



Movies, cartoons and a pop tour of news values

[The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture](#) is a project of the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. Its database contains more than 83,000 entries on journalists, public relations people and media generally. The references come from film, television, radio, fiction commercials and cartoons. Teachers might consider its DVDs; scholars, its peer-reviewed journal.

[Early plays and movies](#), such as ["The Front Page"](#), often looked at the sensational, exciting, romantic aspects of journalism. Journalists were superheroes, such as ["Superman"](#) (reporter Clark Kent) and ["Spiderman"](#) (newspaper photographer Peter Parker). The [classic "Citizen Kane"](#) also emphasized the incredible power of the press.

Investigative reporting took center stage in ["All the President's Men"](#), with brave Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein tracing [a bungled burglary to abuses of power so severe the revelations led to President Richard Nixon's resignation](#). After that, while some journalists still saved the day in popular culture, ethics violations soared; reporters lied, cheated and stole, clawing their way to fame, and "pack journalism" flourished, with crowds of reporters screaming questions.

[Modern movies](#) are a kaleidoscope. [Clark Kent leaves the Daily Planet](#) to start a blog. Netflix' "House of Cards" also has [reporters fleeing the Washington Herald for the digital Slugline](#). HBO's ["Newsroom" details TV's failings](#) in the way ["The Paper"](#) critiqued newspapers. It falls to older documentaries like ["Page One: Inside The New York Times"](#) featuring real journalists such as New York Times media reporter [David Carr \(here talking about the future of journalism\)](#) to inject some reality into public perception of journalism.

Assignments for students at several levels:

Flashlight: Review the links above. Ask each student to choose one book, comic, film or other portrayal of journalism, and rate it: Positive, negative or mixed. Students can email you their video reviews in pop culture format. They can create an animated video of their results using [goanimate.com](#) or another free site. Do portrayals of journalists reflect the journalism of the time? Are they sensationalized to make them more entertaining? If so, how? Post the best reviews on a

blog.

Spotlight: [The Association of American Editorial Cartoonists](#) promotes staff, freelance and student editorial cartoonists in the United States. The group actively opposes the trend toward [newspapers cutting cartoonists](#). Ask students to try keyword searches on the AAEC site or the [Cartoonist Group site](#) or even to find cartoons about [journalism](#), reporters, media, etc. Students should pick their favorites to bring to class. What journalism issues do the cartoonists raise? Are they right? Are there any issues they seem to leave out?

Searchlight: [Matt Wuerker of Politico](#) is a recent [Pulitzer Prize winner for editorial cartooning](#). About halfway through this 40-minute interview, he starts [showing how he draws his award-winning cartoons](#). Assignment: Try it. Ask students to [draw their own cartoons](#). What's the topic? Something they should know about: Journalism education! Let's see what students believe is wrong, ironic, paradoxical, unjust and otherwise broken in teaching the next generation of journalists. Are they learning everything they think they need to know? After the class picks the best, ask for a volunteer to send them to [journalism education groups](#): Will they use them on their web sites?