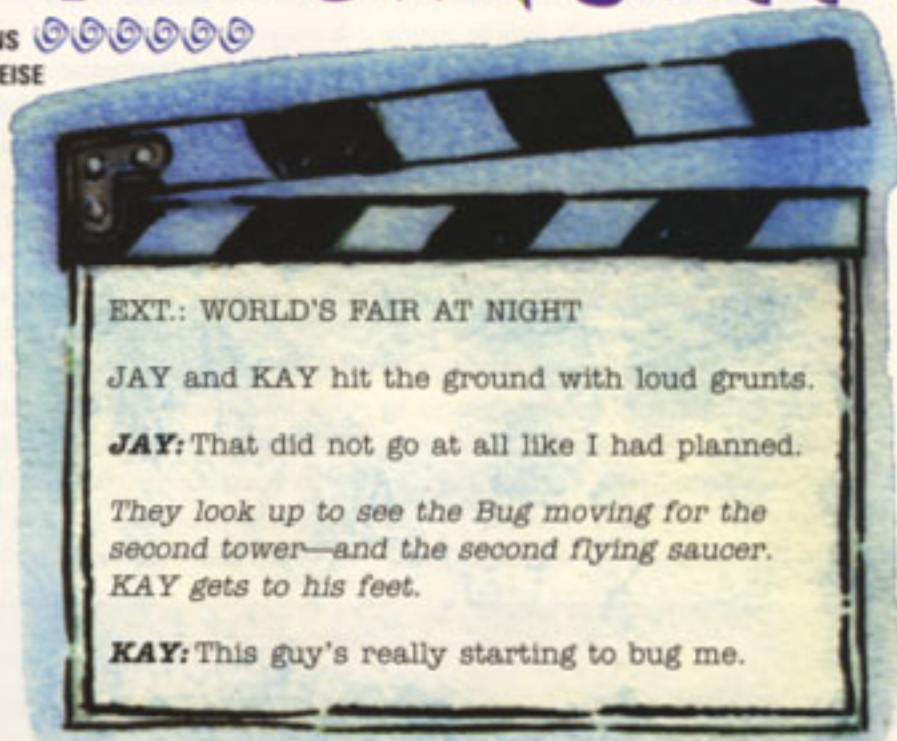


Write Your Own Screen Play

by HEATHER M. HOPKINS
illustrated by PATTY WEISE

Before Will Smith battled a single alien as Agent Jay in Columbia Pictures' *Men in Black*, a writer imagined what Smith would do and say during every second of the film. The resulting screenplay, excerpt at right, was the first step in making this blockbuster hit.



Try your hand at the filmmaker's craft! Follow the steps below to learn how to write your own screenplay.

1. First, decide what genre, or style, your film will be. Do you like old westerns? Action flicks? Dramas? Comedies? Science fiction?
2. Next, write a brief description of the major characters in your film, including important details about their appearances and personalities. For example, "DAISY is a fiery-haired, 11-year-old girl with pigtails and bruised knees." You will use these descriptions the first time each character appears in the film.
3. Now map out the plot for your film. For each scene, write a brief description of the action and dialogue that will take place. For example: "Scene One: Inside the Franklins' barn. Mac and Daisy clean out the horses' stalls and argue about who is going to win first prize at the county fair."

4. Using your outline to guide you, begin to write your screenplay, scene by scene. Each scene should include:

■ A **SLUGLINE**, or scene heading. This is the first line of the scene and describes where the scene takes place. Is it indoors ("INT." for "interior") or outdoors ("EXT." for "exterior")? What is the specific location? What time of day is it?

■ The **ACTION DESCRIPTION**. This paints a picture of what is happening in the scene. For example: "Mac and Daisy sit at a table, their hands tied behind their backs. Above them, a sign reads, 'PIE-EATING CONTEST.'"

■ The **DIALOGUE**, or the characters' lines. Use these as the building blocks of your story.

■ **PARENTHETICALS** or **CHOREOGRAPHY**. These instructions, in parentheses, tell actors how they should recite their lines or what they should do when they speak.

For example:

DAISY (*leaning over to smell the pie*): Mmmmm. Blueberry is my favorite.

5. Once you have finished writing the scenes, you are ready to create a title page. Write the name of your screenplay in the center of the page, followed by your name and mailing address. You are now ready to send your work to Hollywood!

