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So You Want To Be A Movie Director

Linda Soules

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So You Want To Be A Movie Director

by Linda Soules

Genre: Children's Nonfiction

Key Takeaways

• A movie director holds the overall vision for a film and helps every department—from acting and camera work to costumes, sound, and editing—contribute to the same story.

• Directing happens across three stages: planning the movie, filming it, and shaping it in post-production. Choices made during editing can change a scene's pace, humor, suspense, and emotional meaning.

• Storyboards, shot lists, viewfinders, monitors, and slates help directors plan, communicate, and organize a production; preparation makes mistakes cheaper and collaboration clearer.

• The director's job combines creative judgment with practical decisions about schedules, budgets, safety, locations, weather, and what must be changed or cut when plans go wrong.

• Flexibility can turn setbacks into breakthroughs. The malfunctioning shark in Jaws led Steven Spielberg to show less of the creature, creating suspense through glimpses, empty water, and music.

• A director leads by communicating clearly, listening to collaborators, making timely decisions, and building trust—especially with actors who need specific, encouraging guidance.

• Movies can connect audiences, help people understand feelings and unfamiliar lives, preserve languages, and keep cultural memories available for future generations.

- There is no single route into directing: filmmakers have begun as artists, secretaries, publicists, animators, and hobbyists, often learning through short films and hands-on work.
- Young aspiring directors can start now by making brief phone films, storyboarding scenes, trying acting and editing, studying movies closely, and organizing collaborative projects.

Who Should Read This Book

This book is ideal for curious readers, especially ages 10–14, who watch movies and wonder how they are made, enjoy inventing stories, or like organizing people around a creative project. Parents, teachers, and librarians can also use it to spark conversations about careers, teamwork, storytelling, and the many different jobs involved in filmmaking. Its practical activities make it useful for children who want to try directing now, not merely imagine doing it someday. Readers gain a realistic introduction to the whole process—from storyboards and rehearsals to editing, budgets, and opening night—along with honest discussion of long hours, uncertainty, and barriers to opportunity. Unlike a purely inspirational career profile, it offers concrete film exercises and explains production roles; unlike a technical filmmaking manual, it focuses on the director's creative decisions, leadership, and effect on audiences. It is a welcoming first guide for aspiring directors and for anyone interested in how movies bring many people's ideas together.

Chapter Summaries

What If You Were a Movie Director?

A director transforms a written story into an experience audiences can see and hear. While a film may involve hundreds of specialists, the director is responsible for imagining how the whole movie should feel and helping each contributor work toward that shared vision. Directing begins in ordinary creative play, too: inventing characters, assigning roles, and deciding what happens next are early forms of the same work. The job is made up of countless choices, both major and tiny. A director might decide whether a scene should be funny or frightening, how long to hold on an actor's face, or which object a character uses to attract an alien. The book uses E.T.'s Reese's Pieces as an example of how a small production detail can become memorable—and even influence real-world sales. A director's choices accumulate into the audience's emotional response.

What a Movie Director Actually Does

The book describes filmmaking as happening three times: when the movie is written, when it is filmed, and when it is edited. During pre-production, the director studies the screenplay, helps cast actors and find locations, collaborates on sets and costumes, and plans shots using storyboards and shot lists. On set, the director works out blocking, calls for takes, and arranges coverage—such as wide shots and close-ups—so the editor has useful options later. Because scenes are often filmed out of order, the director must track how each character feels at every point in the story. Directing continues after filming wraps. The director works with the editor to choose takes and shape pacing, and collaborates with composers, sound designers, and visual-effects artists. A few seconds cut from a scene can sharpen a joke or intensify a chase; sound and effects can create worlds that were never physically present. Directors may also screen early versions for test audiences and revise scenes that confuse or lose viewers. From initial planning through release, a large production can take two years or more.

Where Directors Work and How They Get Started

Directors film on soundstages and real-world locations, from forests and deserts to city streets. They work in live-action and animation, as well as television, commercials, music videos, and cinematic video-game sequences. Large productions may use a second-unit director to film action, stunts, or scenery while the main director works with actors. New LED-wall stages let actors perform against moving digital backgrounds they can see, rather than imagining a setting in front of a green screen. There is no required career route. Some directors study film, while others begin in different fields or build experience through shorts, music videos, commercials, editing, or assistant-director jobs. Film festivals can bring attention to a small project, and making films independently provides practice even before a first major opportunity. The book also acknowledges the uncertain economics of the work: earnings vary widely, many directors piece together smaller jobs, and professional organizations such as the Directors Guild of America advocate for fair pay and safer working conditions.

The Tools of the Trade

A director uses practical tools to turn ideas into a shared plan. Storyboards show the movie shot by shot, helping crews understand camera placement, character movement, and action before production begins. They can reveal problems while changes are still inexpensive, and they do not need to be beautifully drawn: stick figures can communicate what matters. A viewfinder—or a phone app—helps directors judge what a camera lens will include, from an entire setting to a single tear. On set, a monitor shows the camera’s image so the director can assess framing and performance, while headphones help catch even whispered dialogue. Before a take, a crew member uses a slate to label the scene and take and to create a clap that lets the editor synchronize sound and picture. Together, these tools support the director’s central task: making intentions clear and ensuring that the filmed material can be organized

and shaped into the finished story.

The Best and Hardest Parts of the Job

Many directors cherish opening night, when a room full of strangers responds to a film that only a few people have seen during its creation. The planned laugh, gasp, or tear becomes a shared event. Directors also enjoy watching an idea become tangible—a sketched tree house built by craftspeople, or a performance improved by an actor's unexpected choice. The work is collaborative, and trusted creative partnerships can last for decades, as with Hayao Miyazaki and composer Joe Hisaishi. The same work brings serious demands. Filming days can last twelve hours or more, productions may keep directors away from home for months, and post-production adds further pressure. Delays, illness, weather, and broken equipment can cost money and force fast decisions. Projects may stall for years in development, fail commercially, receive poor reviews, or even lose their director. The book also discusses unequal access to major directing opportunities and ongoing debates about artificial intelligence and creative workers' rights, emphasizing that the profession's challenges are both personal and structural.

Surprises, Accidents, and the Audience's Imagination

A production problem can reveal a stronger creative solution. During Jaws, the mechanical sharks repeatedly failed, so Spielberg showed the shark sparingly. The fin, barrels, empty ocean, and memorable two-note theme made the danger frightening without requiring the creature to appear constantly. The book connects this to early filmmaker Georges Méliès, who used the apparent effects of a jammed camera to make objects vanish and transform. Directors can treat accidents not only as obstacles but as clues to possibilities they had not planned. Editing also shapes what audiences believe they see and feel. In the Kuleshov experiment, viewers interpreted the same calm expression differently depending on whether it appeared beside soup, a funeral, or a woman resting. Directors use this principle by controlling the order of shots, allowing context to create emotion. Other examples show how directors adapt their methods: some use music to help actors access a feeling, Miyazaki develops stories through storyboards rather than a complete script, and Wes Anderson filmed himself acting out scenes to guide animators on Fantastic Mr. Fox.

A Day in the Life

A fictional day on a family adventure film shows how directing balances artistic plans with logistics. The director arrives before sunrise with a call sheet listing the day's work, rehearses young actors, and adjusts the blocking until the scene feels right. When a goat eats part of a prop map, the child actor's improvised response proves funnier than the written line, so the director keeps it. For a secret-door scene, the director films a wide view, medium shots, and close-ups, then gives the actor a clear imaginative prompt to elicit a more convincing reaction. Time and light eventually force compromises. While children receive schoolwork and

designers request decisions, the director must also keep the schedule moving. The goat's interruption leaves less daylight, so the director cuts a beloved short scene and reshapes another to fit one shot. The crew captures the sunset during magic hour, wraps for the day, and the director reviews the dailies that evening. The example illustrates a central lesson: a director protects the story while adapting to the actual conditions of production.

The People Behind a Movie

A director leads a team whose size can range from dozens on a small film to thousands on a major effects-heavy production. Department heads are key partners: the cinematographer oversees camera and lighting, the production designer shapes the film's world, the costume designer creates character clothing, and the script supervisor tracks continuity. The assistant director runs the set, schedule, and safety meetings, while producers manage financing and budgets. Editors, composers, sound teams, effects artists, and many other specialists complete the work. Actors are among the director's closest collaborators. Directors help cast and rehearse them, then offer notes that are concrete and playable—such as asking an actor to imagine hearing a secret—rather than simply demanding an improvement. Trust allows performers to experiment and take emotional or comic risks. Working with child actors calls for additional patience, structured hours, and playful approaches; Spielberg filmed much of E.T. in story order so the young performers' final goodbye would carry a sense of genuine experience. Good leadership means listening to the whole crew, not just issuing instructions.

How Movies Help People and What Directing Requires

Movies create shared experiences among people who may never meet, and they can help viewers feel less alone by reflecting difficult changes, relationships, and ambitions. They also invite audiences into lives different from their own. The book points to localized versions of Moana in te reo M■ori and Frozen 2 in Sámi as examples of films supporting language access. Inside Out, inspired by Pete Docter's observations of his daughter growing quieter as she grew older, gives feelings recognizable characters and can help children name emotions. Films can also make history vivid and preserve cultural records for future audiences. To serve that purpose, directors need vision, leadership, clear communication, decisiveness, and flexibility. They also benefit from skills that may not seem obvious: acting knowledge helps them guide performers, math and budgeting help them manage time and costs, and basic understanding of each department makes their requests more realistic. A director need not personally do every job, but should know enough to collaborate effectively, plan alternatives, and make decisions under pressure without losing sight of the film's emotional purpose.

Directors to Learn From—and How to Begin

Profiles of Alice Guy-Blaché, Satyajit Ray, Steven Spielberg, Hayao Miyazaki, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, and Ava DuVernay show how varied a directing career can be. Guy-Blaché moved from secretarial work to making one of cinema's early story films; Ray shifted from advertising

and illustration to directing Pather Panchali, financing it through personal sacrifice; and Spielberg began with homemade movies before directing Jaws at twenty-six. Miyazaki developed from an animation artist into a celebrated filmmaker, while Nelson advanced from storyboarding to directing Kung Fu Panda 2. DuVernay began as a publicist and made her first feature while keeping her day job. Their stories emphasize persistence, experimentation, and paths that do not begin with fame or a film-school credential. The book turns that encouragement into practical exercises: watch a scene without sound, make a one-minute movie, draw a storyboard, try acting, learn editing, write stories, and take responsibility for a group project. Experiments such as filming a toy's disappearance or cutting a calm face beside different images demonstrate movie techniques with simple equipment. Readers are invited to explore related careers—including cinematography, editing, animation, acting, sound, and screenwriting—and to stay curious about film history and credits. The central message is to begin with a small story, a phone, and willing collaborators, then learn by making and sharing the work.

Notable Quotes

> *"The director is the one person who sees the whole movie before it exists."*

> *"A movie gets made three times: once when it's written, once when it's filmed, and once when it's edited."*

> *"Great directors stay calm under pressure and make everyone feel their work matters."*

> *"Great directors gather opinions, then decide."*

> *"Great directors adapt to rain, broken equipment, and surprises, and sometimes find something better."*

> *"You are a story still being filmed, and some of your best scenes haven't been shot yet."*

> *"Gather your crew, and roll camera."*

Full Summary

So, you want to be a movie director. You want to take a story that exists only as words on paper and turn it into something people can see and hear: heroes and villains, laughter and goosebumps. You might imagine sitting in a dark theater while an audience gasps at exactly the moment you planned. Making a movie takes hundreds of talented people, from actors and camera operators to costume designers, set builders, animators, and musicians. Each brings expertise in one part of the work. The director's special responsibility is to picture the whole film before it exists, explain that vision to everyone involved, and guide the team toward

making the same story.

You may already have tried a little directing. If you have ever told a friend, “You be the dragon, and I’ll be the knight,” you have begun deciding who does what in a scene. In a finished movie, someone has also chosen where the camera goes, whether it rains, what color the hero’s jacket is, whether music swells or falls silent, and how long we stay on a character’s face. Directors answer questions like these all day. Should a moment feel scary or funny? Should the audience see the monster, or only its shadow? A big decision might concern the ending; a small one might be what candy a boy uses to lure a shy alien. In *E.T.*, it was Reese’s Pieces, after the makers of M&M’s declined. The candy’s sales rose after the film came out. Little choices accumulate, and details can make a scene feel just right—or wrong.

Filmmakers often say a movie gets made three times: when it is written, when it is filmed, and when it is edited. Directors take part in all three. Before filming, during pre-production, the director studies the screenplay, the written story containing scenes and dialogue. Some directors write screenplays themselves. They may help choose the actors, search for locations, and work with designers on sets and costumes. To plan what the camera will see, they can make storyboards, comic-strip-style drawings of planned shots, and a shot list, a checklist of the shots to film. This preparation helps turn an idea into a plan that the crew can understand and carry out.

During filming, the director plans blocking: where actors stand and move, and where the camera goes. Each attempt to film a shot is a take. The director calls “Action!” to begin and “Cut!” to stop, then decides whether the scene needs another try. A difficult shot might take ten attempts or more. The scenes are rarely filmed in the order audiences will see them. A movie’s ending might be filmed on the first day, so the director must keep track of how each character feels at every point in the story, even as the cast moves through the plot out of order.

Directors also plan coverage, filming the same scene from several angles so the editor has choices. A wide shot might show the whole room, while a close-up fills the screen with a face and reveals a tiny shift in feeling. When filming is over, post-production begins. The director may spend months with an editor selecting the best takes and arranging shots into scenes. A few seconds removed from a moment can make a joke land more sharply or a chase feel more exciting; the cut can also change a scene’s emotional weight. Whole scenes may disappear, left “on the cutting-room floor,” as the old expression goes.

The director’s work continues alongside other specialists. They work with a composer on music and with sound designers on the noises heard in the film. For *Star Wars*, Ben Burtt created the lightsaber hum by combining the whir of an old movie projector with the buzz of a television set. Visual-effects artists can add dragons, spaceships, or cities that were never physically present. Many films use a green screen, whose solid green background is later

replaced by another world. Directors may watch early cuts with test audiences, noticing when people laugh, fidget, or seem confused, and then make changes. A large movie can take two years or more from its first planning meeting to opening night.

Directors work in soundstages, enormous warehouse-like buildings where sets are built, and on location in real places such as deserts, forests, and city streets. Many major films are made in Los Angeles, but productions also happen around the world, from New Zealand and Morocco to Atlanta. In the United States, about 181,000 people work as producers and directors in movies, television, and theater. A typical director earns about $90,000 a year, though pay varies widely: a few famous directors make millions, while many others piece together smaller jobs in commercials and short films. More than 19,000 directors and colleagues belong to the Directors Guild of America, a union that works for fair pay and safer working conditions.

There is no single route into directing. Some people study film at a university or college, while others study something else first. Satyajit Ray, one of India’s great directors, studied economics and art. Other aspiring directors begin by making short films, music videos, or commercials. A short film that attracts attention at a film festival, where new movies are shown to audiences and judges, can help lead to a first major job. Some people learn the work from inside a production, starting as assistant directors or editors, while making their own short films on weekends.

Animation offers another path, though animated films demand close collaboration on a large scale. Directors work with hundreds of artists, sometimes spending four or five years on one movie. To understand how a character moves, animators may make faces in a mirror or film themselves acting out a scene. While Pixar made *Ratatouille*, about a rat who loves cooking, the team kept pet rats at the studio so animators could observe how they scurried and sniffed. Directors also work in television, commercials, music videos, and the movie-like scenes in video games. On a big action film, a second-unit director can film chases, stunts, and scenery while the main director works with the actors. New technology is changing production further: some films are made in huge rooms lined with curved LED screens displaying moving backgrounds, letting actors see an alien planet around them instead of having to imagine it against a green wall.

To make a movie’s imagined world clear to a crew, directors rely on practical tools. Storyboards are like comic strips: each drawing shows a planned shot, where characters stand, how close the camera is, and which way people move. Alfred Hitchcock planned so carefully that he joked filming was the boring part, because the movie was already complete in his head. Storyboards let directors explain ideas, map out difficult action, and spot problems while they are still cheap to fix. The drawings need not be beautiful; even stick figures can get the idea across.

A viewfinder helps a director imagine how a real location will look through a camera lens. It might be a handheld lens or a phone app, and it lets the director test whether the frame should take in an entire castle or isolate a single tear. During filming, a monitor shows what the camera sees. The director watches the framing and the actors' performances while a camera operator runs the camera; headphones make it possible to catch even a whispered line. The crew often calls the monitor area "video village."

Before each take, someone holds a slate, or clapperboard, in front of the camera. It identifies the scene and take so the editor can find the right footage, and its clap helps synchronize separately recorded sound with the picture. Together, these tools turn a director's ideas into plans the crew can understand and help keep the many pieces of a production organized.

For many directors, the reward comes when a movie finally meets an audience. On opening night, strangers laugh at a joke that took five rewrites or jump at the moment the director spent weeks preparing. Some directors return to theaters for weeks, watching people's faces in the dark. There is also the satisfaction of seeing an idea become something real: a tree house sketched on a napkin built by carpenters and painters, lit and made ready for the camera. Directors value the unexpected contributions of collaborators, too—a costume detail, a piece of music, or an actor's surprising delivery. Hayao Miyazaki has worked with composer Joe Hisaishi for about forty years. And a film can keep reaching people long after its premiere, becoming a family tradition or inspiring a young viewer to make movies.

The work can be punishing as well. A shooting day may last twelve hours or more, begin before sunrise, or continue through the night. Directors may spend months away from home, and post-production can keep them working for months after filming ends. Money and time press on every decision: when a production falls behind schedule, each additional day can cost a fortune. Bad weather, broken equipment, or a sick actor can disrupt plans, leaving the director to decide quickly what can still be done. Sometimes the decision is wrong. Some films receive poor reviews or lose money, and studios may replace a director if they disagree with the choices being made.

Even getting a film started may take years of pitching, rewriting, and waiting. James Cameron wrote an early version of *Avatar* in 1994, but waited about fifteen years for computers powerful enough to create the Na'vi as he imagined them. Filmmakers call such a long delay "development hell." The industry also has doors that remain harder to open for women and people of color: big-studio directing has historically been dominated by white men, and women still direct only a small share of the largest studio films. Mentorships, grants, and training programs are among the efforts to widen opportunities. Meanwhile, movie workers continue to negotiate how artificial intelligence should be used; strikes by writers and actors in 2023 included concerns about pay and AI, and directors made agreements to protect their work.

Plans can fail in ways that lead somewhere better. While making *Jaws*, Steven Spielberg's three mechanical sharks—nicknamed Bruce—kept breaking down in the salty ocean. A shoot planned for fifty-five days stretched to 159. Spielberg responded by showing far less of the shark than he had intended. Instead, audiences saw a fin, floating yellow barrels, or empty water, while a two-note musical theme warned that danger was near. The glimpses made the film more suspenseful; Spielberg later said the movie was better because the shark kept breaking down. A malfunctioning camera may have given Georges Méliès a different sort of opportunity. He said that when his camera jammed during a street scene, a horse-drawn bus appeared to change into a hearse when the film resumed. Whether or not that was precisely how it happened, Méliès developed the trick of making things appear and disappear, becoming one of cinema's early special-effects wizards.

A director also works with what viewers imagine. In an experiment around 1920, Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov showed audiences the same calm, expressionless face beside a bowl of soup, a funeral, and a woman resting on a sofa. Viewers thought the actor looked hungry, then sad, then dreamy, although his face never changed. The shot placed next to a face can create its meaning: a smile after a birthday cake feels different from the same smile after a villain sneaks away. Directors use this power of editing to guide feelings without viewers noticing how it happens.

Music can shape a performance, too. In the silent-film era, musicians sometimes played on set to help actors find an emotion. John Ford kept accordion player Danny Borzage with his crews for decades; before an emotional scene, Borzage would play until an actor felt the mood. Some directors let a story grow as they work. Miyazaki draws storyboards without first writing a complete script, while his team begins animating and the plot develops. Wes Anderson, making the stop-motion *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, filmed himself acting out scenes on his phone and sent the videos to animators. He also recorded the actors' voices on a farm to give them a more natural outdoor sound.

A typical day shows how quickly a director must shift between artistic choices and practical ones. Imagine a family adventure film shooting at a countryside farmhouse in October, with only forty days of filming and an early sunset. At six in the morning, the director checks the call sheet, the day's schedule. Four script pages, a goat, and a sunset shot are on the plan, while the young actors can work only limited hours. At rehearsal, the director tries different ways to block the barn scene: where the girl discovers the map and when her brother enters.

When the slate claps and filming begins, the goat wanders into frame and eats the corner of the treasure map. The actors freeze, but the girl laughs and says, "Well, now we'll have to find the rest." It is an unscripted moment, and the director keeps it. Later, the secret-door scene is filmed in a wide view, then medium shots and close-ups. The director asks the girl to imagine finding the best thing she has ever found; on the next take, her eyes light up.

At lunch, while the young actors do schoolwork with their on-set teacher, the director reviews photographs of tomorrow's cave set and decides what the villain will wear. By midafternoon, the goat's interruption has put the schedule behind and the light is fading. There is no time for everything: a scene the director loves must be cut, and another is rewritten to fit into one shot. The sunset is captured in two takes during the brief glow called magic hour. After the assistant director calls wrap, the crew cheers and the young actors leave on time. That evening, the director watches the day's footage, or dailies. The goat's map-eating moment is even funnier onscreen, and tomorrow's cave is already on the director's mind.

Behind every movie is a team whose members bring different kinds of skill to the same story. The director's closest partners are the department heads: the cinematographer, or director of photography, shapes the camera work and lighting; the production designer creates the film's sets and overall world; and the costume designer dresses its characters. The script supervisor keeps details consistent from shot to shot, while the assistant director runs the set, maintains the schedule, and leads safety meetings before stunts and special effects. Producers raise money and keep the project on budget. Editors, composers, and sound and effects artists help complete the film after shooting. Some credit titles may sound surprising: a gaffer leads the electricians, a key grip oversees the crew moving heavy camera equipment, and the "best boy" is the chief assistant to either one, regardless of gender. *Avengers: Infinity War* holds the record for the most people credited on a movie, with 5,109; more than half worked on visual effects. Even a small film depends on many people, and the best idea may come from the newest assistant.

The director's most important collaborators are the actors. Directors help choose them, rehearse with them, and offer guidance that can help a performance feel honest. Trust matters: when actors feel safe, they can risk being vulnerable, playful, or brave. A useful note gives them something specific to try, such as pretending they have just heard a secret, rather than simply telling them to "do it better." Directing children takes particular patience. Young performers may have limited working hours and need a teacher on set, so directors often turn scenes into games. Steven Spielberg filmed most of *E.T.* in story order, allowing the young actors' goodbye to E.T. to feel real because they had experienced the story together.

Movies can create bonds among people who have never met. A theater full of strangers may laugh, jump, or clap at the same moment; families can quote the same films for years, and friends far apart can watch one and talk about it. Stories also help people feel less alone. A character struggling with change, a lost friendship, or a big dream can help viewers understand their own lives, while stories set in unfamiliar places invite audiences to see through someone else's eyes.

Films can also preserve languages and cultural memory. Disney's *Moana* was recorded in te reo M■ori in 2017, and *Frozen 2* followed in Sámi, a language spoken in northern

Europe. Children learning those languages could hear a favorite film in them. Pete Docter’s *Inside Out* grew from his observation that his daughter Elie became quieter around age eleven, prompting him to wonder what was happening inside her. By turning a girl’s feelings into characters, the film gave children ways to name emotions; therapists recommend it to some young people, and it shows that even sadness is welcome. Movies can make history feel like the experiences of real people, too. The Library of Congress selects twenty-five films each year to preserve because they help tell the country’s story. Future generations can watch them and see how people once spoke, dressed, laughed, and dreamed. A director’s choices may reach someone they will never meet at the moment that person needs a story.

To guide a film, directors need a clear vision: a picture of the finished movie that can hold steady through rewrites, budget cuts, and rainy days. Some build a look book of images and colors to communicate its feeling. They also need leadership, but leadership is not simply giving orders. The best directors listen, stay calm, and help everyone feel their work matters. Clear communication means finding the right way to explain an idea to each collaborator, using sketches, photos, or even sounds made with the mouth. A director might tell an actor there is a noise upstairs, ask the composer for a tiptoeing sound, and ask the lighting crew to darken the corners.

Decisiveness keeps a crew from waiting endlessly for answers. Directors gather opinions, then decide which choices need an answer now and which can wait; changing a decision is fine if the change is clearly communicated. Flexibility is just as important when weather, equipment, or an unexpected event disrupts the plan. A setback can point toward a better idea. Directors also need practical knowledge of budgets and schedules: they must understand what a scene costs, how many shots can be filmed in a day, and what to cut when time runs short. They work with the assistant director to schedule the work and plan backups, such as an indoor scene if rain makes an outdoor one impossible.

Directors do not need to perform every job, but learning the basics of each department helps them understand what is possible. They may learn how lenses change an image, how lighting affects color, what microphones can capture, and which shots an editor will need. Acting classes can help them understand what it feels like to perform and how to give actors useful notes; some directors act out a moment themselves, however silly it looks. English, theater, art, photography, and math all build useful skills, as do improv and opportunities to lead a group.

The paths of acclaimed directors show that no one begins with a famous name. Alice Guy-Blaché was a secretary at a Paris camera company when she saw an early film screening. Around 1896, she made *The Cabbage Fairy*, one of the first story films, and became the world’s first woman film director. Her studio sign told actors to “Be Natural.” Satyajit Ray designed advertisements and book covers in Calcutta before falling in love with

the story of *Pather Panchali*. Unable to find funding, he borrowed against his life insurance and traded his wife’s jewelry for a loan. The film took about two and a half years to make, came out in 1955, and won an award at Cannes the following year.

Steven Spielberg began with a short Western made with friends for a Boy Scout photography badge, then made a science-fiction film as a teenager. At twenty-six, he was hired to direct *Jaws*. Hayao Miyazaki started in animation drawing the in-between frames of movement, helped found Studio Ghibli, and made *Spirited Away* for a friend’s ten-year-old daughter, hoping to give her a heroine who was an ordinary girl rather than a princess. Jennifer Yuh Nelson found her direction while studying when a visiting storyboard artist showed her a job that matched what she naturally did. She joined DreamWorks Animation, led the story team for *Kung Fu Panda*, and became the first woman to direct a major Hollywood animated movie on her own with *Kung Fu Panda 2*. Ava DuVernay worked as a movie publicist and ran a publicity company before directing in her thirties. She kept her day job while making a first feature for $50,000, then became the first African American woman to win Sundance’s top directing prize for a drama.

A beginning filmmaker can start small: watch a favorite scene with the sound off and notice what the colors, camera, and expressions make you feel, then watch again with sound. Make a one-minute movie on a phone or tablet, draw a simple storyboard first, and learn how editing changes a story when shots move into a new order. Try acting, write a short script, and take classes that build skills in storytelling, art, theater, photography, or math. In a group project, volunteer to organize the work and give people jobs that suit them. A phone, a few friends, and a story are enough to begin; the important thing is to notice the small, true details around you and help others bring an idea to life.

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