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Q: I have a middleschool novel being published and readers have commented that it would be good for a movie or afterschool special. How would I go about pursuing that? Who would I approach? Also, my contract says I would only have partial rights for any movie rights, and that my publisher would share them, so do I need to wait for the publisher to be approached? Or can I take an active role?

According to SCBWI Executive Editor Lin Oliver who is head of her own production company, "It's really film and TV and direct to DVD rights we're talking about. Studios and producers look at new books and book reviews, and if they're interested, they would contact the publisher. However, there's no harm in an author taking an active role and submitting it first, or before there's interest. The publisher may have an ancillary rights person who works in film, so check on that. It's always a little more professional if a submission comes through the publisher or an agent.

The book should be submitted by an agent or it will not be read by a network or studio, unless the author signs papers first. Some book agents submit directly, others co-agent with agencies who specialize in theatrical or motion picture deals. If a production company is interested, they option the property for a period of time (usually a year, with option for another) and try to set it up at a studio. If a studio or a network is interested, they might option it directly or put it together with a qualified producer. The option money is usually somewhere around 10% of the ultimate purchase price.

You shouldn't write a screenplay unless you know how. It's a whole craft unto itself. If you are planning to submit directly, research production companies (there's a book called The Creative Directory that lists all companies) and look at the credits of films you've liked or thinks are similar and get the name of the company. Then call and find out who the Director of Development is. But be warned that things go much better when submitted by the publisher or a qualified agent." 7:8/05