

Films and cinema

1 Work with a partner and discuss the questions.

- 1 Sometimes a book is adapted into a film or a TV programme. Why do you think this is?
- 2 Look at the photos. Have you seen this film or read the book? What do you think it is about?

2 Read the text. Why is it important that the screenplay is different from the novel in a film adaptation?

FILMS AND CINEMA: FROM PAGE TO SCREEN



***The Martian* is a recent science fiction film starring famous Hollywood actor, Matt Damon. It's about a space mission to Mars that goes wrong during a sandstorm and the crew are forced to leave, abandoning astronaut Mark Watney (Damon) who they think is dead. But he survives the storm and is left alone on the planet. The film focuses on how he can stay alive and on the plans of NASA (the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration) to rescue him.**

Like many popular films, *The Martian* started life as a novel. It was written by Andy Weir, then the rights were bought by a film company and one of the biggest screenwriters in the business, Drew Goddard, was asked to adapt the book for the big screen.

Adapting a book for film is known as writing a screenplay, but just how different is a screenplay from an original story? In a book, the author spends time describing the characters and plot and exploring scenes in detail to develop the story as much as possible for the reader. But a screenplay is very different. The screenwriter must make lots of changes to the book without losing the main story so that it works well as a film. It is important that things are visual and dramatic on screen to keep the audience interested.

Drew Goddard said that he had spoken a lot with author Andy Weir during the adaptation of *The Martian* as he wanted to get things right. The book focuses mainly on one character alone on Mars and Goddard knew that he had to change this to prevent the audience from getting bored, so the screenplay balances the time between the astronaut on Mars and the characters at the space agency on earth to increase the amount of dialogue and action. In the book Watney communicates through a written diary, but the screenwriter changed this to a video diary for more of a visual effect. Goddard wasn't afraid to cut a lot from Weir's novel either, such as leaving out at least a hundred pages that focused on the science of how to survive on Mars, to keep things moving.

Changes like these are important in adapting a book for the screen so that the result is a fast-paced, exciting film for the audience to enjoy at the cinema.

3 Read the text again. Then read the sentences and write **book (B)** or **screenplay (S)**.

- 1 It is written by an author.
- 2 It should have quite a lot of cuts made to it.
- 3 The film adaptation is a lot shorter.
- 4 It has more detailed information on plot and characters.
- 5 The main story should not be lost.

4 Read the names and definitions and write the correct words.

visual effect • actor • plot • novel • screenwriter
character • ~~scene~~ • author

- 1 There's a sandstorm on the planet. *scene*
- 2 Mark Watney
- 3 adapting to a video format
- 4 An astronaut is abandoned on Mars.
- 5 Drew Goddard
- 6 *The Martian*
- 7 Andy Weir
- 8 Matt Damon

5 Work with a partner and discuss the questions.

- 1 Not only novels are adapted into films. What other types of books can be made into films? What other ideas do filmmakers use to create films?
- 2 What is the difference between an adapted screenplay and an original screenplay?

?? DID YOU KNOW?

It's unusual for the author of a book to be the screenwriter for the film adaptation too. But the author of science fiction novel *Jurassic Park*, Michael Crichton, also wrote the screenplay for the hugely successful film of the same name.

The Academy Awards, or *Oscars*, is an American award ceremony. In 1996, actors Matt Damon (who was 27) and Ben Affleck (who was 25) became the youngest screenwriters ever to win the Best Original Screenplay award for their film *Good Will Hunting*. *The Social Network*, based on the book *The Accidental Billionaires*, was the winner of the Best Adapted Screenplay award in 2010 for its story of the founders of social networking website *Facebook*.

PROJECT

- 1 Work with a partner and choose a favourite book. Think about how the story could be adapted into a film. Read the first chapter of the book again and think about how you might write the screenplay for these opening scenes.
- 2 Imagine you are a screenwriter. Write the screenplay for Chapter 1. Remember to include or consider the following.

Keep the screenplay shorter than the original chapter.
Focus on the visual aspects.
Include dialogue and brief scene descriptions.
Don't be afraid to make cuts.

- 3 Read out your screenplay to the rest of the class.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

abandon [v]: leave someone or something instead of looking after them.

adaptation [n]: film or TV programme that has been changed from a book or play.

audience [n]: a group of people watching or listening to a performance of some kind.

brief [adj]: short.

cut [v]: reduce the length of a film, piece of writing etc.

dialogue [n]: the words that the characters speak in a film or book.

fast-paced [adj]: a lot of things happening quickly.

focus on [v]: concentrate on/pay attention to something.

format [v]: organise written material in a particular way, especially for a computer file.

mission [n]: a flight into space.

NASA: National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

plot [n]: the storyline of a book, film, etc.

prevent [v]: stop something from happening.

rights [n]: the legal authority to publish a book, produce a film, etc.

screenplay [n]: a story written for film or TV.

screenwriter [n]: the person who writes a screenplay.

star [v]: being the main actor or performer in a film, TV programme, etc.

survive [v]: stay alive in a difficult or dangerous situation.

visual [adj]: relating to things that we see.