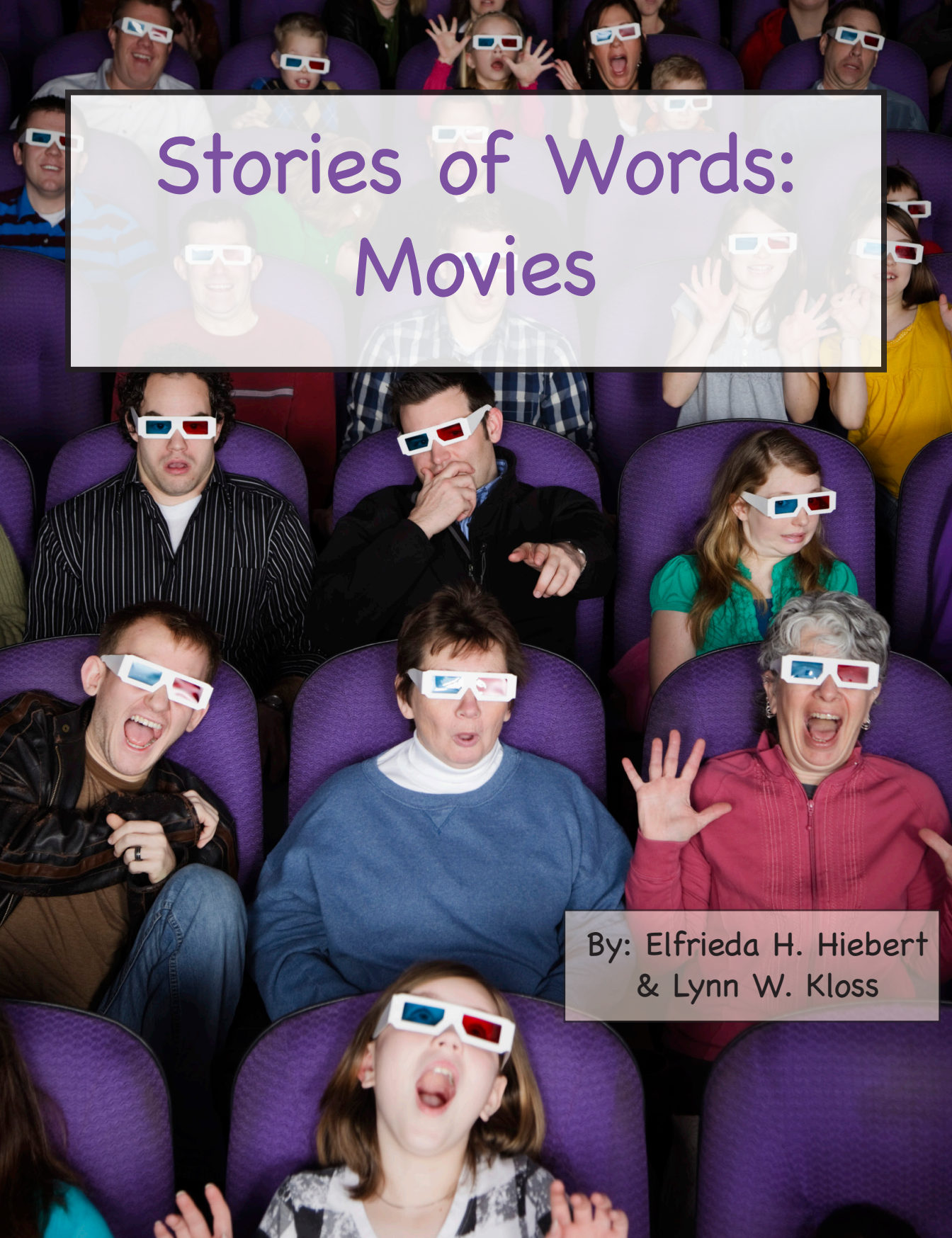

Stories of Words: Movies

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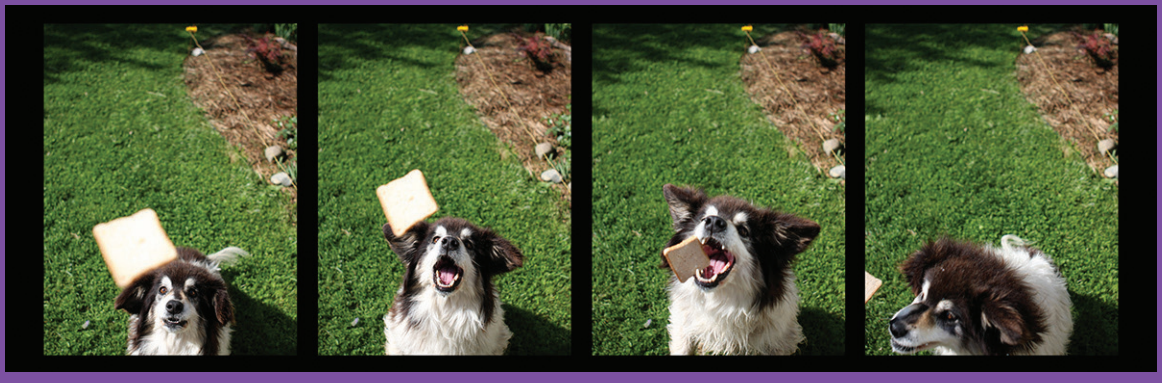
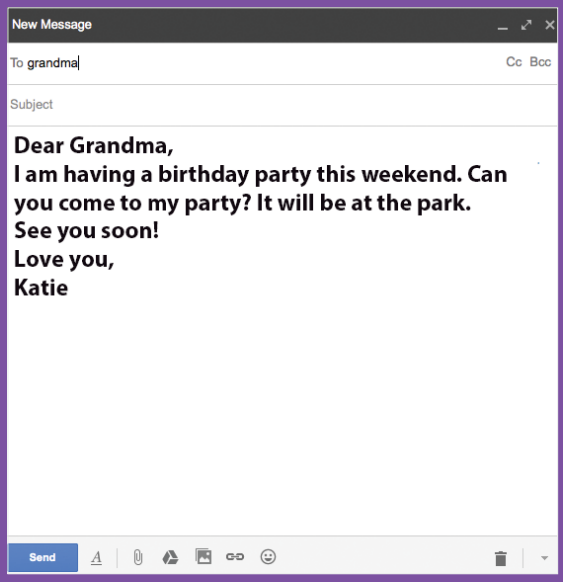


Learning About Words

"Grandma, I can help you download a file from your e-mail." That's a sentence you probably understand clearly, but your grandma might not if she doesn't know much about computers.

When things are invented, such as computers, new words are often created to describe them. Also, well-known words sometimes take on new meanings.

For example, when computers became popular, words such as *download* and *e-mail* were created. If you look closely, you can see two smaller words inside *download: down* and *load.* And if you know that the letter *e* is often used to show that something is related to computers, you'll quickly understand that *e-mail* means "electronic mail."



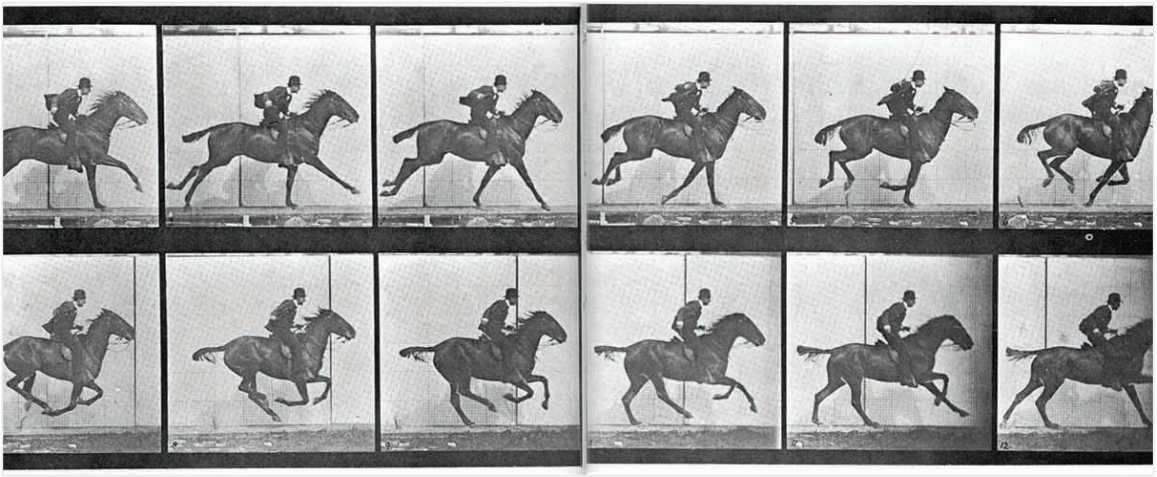
Also, words such as *drive* and *mouse* took on new meanings when they were used with computers. You probably know that, when talking about computers, a *drive* reads and writes information. In addition, a *mouse* is something you can use to get to different files and to different areas of a screen.

Like computers, movies were once so different from anything people had seen before that they required a whole set of new words. Names were needed for the new technology that made and showed them and for the new jobs that were created to produce them. In addition, people had to make up new words to describe what it was like to watch them.

1 THE PICTURES MOVE!

In 1888, a new invention showed a series of pictures in which people moved. This first movie lasted only two seconds, but viewers were astonished. It looked like the event was happening right in front of them. The movie showed people walking in a garden.

Before this time, cameras could take only one picture at a time. These pictures were called *stills* because they didn't move. However, once a series of pictures could be taken and shown quickly, the images seemed to move. First, they were called *moving pictures.* Later, that name was shortened to *movies.*



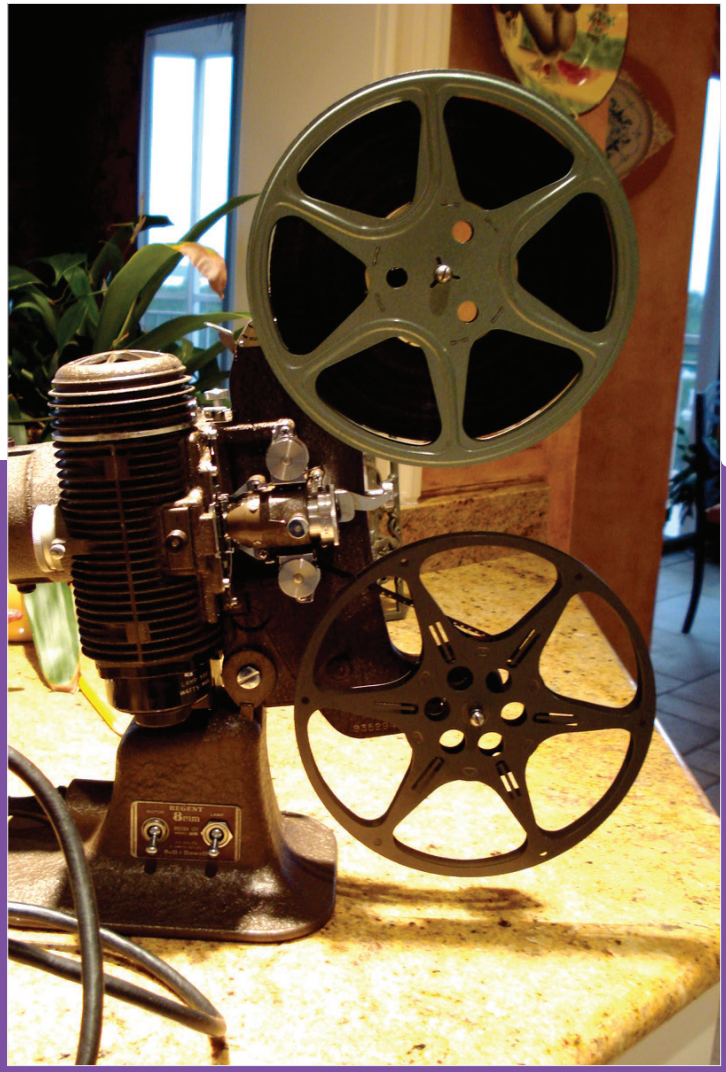
For their first 40 years, movies had no sound. Instead, music was made in the theater by someone playing an organ or even by a whole orchestra. Because they had no sound, they were called *silent movies,* or *silents.* Conversations between characters were written on the screen in words.

In the 1920s, sound was added to movies. This meant that the audience could hear actors speaking to one another. Music was added, too. These movies became known as *talkies.* The word *talkies* didn't last, but two names from the early days of the movies are still used: *silver screen* and *flick.*

Flicks on the Silver Screen

For the first 60 years, movies were shown only in black and white. Movie screens were painted with a silver metallic paint that made the pictures easier to see. Although movie screens are no longer painted with silver paint, the term *silver screen* is sometimes still used to describe the movie business.

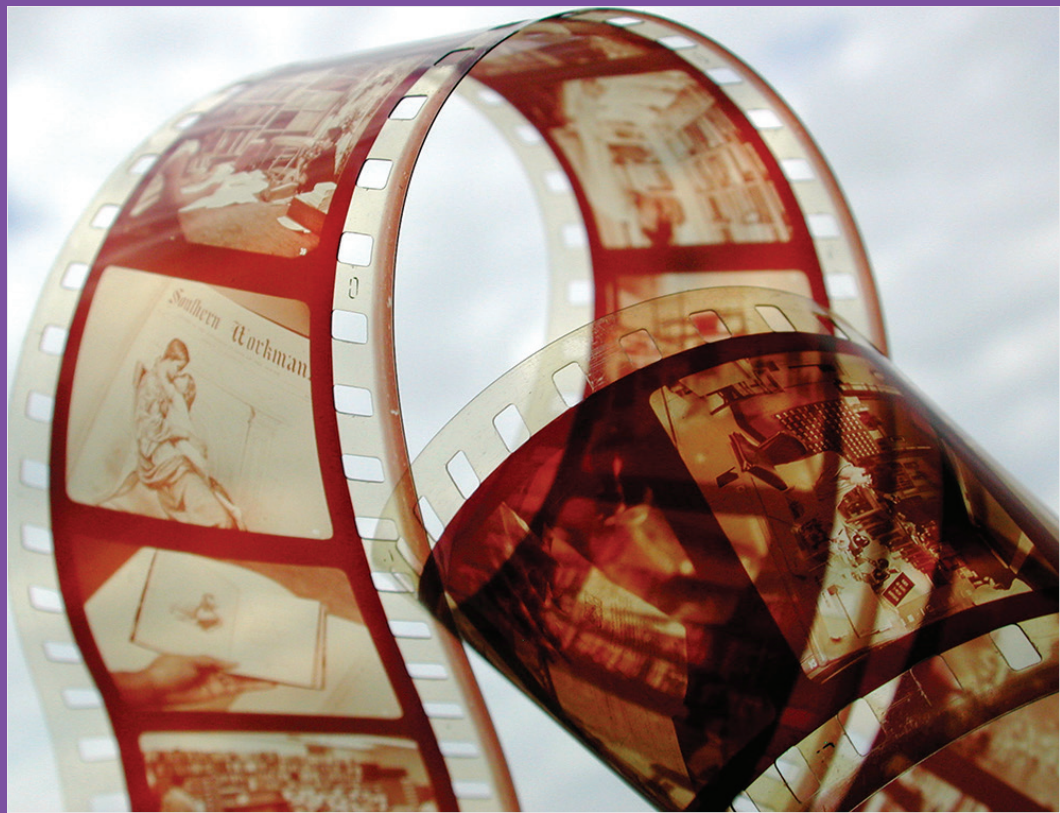
In these early days of movies, the film was wound on big reels and run through a projector. Dust on the lens of the projector and other problems could cause the picture to flicker. This is how movies came to be called *flicks.*



Film Words from Around the World

Today, movies are also called *films.* This word comes from photography, and describes how the pictures were developed. A thin coat, or film, of chemicals was used to create images on photographic plates. When these photographs started being made into moving pictures, the word *film* was borrowed, too.

Cinema is another word used often for movies. It is short for the French word *cinématographe,* which was an early movie camera that could also develop and project films. The French word had been borrowed from the Greek words *kinemat,* which means "movement," and *graphein,* which means "to write." The term was shortened to *cinéma* in French. When it came to be used in English, the accent mark was dropped.



2 TWO KINDS OF THEATERS

When something new is invented, people often talk about it by using words from something that is closely related. Before there were movies, people watched stories that were acted on a stage in a theater. Since movies are also stories that are acted out, many movie words were borrowed from the theater. The word *theater* itself, in *movie theater,* is an example.

Some of the same words are used to describe the job of acting in plays and movies. The people who play the characters are called *actors* or *performers.* A group of actors working in a play or movie is called a cast. Also, the parts that actors play are called *roles.*

Setting the Scene

Even though some of the same words are used when talking about movies and plays, some have somewhat different meanings. One of these words is *scene*. Plays are usually have a series of acts, each with several scenes, or parts of an act. A scene in a movie, though, is the place where the action is set, or a setting. In fact, the word *scene* can have several other meanings, too, but it usually has to do with something that can be viewed.

Another word with different meanings is *set.* In a play, the set consists of the things that are on the stage, such as chairs and walls. In movies, parts of the story may be filmed on an area that has been built for filming. This is called a *set.*

In contrast, other parts of a movie may be filmed *on location,* or somewhere outside the studio where the story is supposed to be taking place. When you see words such as *scene* and *set,* which have several meanings, think of the words around them and see which meaning makes sense.

People Behind the Cameras

The people who work on a play or movie but who are not actors are called the *crew.* This word was first used to describe the people who worked on a ship. The word fits both situations because the people work as a team.

At the end of the movie is a list of the crew and their jobs. This list is called the *credits.* You may not see the crew, but the movie couldn't have been made without them.

Here are some words that are used in both movies and plays.

Theater Words	**Movies**	**Plays**
Words and directions for what the actors should say and do	script	script
The person who writes the script	screenwriter	playwright
The person who is in charge of the project	producer	producer
The person who tells the actors how to speak and move	director	director
An actor's words	lines	lines
Where people see the production	movie theater	theater

3 ACTION!

As you have seen, a number of words that are used to discuss movies were first used in the theater. But new words were also needed to describe things that happen in movies, but not in the theater. Many of these words relate to camera work.

Some everyday words came to be used in movies in new ways, too. For example, when directors are ready to film a scene, they yell "Action!," which means the cameras should start filming. Then, when they think a scene is finished, directors yell, "Cut!"

You certainly know both of these words, but their meanings may be different from the ones you're used to. In making a movie, *Action!* means "Take action!" or "Begin!" *Cut!* means "Stop filming!"

Shooting a Movie

At the end of a day, directors often view what they've filmed. These bits of the movie are called *dailies,* or *rushes.* The term *rushes* comes from the days before digital cameras were invented.

At that time, film was rushed to a lab for development. Then scenes could be filmed again if they didn't look right. With digital filming, though, parts of movies can be viewed as soon as they are shot. That makes it easy to get a scene to look right.

Many things happen to movies after the actors have finished their work. Some of the words used for this part of movie making were taken from book publishing, such as the word *editing.* When directors edit a movie, they do such things as cutting parts or changing the order of scenes, just as book editors do.

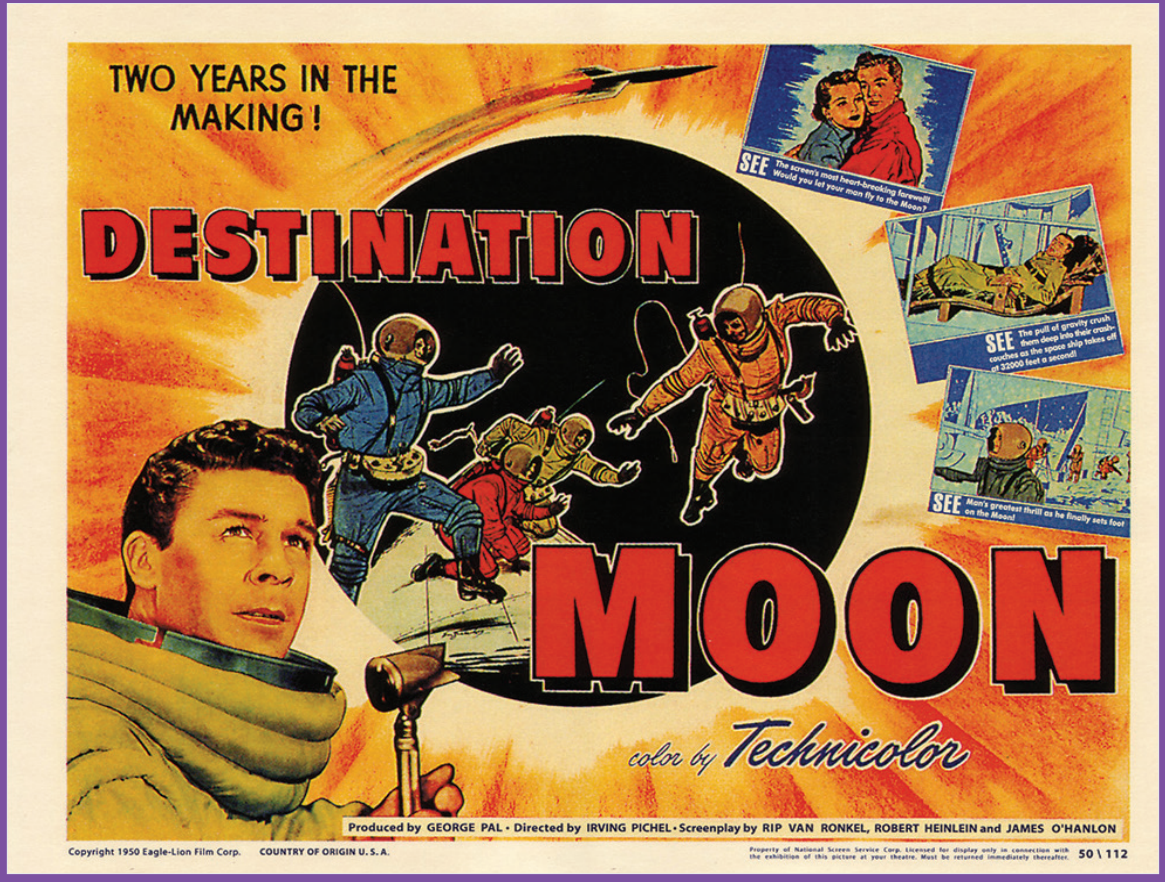
Here are some other words that describe camera work.

Movie Term	**Meaning**
Angle	The way a camera is held or pointed, which helps viewers understand how characters relate to one another
Close-up	The camera films close to the people or action.
Long shot	The camera films far away from the people or action.
Pan	The camera moves around a scene, showing a broad view.
Wrap	The filming is finished.

Advertising New Movies

Of course, if people are going to see a movie, they have to know about it. Producers usually make trailers to get people excited about a movie. Historically, movie theaters showed news programs and short features before the main movie. Then they would show a preview, or *trailer,* for the main movie.

Today, trailers are shown months before a movie is released, and sometimes even before the movie is finished. Often, this kind of trailer shows a few scenes from the movie, and it is meant to get an audience excited about a movie release.



4 IT TAKES MORE THAN STARS TO MAKE A MOVIE

What do you think a *best boy* does? If you said he's the best worker, you're right! The best boy is usually the chief assistant in a department, such as the department that handles electrical work. The name was created when the head of a department asked another department for its "best boy" to help with something.

What might a *grip* do? The job doesn't involve holding things. Instead, a grip sets up and maintains the cameras and lighting on a set. This term is borrowed from the theater, too, but in the theater, a grip is a stagehand who moves scenery.

Then there's the *gaffer.* This person is the head of the electrical department and is often responsible for designing a lighting plan for a movie. This word comes from the early days of movies, when filming was done in natural light. At that time, light was reflected by large cloths controlled by long poles called *gaffs.*

Dangerous Jobs

When you see a car chase or someone jumping off a building, you might be worried that the star could have been hurt during the filming. The person you're seeing, though, is most often a stunt performer, not the star.

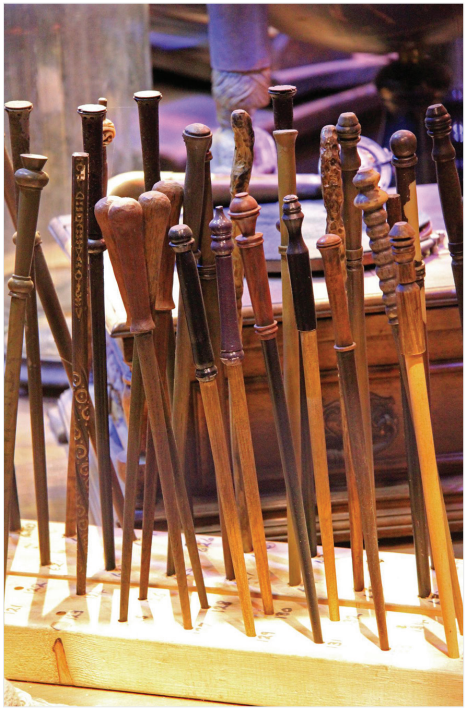
The word *stunt* means "an act done to attract attention." It is thought to have come from a word that meant "a dare or a challenge," and it originated on U.S. college campuses in the late 1800s. This was around the time the first movies were made.

Stunt performers are also called *stunt doubles* because they're chosen to look like the star whose stunts they're performing. That way, people think they're seeing the star.

Although the work is dangerous, stunt performers know how to stay safe. They also keep the stars safe by doing the dangerous work for them.

Looking Good

Another unusual title for a movie job is the *cinematographer.* What smaller words do you see in this word? If you said *cinema* and *graph,* you're right. You read about the word *cinema* in the first section of this book. It's another word for "movie." You also read that *graph* means "to write."



Cinematography involves the art and technology of movie-making. The cinematographer works with the director to choose how the movie will be lighted, which cameras they will use, how the cameras will move, and which special effects will be added.

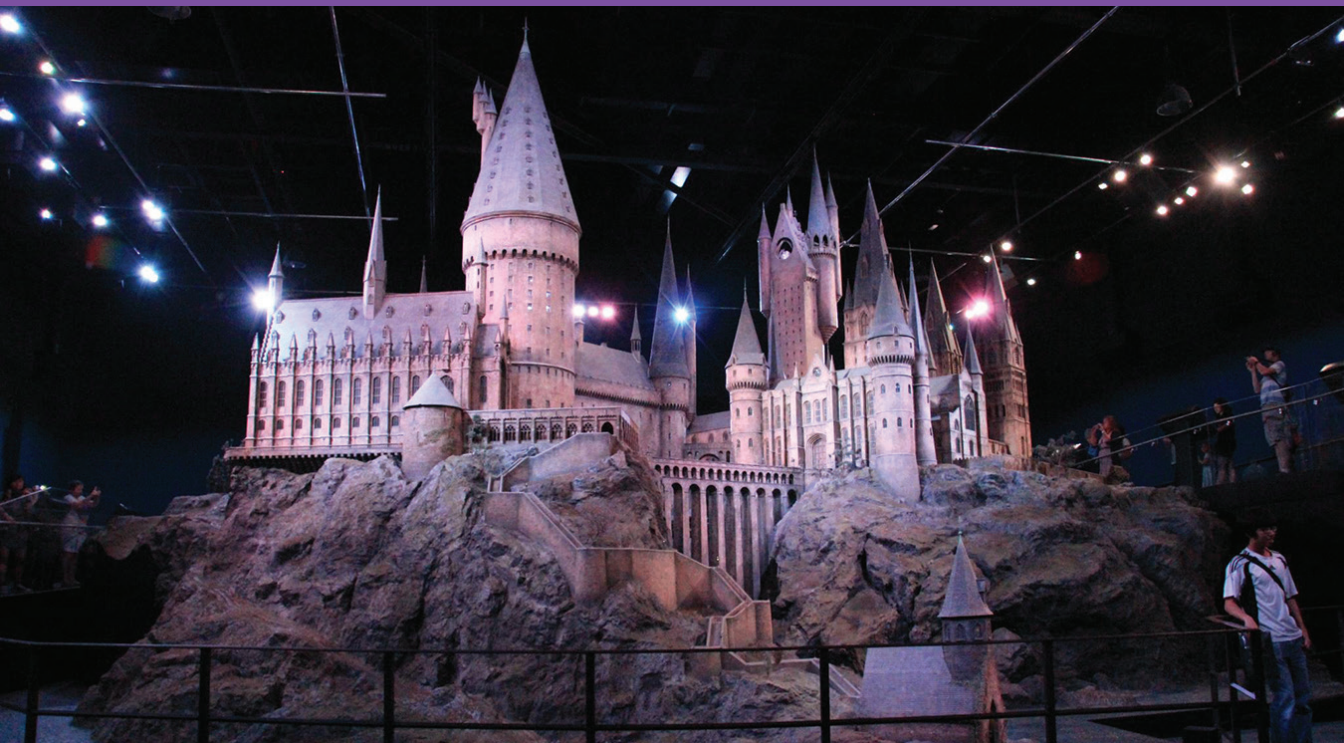
In addition, there's a *prop master.* A *prop,* or *property,* is something that appears on the stage or in the movie, such as a chair or a bike. The prop master is the person whose job it is to find and place all of the things you see in a movie.

4 MAKING MOVIES REAL

Movies look more real today than ever. You can imagine you're riding in a speeding car or flying in a spaceship, even though you're sitting in a chair. Technology allows movie-makers to create these feelings, making you feel as if you're in the film. To do this, they use special effects, which fool the eye into seeing things that weren't even on the movie set.

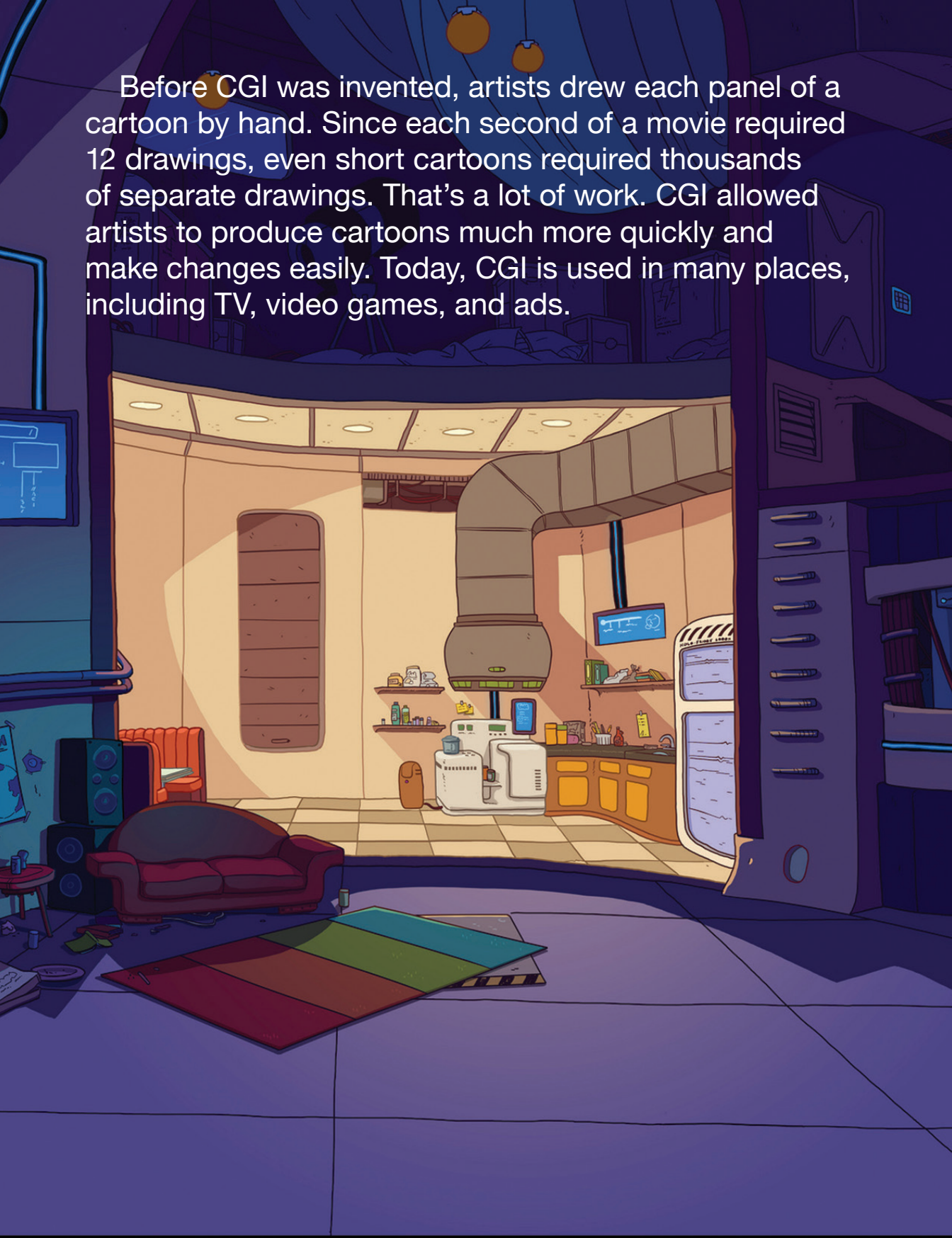
Special effects allow artists to show things such as realistic-looking earthquakes and space aliens. The artists can build small models of a city and shake it in front of a camera. The movie seems to show a real town, but in reality, the "town" is the size of a table. They can also create monsters that look real on the movie screen. To do this, they can use models or draw scenes with animation.

By the time you read this, there will probably be lots of new kinds of technology used in making movies. Computers are driving many of these changes, and with those new kinds of movies will come new words.



CGI

One kind of technology that has changed the way movies are made is *CGI,* or *computer-generated imagery.* You probably know the word *computer,* but look at the words *generated* and *imagery. Generated* means "created," and *imagery* means "pictures." So, *CGI* means "pictures that are created on a computer," rather than drawn on paper.



Before CGI was invented, artists drew each panel of a cartoon by hand. Since each second of a movie required 12 drawings, even short cartoons required thousands of separate drawings. That's a lot of work. CGI allowed artists to produce cartoons much more quickly and make changes easily. Today, CGI is used in many places, including TV, video games, and ads.

CGI is often used for visual effects, such as adding additional people to a crowd scene or even creating an entire planet. In recent years, characters created entirely in CGI have become common. Many look so real, we can feel we're seeing a scene that was acted, not one that was drawn.

1928: first appearance of *Mickey Mouse*

1933: first appearance of *Popeye* and *Betty Boop*

1937: first animated feature film: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

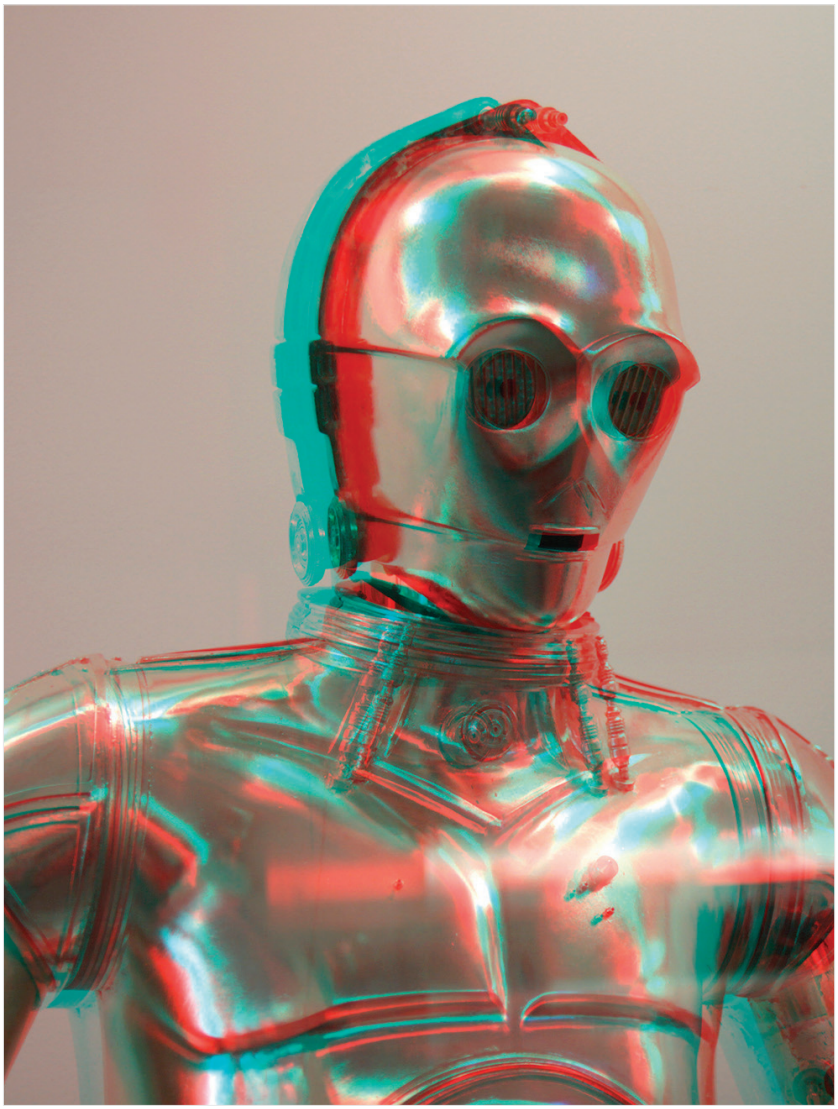
1995: first computer-animated film: *Toy Story*

3D Technology

"The shark's jumping off the screen!" Another way movies can be made to look real is with 3D technology. *3D* is another abbreviation; it stands for "three dimensions."

Dimensions are measurements that show such things as the length and width of an object. Most movies are shown with 2D technology, which means the image has height and width. It doesn't have depth, so it is flat. You may remember a character called Flat Stanley. He was 2D, so he could fit into an envelope.

3D images, though, have depth. That's what makes them look so real. They look like something you could walk around or climb into. They also make you feel like you could catch a ball that an actor seems to throw to you.

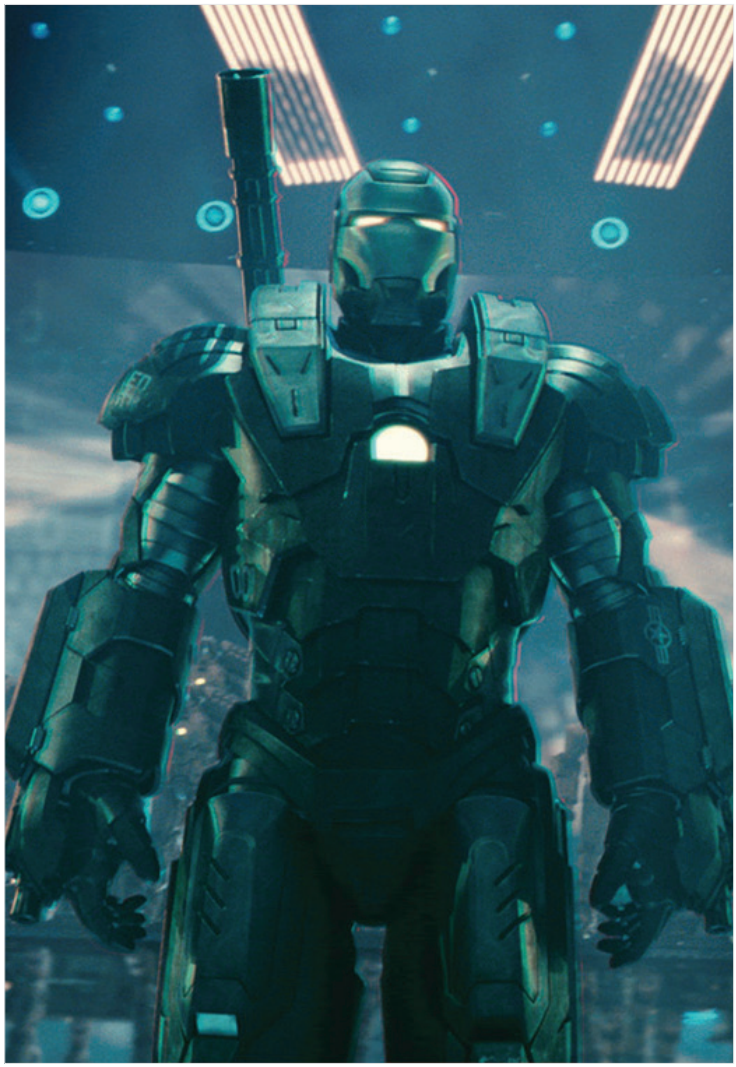


Our Changing Language

Today, we watch movies in many ways. We watch them in movie theaters, on TV, and on computers and mobile devices. Each of these new technologies has required new words.

Although we used to buy or rent DVDs, today, many people *stream* movies or *download* them. We watch *high-def* ("high definition," or "very clear") movies. We also watch *bloopers,* or mistakes made by the cast.

The language of movies changes from year to year, as new technology is invented. It's impossible to know what's next, but it's fun to imagine what the next movie experience might be!



Glossary

3D *three dimensions, or measurements of length, width, and depth*

CGI computer-generated imagery, or pictures that were created on a computer

cinema another name for movies

image a picture

scene in movies, a place where the action is set; in plays, a part of an act, or a section of a play

set *in movies, a place that has been built for filming; in plays, the things that are on the stage*

special effects images that are created by technology

theater a place to see a movie or a play

Think About It

• What is your favorite movie? Tell a friend about it, using two or three of the words you learned in this book.

• Draw a cartoon that shows your favorite characters. Show it to a friend and describe what your characters are saying and doing.

• Suppose you could work in film-making. Which job would you like to do? What about the job sounds like it would be interesting and fun?

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