**CHOOSING A STORY**

*“Storytelling is almost always a combination of something old and something new. And it’s the something new that gives it the contemporary relevance that makes it immediate and meaningful.”* —Ron Howard

CHAPTER REVIEW

Ron emphasizes fresh storytelling throughout his MasterClass. Familiar myths and themes can feel modern and significant when they are presented in a fresh way, and traditional cinematic approaches can feel new when the story feels current.

Look for a story that triggers inspiration for you. You should feel an emotional connection rather than an intellectual one, and find visualizing the story—even dreaming of the story—irresistible. Be sure the story has the potential to offer something fresh and interesting to audiences and be worth their time and money. Evaluate your idea for freshness; then, look for a series of powerful moments within the story. Identify, understand, and build to those scenes. If you’ve earned it, audiences will feel the impact and want to discuss and revisit that feeling.

LEARN MORE

* Ron points out that George Lucas’s *Star Wars* uses a classic narrative structure, but that it feels completely fresh in its new context. Read Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which deconstructs the familiar themes, myths, character psychology, and narrative structure found in the *Star Wars* movies.
* Watch Gil Junger’s 1999 fil*m 10 Things I Hate About You* with
an eye for its narrative structure and theme. The film is an interpretation of Shakespeare’s play *The Taming of the Shrew,* retold in the context of 1990s teenage America. Parse out in your notebook the elements of Shakespeare’s story that Junger retains, and those he updates.

ASSIGNMENT

• What are your instincts, aesthetics, and voice for storytelling through film? Begin to collect and organize stories, themes, films, scenes, filmmakers, TV shows, and other visual styles that you are drawn to in a notebook. Do you notice any patterns? Continue to add to this collection throughout your class.



**STORY INSPIRATION: CASE STUDIES**

CHAPTER REVIEW

In these case studies, Ron walks you through his belief that almost all stories are made of something old and something new. He explains how he kept each story fresh and relevant even if the themes, characters, plot, or genre were familiar.

In *Splash*, the genre was familiar—it’s essentially a 1930s romantic comedy—but the fantasy element of the girl being a mermaid was new, adding comedy and surprising visuals.

Ron knew the plot for *Cinderella Man* was familiar, but when he came across the Popeye “Out to Punch” cartoon in his research, he laughed at how similar it was to the story they were telling. It pushed him to tell the story in as visceral a way as possible and to root the story in Braddock’s struggle to pull his family up and out of poverty.

Ron felt that the screenplay for *Cocoon* was promising but that it didn’t connect with audiences on a human level. His wife Cheryl has a degree in psychology and often worked with geriatric patients, observing that as humans we never really grow out of our high school psychology. Ron applied this teenage psychology to the senior citizens in the film as they began to return to youth, making the characters more relatable.

With *Apollo 13*, Ron started with a journalistic approach, intensely researching the true story. He was primarily
excited about the cinematic ways to take the audience along with the characters. As he got deeper into the project, the emotional themes that he unearthed surprised him and contributed to his attachment to the movie.

LEARN MORE

* Watch *Splash* and identify how it mirrors the 1930s romantic comedy genre of movies like Charlie Chaplin’s *City Lights*.
* The research for *Cinderella Man* included watching footage of Jim Braddock and other boxers of the era, *Raging Bull*, and cartoons of the era. Listen to Ron describe his research process in more detail in this radio interview.

