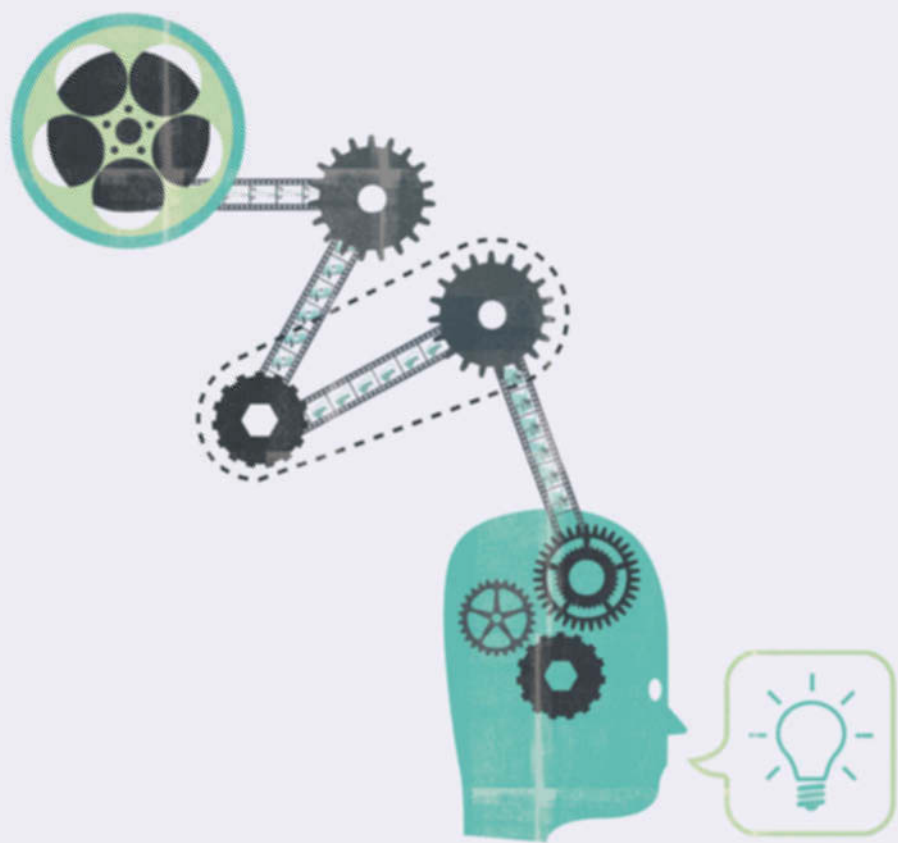


# CHILDREN, FILM AND LITERACY



BECKY PARRY



# Children, Film and Literacy



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*For Jon, Sam, Jake and Dan*

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# Foreword

The relationship between film and literacy is a rich and promising one, yet literacy researchers have not explored it extensively in recent years. This book, therefore, makes a significant and highly informative contribution to this field. It is puzzling as to why film has been so neglected in contemporary studies of children's multimodal practices. Perhaps the lure of the internet, with its potential to link film to a range of related texts, and its extensive social networking opportunities, has marginalised the study of film as a medium. It may be the case that the grammatical complexity of film is just a little too challenging, even for the most expert of multimodal analysts. Whatever the reasons, this lack of attention to film has left a lacuna which Becky Parry's book comfortably fills.

The importance of this book for the study of children, film and literacy lies in the careful attention it pays to three areas. The first major contribution is its exploration of the place of film in children's cultural, emotional and social lives. No doubt all of us can still remember iconic films from our childhood days and the powerful effect they had on us. Like many others born in the 1950s, my earliest memory of film was sitting in a darkened cinema, crying despondently at the death of the mother of a deer named Bambi in the Disney animated film of that name and squeezing tightly onto the hands of my two younger brothers, just in case they were as upset as I was (however, being little more than toddlers at the time, the intensity of the story somewhat passed them by and it was their older sister alone who sat staring at the screen in a somewhat traumatised state). The high-quality animation, rich colours and poignant music worked together to wrench every drop of emotion out of the film's audience, and the intense experience was enough to create a lasting love of film for me from that day (although I still find most death scenes too heart-wrenching for words). Becky's analysis of children's response to film includes a sensitive appraisal of Disney's portfolio and, while critiquing the ideologies underpinning many of the films, many of which are racist and sexist in nature, she acknowledges the affective impact of the animations on children and recognises the appeal of Disney for childhood audiences. It is this sensitivity to children's responses to film which is a great strength of the book. Becky avoids simplistic judgements and, instead, offers a nuanced appraisal of the complex, contradictory and culturally bound place of film in children's lives.

The second strength of the book is that it makes clear the relationship between engagement with film and children's understanding of narrative, demonstrating how the study of moving image should be central in

literacy teaching. Children learn much about plot and structure from film and they can transfer this understanding to print-based texts. Becky offers a detailed analysis of children's writing based on their film viewing and production and demonstrates the way in which they had internalised a complex set of conventions and rules through film viewing that was then embedded into their writing. Unfortunately, the skills the children demonstrated are not always recognised in a literacy curriculum that is focused on the acquisition of knowledge and understanding related to alphabetic print, and Becky's work presents a direct and powerful challenge to this orthodoxy. It is the case that work on film within the literacy curriculum has led in some projects undertaken in the past to a use of film that serves primarily to support the reading and writing of print-based texts, privileging the latter. Becky's work contests this approach and she emphasises that, while there is little doubt that a focus on film can enhance traditional literacy skills, children should have opportunities to learn about film as a valuable medium in itself. Drawing on Margaret Meek's contention that 'texts teach what readers learn', Becky argues that children develop the skills to decode and make meaning from film by watching films. This is a powerful message that should lead to curriculum approaches that enable children to analyse and produce films as valuable and significant texts within themselves, and not merely as ways of enticing reluctant children to engage with printed texts.

Finally, a further strength of the book is that it presents a series of engaging vignettes of children who are both consumers and producers of film, tracing children's meaning-making in a way that places creativity at the heart of the curriculum. Becky's methodological approach is genuinely participatory, and the children are engaged as active agents in the research process, their voices at the very centre of the study. This offers a model for all who wish to work with children to draw out aspects of their meaning-making for analysis and reflection. There is a deep authenticity to this approach and Becky does not shy away from addressing the challenges to such work. In drawing attention to the powerful role that popular culture plays in children's productions, she also reminds us that children's experiences are not homogenous and that for some, popular culture may not be as attractive as other cultural forms, while for others, it is their key passion and we ignore it in the classroom at our peril.

This is a book that goes to the heart of some of the critical debates in literacy education in the current era. As this book goes to press, we are in the midst of a curriculum review in England led by a Minister for Education, Michael Gove, who wishes children to return to the golden age of a mythic past in which popular culture has no place, forced out of the curriculum by an emphasis on high cultural forms and low-level decoding skills. It is up to the education profession to respond to this outright attack on some of the fundamental principles of child-led provision by re-asserting the cultural

and educational value of texts and forms that are prevalent in children's everyday, out-of-school lives. Becky's book provides a touchstone and moral compass for this endeavour, pointing both to the educational value of such work and, as importantly, to its social and cultural worth, giving, as it does, greater voice and agency to children by valuing their everyday encounters with films and texts of all kinds.

*Professor Jackie Marsh  
University of Sheffield*

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# 1

## Introduction: A Narrative on Narrative

Narrative is ubiquitous and takes many forms, from written and oral language to still and moving images. Barthes (1975) observes that in every culture narrative is ever present:

Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural. (Barthes, 1975, p. 1)

As Barthes describes, the earliest philosophers, including Aristotle, turned their attention to defining the characteristics of narratives and this has been the subject of debate as new forms of storytelling emerge. Regardless of innovations in medium and form, narratives continue to be highly important to the lives of children:

When we are born we enter into a world of stories: the stories of our parents, our generation, our culture, our nation, our civilisation. (Goodson, et al., 2010, p. 2)

As parents we teach children how to be, how to think, how to imagine, how to feel, how to remember, using stories in many different forms. Bruner (1986) describes narrative as a mode of thought and the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Elkonin (1978) demonstrates that it is make-believe or playing stories which form the richest context for young children's learning. Hardy (1975) describes narrative as a primary act of mind:

Narrative is crucial in life and in literature. Our ordinary and extraordinary day depends on the stories we hear. One piece of news, a change of intention, even a revision of memory, a secret, a disclosure, a piece of gossip may change our lives. (Hardy, 1975, p. 16)

Although the primacy of narrative has been contested in relation to very young children's experiences of reading (Pappasa, 1993), there can be little doubt that

narrative is highly significant to their engagements with texts. Robinson (1997) demonstrates that with each encounter with a new text, readers draw on previous experiences to make sense of them. As a result, as readers we develop repertoires of experience of narrative from print, film, television and other media, which help us engage with new texts. However, literacy has conventionally been taught through the telling and re-telling of print-based stories.

The importance of narrative was acknowledged in strategies to support the formal teaching of literacy in the UK:

The promotion of children's understanding of narrative texts, and opportunities to create them, are core aspects of children's literacy development. (DCSF, 2006 Year 1 Literacy Planning)

Fictional books are used to teach children not only how to decode alphabetic text but also how to infer meaning from the combined uses of language, font, layout and images. Through narratives we learn literacy (Dyson and Genishi, 1994), we construct identities (Marsh, 2005) and we become storytellers (Brice Heath, 1983). The importance of narrative is ingrained in school practices in written, oral and dramatic form. Learning about narrative is a critical aspect of becoming a reader and accessing education:

Narrative is primary in children, but it stays with us as a cognitive and affective habit all our lives long. (Spencer, 1982, p. 288)

Despite the clear significance of narrative to the teaching of literacy in schools, film and other popular media narratives are often treated with suspicion (Lambirth, 1994).

Meanwhile, at home children's early experiences of narrative are likely to be visual (picture books), moving image (children's television and film) or screen-based texts (computer games and websites). Attention has been paid to the role of media forms of narrative in children's lives such as television (Hodge and Tripp, 1986; Buckingham, 1993; Robinson, 1997; Messenger-Davies, 1997, 2001), games (Buckingham et al., 2006; Bearne and Wolstencroft, 2006) and websites (Marsh, 2010; Merchant, 2005a, 2005b); however, the relationship between children's film as a narrative form and children's emerging literacy has not been fully explored.

This monograph, therefore, presents a study of children's experiences of film and the significance of children's film as an aspect of a shared children's culture. The work contributes to a growing field of study that acknowledges the relationship between popular media and children's literacies and identities. It is important to make clear at this stage that I am not claiming a greater significance for film over other media or popular forms. I do however, demonstrate, in subsequent chapters, the benefits of examining in close-up a specific media form. I recognise that film is just one element of a wider

constellation of other media and activities that constitute children's popular culture and indeed children's lives. Furthermore, that the different forms of children's popular culture converge and interrelate in interesting ways that it is also important to pay attention to. The same narrative can now appear as a film, television programme, book, console or computer game and website. However, children's films are narrative texts with their own formal affordances, codes and conventions and, as such, they contribute to what Robinson (1997) describes as children's developing repertoires of narrative.

The research was motivated by a desire to situate film alongside other media as a form through which children learn to read and create their own narratives at home and potentially at school. The data described in this work seeks to understand what children learn about narrative from their engagements with children's films. The ways in which children participate in and engage with children's film are examined alongside an exploration of the extent to which children's films are sources of ideas about narrative in the classroom. Finally, the processes through which children draw on children's film when creating their own moving image narratives is analysed in detail.

## **Narrative learning**

Goodson et al. (2010) describe narratives opening up spaces for learning:

Narrative learning is not simply learning **from** the stories we tell about our lives and ourselves. It is learning that happens **in** and **through** the narration. (Goodson et al., 2010, p. 2)

I present narratives of six children's literacy identities in relation to film at home, at the cinema and at school. My perceptions of the children's identities, informed as they are by fieldwork data, are also informed by a narrative of my own – the cumulative experience of participation and engagements with film at home, at the cinema and at school. As a result I begin with six vignettes, storied accounts, of my own experiences of film as a child, a teacher, a parent and a film educator. The process of reflecting on these telling moments contributed to the formulation of my research. Goodson et al. (2010) point out that narrative learning as part of the life course often occurs implicitly and that making it explicit is associated with learning:

For all those interested in education as a route to self-development and social purpose narrative learning would seem to offer a promising gateway. (Goodson et al., 2010, p. 132)

I therefore present a reflection on some key personal and professional experiences, which provoked questions and enabled me to arrive at an appropriate starting place for my research.

## Hollywood tales

When I was a child my gran used to tell me stories. There is not anything unusual about a granddaughter listening to the stories of her grandmother but the stories I listened to were not from books. The stories she told me were intricately woven plots and they were based on Hollywood melodramas and the lives of the Hollywood stars. Bette Davies, Olivia de Havilland, Vivien Leigh, Audrey and Katherine Hepburn, Jane Russell, Ingrid Bergman and Joan Crawford became the brooding, pouting, earnest, heroic stuff of my imaginings. Whether they played an insolent and feisty heiress, a martyred downtrodden sister, or the classic femme fatale, I came to love hearing their stories. My gran had a particular way of telling stories, building up gradually to a key line such as, 'Why ask for the moon when we have the stars?' from the film *Now Voyager* (Rapper, 1942). She would mingle the film plots with snippets of juicy information from the private and public lives of the stars. According to my gran's wonderfully digressing narratives, on and off screen these women had terrible difficulties to overcome including poverty, heartbreak and public misunderstandings.

It was many years later that I actually got to see any of the films she retold. No video or DVD copies of old films were available then. Sometimes I would find myself watching a 'half-way through' film on a Saturday afternoon on BBC Two and realise that the story was oddly familiar to me. As a consequence of this experience I always believed that film was a significant source of stories. It did not occur to me that films were of any less value than books, television, comics or songs. I did not become a film 'buff', I had no interest in how films were made and did not imagine I could make films, but just as some children become habitual book-readers, I did go to the cinema or watch films at home whenever I had the chance, especially those films with strong female characters and with a high likelihood of being a 'weepie'.

## Alien invasion

I have two particularly significant childhood cinema memories. The first was going to see *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977). I cannot remember being especially excited before going but all the same there was a buzz about it and as a result I found myself, with my siblings, in a long queue for tickets. When we finally got into the cinema, the tickets had been oversold and there were no seats. I look back and imagine the usherettes taking pity and letting us sit on the floor at the front (something that surely would not happen now in times of more health and safety rules). However, this was an important part of the whole experience. We were caught up in the excitement that was *Star Wars* the cultural phenomenon. It wasn't long before we were using large sticks, broom handles and any other tube-shaped objects as light sabres and, although none of us ever wanted to be the only female character, Princess

Leia, we made up our own girl *Star Wars* characters or took on the roles of the boys.

I also recall with great emotion watching *E.T.* (Spielberg, 1982), the story of a stranded alien. During the scene by the river where *E.T.* is found close to death my sisters and I wept noisily. I was distraught, but I loved the film. I loved the fact that the children kept things hidden from the grown ups. I loved the humour of the connection between Elliott, the main character (and middle child!), and *E.T.* but most of all I identified with Elliott. I responded to the fact that his family did not listen to him, believe him or take him seriously and for me the denouement of the film was that everyone had to stop and listen to Elliott; he was right and they were wrong.

My love of the film *E.T.* has become a family narrative. Like children today keen to collect toys, cards and experiences linked to a favourite text, I was delighted to find, in a charity shop, a model of *E.T.*, which still lit up and said, 'Phone Home'. On a recent trip to the Florida theme parks I was more excited than any of the children when I got to ride on a BMX bike over the night sky to John Williams' evocative music. Perhaps some films become 'always' films – significant memories of a shared experience.

### **Tread softly**

After completing my Communication Studies degree in Sheffield I trained to be a secondary school English and Drama teacher (there were no courses for teachers of Media) and took up my first teaching post in 1992. During my training we spent just one day exploring the possibility of teaching Media Studies, despite the growth of this area and the high likelihood of a teacher of English being asked to teach either the subject or media within English. This session was run by a local secondary school teacher who described what he did in the classroom to explore the film *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990). However, before we even got started, a lively discussion erupted about whether or not this was a text worthy of study. This discussion drew on common discourses about the value of the text, and the film was dismissed, by my peers, as being rubbish. There were also anxieties about the representation of gender in the text, although eventually a consensus was reached that this was a text that could be studied to ensure young people were able to deconstruct it and see its ideological imperfections. Coming from a Communication Studies course which was largely composed of the study of popular texts, whether they were television detective series, representations of race, or the history of the penny dreadful, I realised that my position in the group was distinct from many of the English graduates who would go on to be colleagues. I also realised that my peers were asking fundamentally different questions of popular texts than those applied to literary ones.

There is a moment which I love in the film *Pretty Woman*. As someone who loathes shopping and feels totally intimidated by glossy shops, I love

and re-enact this moment with friends. Julia Roberts' character returns to a shop in which she had been sneered at, with a large amount of money to spend. In context this is hardly a feminist moment, the money is her client's, the shop assistant is female and our Cinderella still gets prettily transformed for the ball. However, for me the shopping moment connected with my social anxieties about going into 'posh' places and I loved it. In the classroom this affective response was being trampled on and I worried about the children these English teachers would also encounter whose pleasures they might also trample on (Pompe, 1992b). This experience made me increasingly determined to teach Media Studies.

### **Monstrous stories**

In my early years of teaching I encountered an issue which appears to be a fairly common experience. One boy in my English class persistently wrote extremely violent stories with sprawling narratives and evolving monsters, which I found difficult to respond to appropriately. I discovered on further enquiry that this boy had a particular interest in Japanese anime films and manga. This made me aware of the need to take an interest in the sources from which children draw in their stories, but also left me with a dilemma about how to make the writing compatible with the newly introduced statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. Years later this dilemma also contributed to the formulation of my research.

### **Chivalric code**

From a period of time in which I worked in cinemas and children's film festivals one experience in particular stays with me. I was approached by an education welfare officer at a school who ran a group for children with experiences of bullying, and who wanted to explore if there were any films the children might find relevant to their experiences. We discussed some possible activities and this led to the group taking part in two screenings, one of an Icelandic film called *Benjamin Dove* (Snær Erlingsson, 1995) and one entitled *The Mighty* (Chelsom, 1998), an American film. Both films had male protagonists who were from 'ordinary' not affluent backgrounds and explored issues of bullying. Both films end with tragedy and redemption and some greater understandings, although their moral stance is not didactic. Both also draw on myths of the codes of honour between knights and explored the reasons why people bully and are bullied.

Following the activity we ran a drama activity, which gave the children an opportunity to further explore and discuss their responses to the films. It would be fair to say I was relieved to have an audience for *Benjamin Dove* (Snær Erlingsson, 1995) – few teachers would opt to bring a whole class to a subtitled Icelandic film with its washed out, if achingly beautiful, snowy

landscapes and its depiction of such a bewilderingly different rural lifestyle. *The Mighty* (Chelsom, 1998) was more accessible although, by having such a sad ending, it was not the end-of-term treat choice. However, nothing could have prepared me for the children's responses. They took on an ownership of these films and used them to make comparisons with their own experiences. It struck me that this is often what we do with fiction; we relate, we empathise, we distance ourselves, we immerse. And yet it was striking that these children seemed to respond to the films as if they had never seen aspects of their own lives, in this case bullying, at the cinema before. Following the screening the children formed a club which had a code of honour based on the same knights' code explored in the films. I felt that these films had an impact on the children beyond the everyday; the affective responses the children had to the films was important and needed to be valued.

### **Bugs and baddies**

When my middle son, Jake, was four I noticed he always chose to be the baddie in any re-enactments of films he loved. When he came out of a screening of the film *A Bug's Life* (Lasseter, 1998) he didn't say 'I want to be Hopper', the evil grasshopper, or indeed 'I want to be Flick, the hero of the story'. He said 'I am Hopper' and proceeded to hop or rather fly around the cinema, park and house for days and weeks afterwards crying joyfully 'Let's Ride!' What struck me was not just that he was asserting that he would choose to be the baddie, Hopper, but also the particular way he expressed himself. My older son Sam, five years his senior, would always say 'I am going to be Postman Pat, Buzz Lightyear or Luke Skywalker with a much greater consciousness that what he was suggesting was a game, and that he was playing at something. When I talked to Jake about why he chose to be Hopper he grinned, remembering that Hopper could fly, the grin had a hint of mischief in it, recalling the pleasure of transgression.

The trend of quickly identifying the character to 'be' continued, and in every film or television programme Jake watched throughout his fifth and sixth years, he always quickly told me who he was going to be. This was an integral part of our engagement with films. I enjoyed guessing who he was going to be; he enjoyed my reactions. As he grew older he did not always choose to be the bad guy but he certainly chose people at the centre of the action, with super-powers or all the funniest lines. On reflection, I think Jake sought to take on the role of the character who made things happen, who created adventure or acted on decisions. His choices related to his own emerging sense of self as a child encountering a number of new situations – a new baby arriving, moving house and starting a new school.

Through play and the availability of toys and clothes, this film became part of the fabric of home. Jake's liking of *A Bugs Life* became an aspect of his identity, influencing birthday present choices, for example, and developing

as a family narrative about his childhood. The pleasures connected with engaging with the film, taking sides, enjoying transgression, and not identifying with the hero, were all responses that contributed to Jake's approach when encountering new texts. His engagement with the role of Hopper, choosing to be Hopper, rather than distancing himself, became a particular way he engaged with stories. Play based on films offered a space in which he learnt to deeply immerse himself into a fictional world while making links with his emerging identity and his fantasies.

In my own experience, then, film played a significant role in my early life as a stimulus of play, an important source of narrative and a shared experience with family and friends. The role of film in my own life helped to inform my decision regarding the focus of my research. As an educator and parent, I had 'lived' experience of the way in which particular films gain in significance in children's lives, enabling them to explore and perform identities. However, this experience raised many further questions, especially relating to the role of film in schools and its potential to connect children's lived experiences with their school literacy experiences.

## **The study**

This was therefore a study of children's engagements with film at home and at school and an attempt to examine the way in which their understandings of narrative based on film manifested in different forms and contexts. Far from being an old media which has already been the focus of considerable study, children's films have been overlooked, especially recently in the hurry to look at young people's uses of newer technologies such as social networking websites (Burn, 2007). Research which focuses on children's participation in contemporary and popular children's films has a strong contribution to make to debates about contemporary childhoods, literacies and identities, and it is this area to which this work contributes.

The research is presented in a chronological structure which attempts to share both the data and findings but also the process through which these were constructed. In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I present a brief rationale for my particular focus on children's film in the context of contemporary studies of childhood and children's culture. In Chapter 3 I examine the significance of children's film as assets or resources in their developing literacy, identity and textual practices and compare this to the role of film in schooled literacy. I go on, in Chapter 4, to consider children as readers of film, I draw on reader response theory and narrative film theory to understand further the role of the reader and the processes involved in reading moving image narratives, by comparison to reading print narratives. In particular, I draw on the notion of the reader in the writer, as a focus and introduce the central focus of the research: what we can learn about what children understand about narrative from their film-related storytelling? In

Chapter 5 I present my methodological approach to my fieldwork, drawing on participative, collaborative and visual methods to engage meaningfully and ethically with the children involved in the research.

In the data chapters I present storied accounts of the developing identities of the children involved in this research with a particular focus on children's film, in the light of recent theory linking identity, literacy and popular culture, Chapter 6. I reflect on the role of children's films in the children's lives as resources for talk and play. Furthermore, I reflect on the different approaches the children take to reading children's films. In Chapter 7 I explore what knowledge and understandings of narrative the children are able to express in written and oral storytelling and the extent to which they draw on their knowledge of film in these contexts and, in Chapter 8, I explore what knowledge and understandings about narrative the children were able to express through film, reflecting on differences between the two contexts. Finally, in Chapter 9 I offer my conclusions regarding the significance of children's films to children's understandings of narrative and make a case for the further inclusion of film and moving image in literacy curriculums and practice.

# 2

## Children's Film: Children's Cultures

Children's films are currently hugely successful commercially and well received critically; many, many films for children are made each year (although less so in the UK). In the past families watched the first broadcast of films at Christmas such as *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939). According to research published by the now-abolished UK Film Council (UKFC), of the most successful films worldwide between 2001 and 2008 the top twenty were made for families and accessed by children (UKFC, 2009a), for example the *Harry Potter* (Columbus, 2002) *Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001), *Star Wars* (Lucas, 2002) *Spiderman* (Raimi, 2002) and *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson, 2001) series of films. Furthermore, children and young people and their parents make up the largest audiences for cinema in the UK:

The cinema audience for the top 20 films in 2008 was predominantly young, with the 7–34 age group (40% of the population) making up 64% of the audience. (UKFC, 2008, p. 116)

Children today access many more and a much wider range of films at the cinema, on television, on video, DVD, and on the Internet. Viewing can be a solitary or shared experience and children can watch again, pause, rewind and fast-forward to favourite moments and watch the 'making of' content. Related toys, clothes, bedding and books can extend their experience of film narratives (Marsh, 2005). Despite competition from online activities or console games, the significance of film in children's lives has increased in recent years.

Despite this increasing popularity, children's films have received limited attention in studies of culture, media and film:

Children's culture has been largely ignored, especially the world of animated films. (Giroux, 1995, p. 1)

While there have been studies of children's understandings of television, studies of children's film have been preoccupied with critiques of the

Disney Corporation. Sociological research into constructions of childhood, children's culture and children's literature has included a greater interest in children's popular culture. However, in this arena, debates about children's popular culture often focus on the film industry, the films, or representations of children in film (Hanson, 2000) and tend not draw on research into children's responses to children's films. For example, Giroux (1995, 1999) writes extensively about Disney as a global phenomenon rather than taking into account how children respond to any particular Disney texts. Furthermore, the focus on one corporation means that analysis stems from notions of the institution rather than from the child or children in their own context.

In this chapter I explore the ways in which children's films have been differently defined and understood. I situate children's films in the context of studies of childhood and children's culture. I then go on to examine some particular concerns raised about children's films and Disney in particular, including cultural imperialism and global domination, the appropriation of stories and the mis-representations of gender, class and race. In conclusion, I highlight the need for research which attempts to understand children's films in the context of contemporary children's culture and as significant to children's emerging literacy and identity practices.

## **The construction of childhood**

Current debates about the sexualisation (Levin and Kilbourne, 2008) and commercialisation of childhood (Palmer, 2007) have harked back to a time of innocence when children were 'pure and protected'. These nostalgic notions of children and childhood are socially constructed (James and James, 2004) rather than based on detailed research and are, as pointed out by Buckingham (2002), used to present children today as deprived of childhood. Buckingham (2002) demonstrates ways in which the media constructs children as both in danger and dangerous. He goes on to describe the contradictory relationship the media has with children. In one way the media acts as a vehicle for the discussion of discourses problematising contemporary childhood; and in another way the media (currently computer games and the internet) is often blamed for the crises in children's lives. Buckingham (2002) describes the ways in which contemporary accounts of childhood evolve as 'historical narratives' built around 'diverse representations' of children (Buckingham, 2002, p. 61) and argues that notions such as the purity and innocence of childhood are quite recent constructions.

Aries (1998) suggests that sexual innocence, for example, is a relatively recent expectation of children. He describes a range of incidents from experiences of French royal childhood that infer that in the past children were encouraged to be humorous and open with regard to sex and that modesty and decorum were learnt later as part of reaching maturity. Calvert (1998) reviews historical accounts of experiences of children that cite such issues

as high levels of morbidity, the need for economic involvement of children in family survival and the presence of children in all aspects of daily life as evidence that, for some pre-industrial children, there was no such thing as childhood as we understand it today. She demonstrates the ways in which early studies of childhood often drew exclusively on boys' experiences and those of children from privileged backgrounds to generalise widely about what was accepted practice for parents. Calvert (1998) identifies the need for sustained further studies of the lives of children from distinct class, gender and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, Calvert (1998) discusses key changes in relation to child protection, labour, education and the notion of children's rights, which reflect considerable shifts in perceptions and attitudes to children. Experiences and expectations of children and childhood are subject to change and become sites of conflict:

The concept of childhood has changed dramatically over time, with changes in social structure, cultural assumptions, and technological innovations leading one generation of parents to reject the child-rearing patterns of its predecessors. (Calvert, 1998, p. 74)

Calvert (1998) proposes that it is important to move beyond arguments about whether or not there was indeed a conception of childhood in the past and towards an understanding of the changing conceptions of childhood.

In post-industrial society, against a backdrop of social, economic and technological innovation, changing attitudes to childhood were reflected in the emergence of distinct texts for children such as books, radio, comics and then films, television and games. Negotiations about what childhood is perceived to be, what is suitable for children, children's relationships with adults and what children will enjoy are played out in these cultural texts. Kline (1998) points out, with reference to Western societies, that children's culture has a complex history involving institutions such as the family, the media, the law, the church, the school:

Culture is, after all, as the repository of social learning and socialisation, the means by which societies preserve and strengthen their position in the world. (Kline, 1998, p. 95)

Kline proposes that children's seemingly autonomous cultural expressions, whether they are nursery rhymes or playground games, 'take shape within a broader cultural framework' (Kline, 1998, p. 95). He argues that adults produce cultural texts and 'urge' them on children, raising questions about what it is that adults are urging on children and how children respond. Clearly, it is the case that, as authors, directors, toy-makers or comic strip artists, adults make texts for children. What is more, adults buy or enable children to buy and access popular culture. Yet children do not simply take