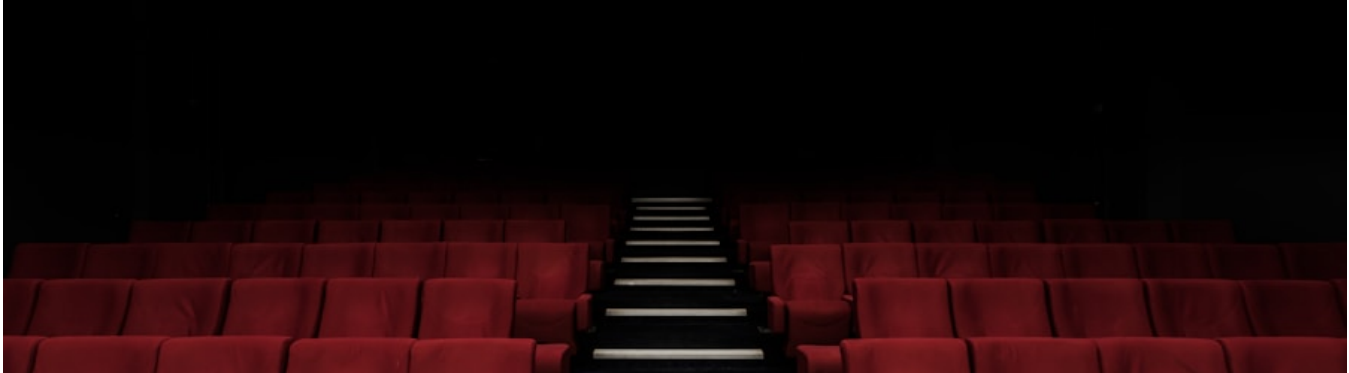




HOLLYWOOD'S BIGGEST HITS OF THE 1990s

The Decade That Changed Cinema — From Jurassic Park to Titanic

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____



A packed cinema auditorium — in the 1990s, opening-weekend box office records were broken almost every summer

PART 1 — Key Vocabulary

Study these words carefully before reading the passages below.

Word	Definition
<i>CGI</i>	short for Computer-Generated Imagery; visual effects created entirely by digital software, allowing filmmakers to depict scenes, creatures, and worlds that would be impossible to film in reality
<i>DVD</i>	short for Digital Versatile Disc; a high-quality home video format introduced in 1997 that replaced VHS, offering superior picture and sound quality along with bonus content such as deleted scenes and director's commentaries
<i>multiplex</i>	a large cinema complex containing many individual screens, allowing audiences to choose from a wide variety of films at a single venue at any given time
<i>independent film</i>	a film produced and financed outside the major Hollywood studio system, typically with a smaller budget and greater creative freedom for the director and writer
<i>reboot</i>	a new version of an existing film franchise that restarts the story from the beginning — often with a new cast and a contemporary approach — rather than continuing a previous storyline

ensemble cast

a group of actors in a film who share roughly equal on-screen importance, with no single dominant lead character around whom the entire story revolves

director's cut

a version of a film re-edited according to the director's original creative vision, often containing scenes removed by the studio before theatrical release; made widely available on home video formats during the 1990s

sequel

a film that continues the story of a previously released, usually successful, film — often with the same characters, setting, and creative team

blockbuster

a film that earns an enormous amount of money at the cinema, attracts audiences in record numbers, and becomes a major cultural event that dominates popular conversation

franchise

a series of related films sharing the same characters, universe, or brand — often extended into sequels, spin-offs, animated series, video games, and merchandise

soundtrack

the music featured in a film, including original songs and orchestral score, often released separately as a commercial recording that sells independently of the film itself

gross

the total amount of money a film earns from cinema ticket sales worldwide before any costs or expenses are deducted — also called the box office gross

PART 2 — Vocabulary Practice

Match each word on the left to its correct definition on the right.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. CGI | A. a film produced outside the major studio system, usually with a smaller budget and greater creative freedom |
| 2. DVD | B. visual effects created entirely by computer software, allowing scenes impossible to film in real life |
| 3. multiplex | C. a group of actors sharing roughly equal on-screen importance, with no single dominant lead |
| 4. independent film | D. a large cinema complex with many individual screens where audiences can choose from many films at once |
| 5. reboot | |
| 6. ensemble cast | |
| 7. director's cut | |

- E. a version of a film reflecting the director's original creative vision, often differing from the theatrical release
- F. a high-quality home video disc format that replaced VHS and introduced bonus content such as deleted scenes
- G. a new version of an existing franchise that resets the story from the beginning with a new cast and approach

Fill in the blank with the correct vocabulary word.

1. The dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* were created using revolutionary _____, making them appear so realistic that audiences and critics alike struggled to believe they were watching computer-generated images rather than real animals.
2. *Titanic* set a record for the highest global _____ of any film in history when it was released in 1997, earning over \$2.19 billion from cinema ticket sales worldwide.
3. The _____ for *The Lion King* — featuring Elton John's original songs and Hans Zimmer's orchestral score — sold over fourteen million copies independently of the film itself.
4. The commercial success of *Pulp Fiction* proved that an _____, made outside the studio system on a fraction of a studio budget, could reshape the direction of mainstream cinema.
5. By 1999, the _____ had almost completely replaced VHS in American homes, offering better picture quality and bonus features that transformed watching films at home into an entirely new kind of experience.
6. James Cameron's decision to cast relatively unknown leads in *Titanic* proved that a compelling story did not require a star-studded _____ to attract record-breaking audiences.



A vintage cinema projector — in the 1990s, Hollywood used digital technology to create images that projectors alone could never have captured from reality

PART 3 — Reading Passage 1: The CGI Revolution and the Box Office Champions

What Changed in the 1990s?

The 1980s had been the decade of the blockbuster — the era when Hollywood discovered that a single summer film could earn hundreds of millions of dollars and dominate popular culture for months. The 1990s inherited that legacy and transformed it. Where the previous decade had built its spectacle from physical models, practical make-up effects, and in-camera tricks, the 1990s introduced a technology that permanently changed what was possible on screen: computer-generated imagery. The result was a decade in which cinema's visual language was entirely rewritten — and in which the biggest films were not merely entertainment events, but technological demonstrations watched by audiences who could scarcely believe what they were seeing.

The Moment Everything Changed

The single most technically significant film of the decade — and arguably the most consequential in the history of Hollywood effects — was *Jurassic Park* (1993). Directed by Steven Spielberg and adapted from Michael Crichton's bestselling novel, it became the first film ever to earn more than one billion dollars worldwide, grossing \$1.03 billion from a production budget of \$63 million. Its central achievement was the creation of photorealistic dinosaurs through a combination of full-scale animatronic models and computer-generated imagery developed by Industrial Light & Magic, the visual effects company founded by George Lucas. The team spent two years writing software capable of rendering the texture of dinosaur skin, the movement of muscle beneath that skin, and the interaction of natural light across surfaces that had not existed for sixty-five million years. When Spielberg screened the first completed CGI shot — a herd of brachiosaurs moving across a prehistoric landscape — he reportedly wept. Nothing remotely like it had ever been seen before.

Jurassic Park changed the industry immediately and permanently. Within two years, every major studio had invested in dedicated digital effects facilities. Traditional model-makers, matte painters, and stop-motion animators were quietly informed that their services would no longer be required at the scale they had previously been employed. The age of practical filmmaking was not over — but it would never again be the industry's primary tool.

Titanic and the New Scale of Ambition

If *Jurassic Park* announced the arrival of the CGI era, *Titanic* (1997) demonstrated what that era would ultimately look like at full scale. James Cameron's film cost a then-extraordinary \$200 million to produce — the most expensive film ever made at that point — and was so far over schedule and over budget that 20th Century Fox executives privately predicted it would be the most catastrophic financial failure in Hollywood history. Cameron had insisted on reconstructing the RMS Titanic at ninety percent of its original scale in a purpose-built tank facility in Baja California, Mexico, and on filming many scenes using the actual constructed set partially submerged in water rather than relying entirely on digital compositing. The result was a film of extraordinary visual and emotional authenticity.

Titanic earned \$2.19 billion worldwide — a record it held for twelve years until Cameron himself broke it with *Avatar* in 2009. It received fourteen Academy Award nominations and won eleven — tying the record set by *Ben-Hur* in 1959 — including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Film Editing. Leonardo DiCaprio, previously known for character-driven dramatic roles, became one of the most recognizable film stars in the world almost overnight.

Animation, History, and the Limits of Technology

Not every landmark of the decade was built on digital technology or extraordinary budgets. *The Lion King* (1994) — produced entirely using traditional hand-drawn animation — earned over \$968 million worldwide and remains the highest-grossing traditionally animated film in cinema history. Its soundtrack, composed by Hans Zimmer with original songs by Elton John and Tim Rice, sold over fourteen million copies and introduced phrases such as 'the circle of life' and 'hakuna matata' into everyday global language. *Forrest Gump* (1994) used newly developed digital compositing techniques to insert its protagonist — played by Tom Hanks — into real historical television footage, placing him alongside Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, and at the Lincoln Memorial during a Vietnam-era peace rally. The film earned over \$678 million worldwide and won six Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Actor for Hanks — his second consecutive win, following *Philadelphia* (1993), making him the first actor to achieve back-to-back wins since Spencer Tracy in 1937 and 1938.

Comprehension Questions — Passage 1

1. What was CGI, and why was it significant for the film industry in the 1990s?

2. How much did *Jurassic Park* earn worldwide, and what was its production budget?

3. The passage describes Spielberg's reaction to the first CGI shot. What was it, and why was this moment significant?

4. Why did Fox executives predict *Titanic* would fail — and what evidence in the passage shows they were wrong?

5. Why is Tom Hanks' Academy Award record, as described in the passage, considered historically unusual?

6. What does the passage mean when it says *Jurassic Park* changed the industry 'immediately and permanently'?

PART 4 — Reading Passage 2: Independent Cinema, DVD, and the Stars of the Decade

The Rise of Independent Cinema

Not every landmark film of the 1990s was a studio blockbuster. The decade also witnessed the explosive rise of independent cinema — films produced and financed outside the major studio system that challenged audiences with stories, structures, and sensibilities that mainstream Hollywood would rarely have permitted. At the centre of this movement was Quentin Tarantino, whose *Pulp Fiction* (1994) rewrote the conventions of narrative storytelling. Its scenes are presented out of chronological order; its dialogue is dense with pop culture references and unconventional humour; its violence is simultaneously graphic and darkly comic in a way that defied every existing category. The film cost \$8 million to produce and earned over \$214 million worldwide — a return on investment that no studio executive could ignore. It was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, signalling that unconventional, challenging cinema could reach both critical and commercial audiences simultaneously.

The Coen Brothers' *Fargo* (1996), featuring Frances McDormand in an Academy Award-winning performance, demonstrated that the independent movement was not a single aesthetic but an entire ecosystem of filmmaking approaches. *Good Will Hunting* (1997) — written by and starring the then-unknown Matt Damon and Ben Affleck — earned \$226 million worldwide from a \$10 million budget, winning two Academy Awards and launching both its writers into Hollywood's highest tier in a single night. And at the close of the decade, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) — filmed for an estimated \$60,000 and marketed through a then-revolutionary internet campaign — earned \$248 million worldwide, representing one of the most extraordinary returns on investment in the history of commercial cinema.

The DVD Revolution

As VHS had transformed home entertainment in the 1980s, the DVD did the same in the late 1990s — but more profoundly. The Digital Versatile Disc, launched commercially in North America in 1997, offered a quality of picture and sound that no previous home format had achieved. But its deeper impact lay in what accompanied the film itself. DVD introduced supplementary content — director's commentaries, deleted scenes, behind-the-scenes documentaries, multiple language tracks, and isolated music scores — that transformed watching a film at home from passive entertainment into something closer to film education. Audiences could pause, rewind, and examine individual frames. They could listen to a director explain the creative reasoning behind every decision, from camera angle to casting choice. The *director's cut* — previously available only to festival audiences or film scholars — became a mass-market product available to anyone. *The Matrix* (1999) sold over three million DVD copies in its first month of home release, largely because audiences wanted to rewatch its technically astonishing sequences — particularly the 'bullet time' effect, in which a camera appeared to orbit a frozen moment in time — frame by frame at home. That single film demonstrated that DVD was not merely a more convenient delivery mechanism than VHS, but a fundamentally new way of experiencing cinema.

The Stars of the Decade

The 1990s produced a generation of film stars who would define popular culture for the following two decades. Tom Hanks, having won consecutive Academy Awards, became the most trusted actor in Hollywood — the performer to whom studios turned when they needed an audience to believe in the ordinary decency of a character facing extraordinary circumstances. Julia Roberts, following her

breakthrough in *Pretty Woman* (1990), became the highest-paid actress in Hollywood and one of the most photographed individuals on earth. Will Smith executed one of the most precisely calculated career transitions in entertainment history: moving from rap musician to television star to blockbuster action lead, via *Bad Boys* (1995), *Independence Day* (1996), and *Men in Black* (1997) — all within the space of three years. And at the very end of the decade, *The Sixth Sense* (1999) introduced audiences to a director named M. Night Shyamalan and to a child actor named Haley Joel Osment, whose performance — and the film's final, wholly unexpected twist — became one of the most discussed cinematic moments of the century. Cinemas reportedly asked audiences who had seen the film not to reveal its ending to those who had not, in what became one of the earliest examples of deliberate online spoiler management.

True or False

Write **T** for True or **F** for False.

1. ___ *Jurassic Park* was the first film in history to earn more than \$1 billion worldwide.
2. ___ Fox executives were confident that *Titanic* would be a financial success before its release.
3. ___ DVD allowed viewers to access director's commentaries, deleted scenes, and behind-the-scenes documentaries at home.
4. ___ *Pulp Fiction* was produced by a major Hollywood studio with a budget of over \$50 million.
5. ___ Tom Hanks was the first actor since Spencer Tracy to win the Academy Award for Best Actor in consecutive years.
6. ___ *The Blair Witch Project* is one of the most profitable films in history relative to its production budget.
7. ___ *The Lion King* remains the highest-grossing traditionally animated film in cinema history.
8. ___ *The Matrix* sold over three million DVD copies in its first month of home release.

Comprehension Questions — Passage 2

1. What made *Pulp Fiction* unusual compared to mainstream films of its time? Give at least two specific examples from the passage.

2. How did DVD change the home viewing experience compared to VHS?

3. Why is *The Blair Witch Project* financially remarkable, according to the passage?

4. How does the passage describe Will Smith's career path in the 1990s?

5. What does the passage mean by 'spoiler management' in the context of *The Sixth Sense*?

6. According to the passage, what kind of character is Tom Hanks most associated with?

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

Use the word bank to complete each sentence.

CGI · DVD · multiplex · independent film · sequel · franchise · gross · ensemble cast · director's cut · soundtrack · blockbuster · cultural phenomenon · nostalgia · box office

1. *Jurassic Park* used revolutionary _____ to create dinosaurs so convincing that the industry immediately abandoned traditional model-making as its primary tool for visual spectacle.
2. *Titanic* set a record for the highest worldwide _____ of any film in history, earning over \$2.19 billion from cinema ticket sales alone.
3. The _____ for *The Lion King* — featuring Elton John's 'Can You Feel the Love Tonight' and Hans Zimmer's orchestral compositions — sold fourteen million copies worldwide independently of the film.
4. The commercial triumph of *Pulp Fiction* proved beyond argument that an _____, made outside the studio system on a fraction of a standard budget, could reshape the direction of mainstream cinema.
5. *Jurassic Park* was so successful that it generated a global _____ — including sequels, animated series, and theme park attractions — that continues to produce new films three decades later.
6. By 1999, the _____ had almost completely replaced VHS in American homes, offering better quality and the bonus features that made rewatching films an entirely new kind of experience.
7. Ellen Ripley in the *Alien* films and Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* became genuine _____s — their images and lines recognised and referenced far beyond the films themselves.
8. People who grew up watching 1990s films in multiplexes often feel powerful _____ for that era — a warm longing that the industry now actively taps into through remakes and anniversary re-releases.

PART 6 — Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or your class. There are no wrong answers — support your view with evidence and examples.

1. *Jurassic Park* used CGI to show dinosaurs with convincing realism for the first time. Today, almost every major film uses CGI extensively. Do you think this has made cinema better or worse? Are there things CGI should *not* be used for? Use specific films as examples.
2. James Cameron spent \$200 million on *Titanic* and Fox executives predicted disaster. The film earned \$2.19 billion. Does this change your view of when studios should trust a director's instincts against commercial logic? Is there ever a budget too large to be justified?
3. *The Blair Witch Project* cost \$60,000 and earned \$248 million. *Titanic* cost \$200 million and earned \$2.19 billion. Which of these achievements is more impressive — and why? Is there a relationship between a film's budget and its artistic quality?
4. The passage describes DVD as transforming home viewing from 'passive entertainment into something closer to film education.' Do you agree? If you could listen to any director's commentary — for any film ever made — which director and which film would you choose, and what would you most want them to explain?
5. Many 1990s films — *Jurassic Park*, *The Lion King*, *Men in Black* — have since been remade, rebooted, or given sequels. Do you think continuing these franchises is a sign of creative limitation in Hollywood, or a legitimate way of introducing great stories to new generations? Use one specific example to support your argument.

ANSWER KEY — HOLLYWOOD'S BIGGEST HITS OF THE 1990s

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Part 2 — Vocabulary Matching

1. B — visual effects created entirely by computer software, allowing scenes impossible to film in real life
2. F — a high-quality home video disc format that replaced VHS and introduced bonus content such as deleted scenes
3. D — a large cinema complex with many individual screens where audiences can choose from many films at once
4. A — a film produced outside the major studio system, usually with a smaller budget and greater creative freedom
5. G — a new version of an existing franchise that resets the story from the beginning with a new cast and approach
6. C — a group of actors sharing roughly equal on-screen importance, with no single dominant lead
7. E — a version of a film reflecting the director's original creative vision, often differing from the theatrical release

Part 2 — Fill in the Blank

1. CGI
2. gross
3. soundtrack
4. independent film
5. DVD
6. ensemble cast

Part 3 — Comprehension: Passage 1

1. CGI stands for computer-generated imagery — visual effects created entirely by digital software. It was significant because it allowed filmmakers to depict things impossible to film in reality (living dinosaurs), permanently transforming what cinema could show.
2. \$1.03 billion worldwide; production budget of \$63 million.
3. Spielberg reportedly wept. The significance is that even the director responsible for the achievement was overwhelmed — it signals how genuinely unprecedented the photorealistic CGI dinosaur looked.
4. The \$200 million budget was the most expensive in history and the film was over schedule and over budget. Fox executives predicted catastrophic failure. Evidence it was wrong: \$2.19 billion worldwide gross, 14 Oscar nominations, 11 wins including Best Picture — breaking records rather than budgets.
5. Hanks won Best Actor in consecutive years (Philadelphia 1993, Forrest Gump 1994). The passage notes this made him the first actor to do so since Spencer Tracy in 1937–38 — making it one of the rarest achievements in Oscar history.
- 6.

It means the impact was both immediate (within two years every major studio had invested in digital effects) and lasting (traditional model-makers and stop-motion animators were no longer hired at the same scale — the production methods of the entire industry were structurally transformed).

Part 4 — True or False

1. T
2. F — Fox executives privately predicted it would be a catastrophic financial failure.
3. T
4. F — *Pulp Fiction* was an independent film made for just \$8 million.
5. T — first since Spencer Tracy (1937–38) to win back-to-back Best Actor awards.
6. T — \$248 million worldwide on an estimated \$60,000 budget.
7. T
8. T — over three million copies in its first month of home release.

Part 4 — Comprehension: Passage 2

1. At least two from: scenes presented out of chronological order; dialogue dense with pop culture references and unconventional humour; violence simultaneously graphic and darkly comic; produced independently for \$8 million outside the major studio system.
2. VHS could only play the film. DVD offered superior picture and sound, plus supplementary content: director's commentaries, deleted scenes, documentaries, multiple language tracks. Viewers could pause and study individual frames and hear directors explain creative decisions. It transformed home viewing from passive entertainment to something closer to film education.
3. It was made for an estimated \$60,000 and earned \$248 million worldwide — one of the highest ratios of earnings to budget in commercial cinema history.
4. Smith moved from rap musician → television star → blockbuster action lead via *Bad Boys*, *Independence Day*, and *Men in Black* — all within three years. The passage calls it 'one of the most precisely calculated career transitions in entertainment history.'
5. The film had a major unexpected twist ending. Cinemas asked audiences not to reveal the ending to those who hadn't seen it — an early, deliberate strategy to prevent plot revelations spreading online before the concept of 'spoiler culture' had a recognised name.
6. The passage associates Hanks with 'the ordinary decency of a character facing extraordinary circumstances' — the kind of person audiences instinctively trust and believe in.

Part 5 — Fill in the Blank

1. CGI
2. gross / box office
3. soundtrack
4. independent film
5. franchise
6. DVD
7. cultural phenomenon
8. nostalgia

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