

## Women Reporters in the Movies

*Images of women news reporters in movies, television and online media reflect and potentially change prevailing views about gender roles. In this activity you design a poster for a modern-day movie, TV show, podcast, or streaming series about a strong, independent, ethical, truth-seeking woman journalist and the challenges they face in that role.*

The image of a truth-seeking, fearless, tough-minded female reporter was a liberating role model for women during the mid-20th century when movies and radio were the predominant entertainment media.

Torchy Blane, featured in nine Hollywood movies from 1937 to 1939 and played by three different actresses, was a fictional newspaper reporter who was also a tough-talking, crime-solving detective.



[Glenda Farrell in Smart Blonde Trailer](#) | Public Domain

In the 1939 episode, "Torchy Blane Runs for Mayor," the reporter, played at that time by Glenda Farrell, exposed corruption in a city government where the mayor was taking money from the mob. In a plot twist with modern-day implications, the mayor threatens to withdraw advertising from any newspapers who criticize him, but Torchy finds a paper that will publish the truth.

Cited by one journalism researcher as "the most famous fictional journalist you've never heard of," Torchy Blane may have been the most well-known fictional reporter of her time - more popular than either Lois Lane or Brenda Starr, two other fictional women reporters in the popular media of the time (see [IJPC notes](#)).

Actress Glenda Farrell is most prominently associated with the character, but Torchy Blane was also played by Lola Lane in one movie and her name served as the one of the inspirations for the reporter Lois Lane in the Superman comics and films ([Turner Classic Movies](#), April 24, 2019). You can read a [summary of all Torchy Blane films](#) here.



[Watch on YouTube](#)

### **Evolving Gender Images in the Media**

One recent study of 180,000 sentences in movie plots between 1940 and 2019 showed that women characters have been primarily associated with themes of romance, sexual relationships, and weddings, while male characters have more diverse roles and portrayals ([Gender Stereotypes in Hollywood Movies and Their Evolution Over Time: Insights from Network Analysis](#). *Big Data and Cognitive Computing*, 2022).

Lois Lane is one of the most well-known women movie characters. Over time and many films, her character has evolved from a woman who had to be rescued by a man to an independent, in-charge, change-seeking journalist. Women reporters were also portrayed on TV as independent figures in the 1970s on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Murphy Brown*, although the roles were situated in comedies where the news business was broadly played for laughs.

Women reporters in films have also faced and learned from complicated professional demands. "Meet John Doe" (1941) stars a woman newspaper columnist (Barbara Stanwyck), who, on the verge of being fired, recruits a drifter (Gary Cooper) to impersonate a non-existent person that people across the nation begin to treat as a celebrity, all as a scheme to generate more sales and profits for her newspaper. While the main characters appear to change their attitudes and regret their actions at the end of the story, the film's message is focused on the power of deception and

manipulation in the business of selling newspapers ("[Meet John Doe](#)" Shows the Darkness of American Democracy, Kristin Hunt, 2019).

In print media, there were fictional female news reporters challenged gender stereotypes, including Jane Arden who appeared in newspaper comic strips for 41 years from 1927 to 1986. She was referred to in print as a "spunky girl reporter" and on radio as a "fearless girl reporter" ([Wikipedia](#)) and was the central character in the 1939 movie, "The Adventures of Jane Arden." Her uncover investigative work helps the police catch a gang of jewel smugglers. View the [original trailer for the film](#) here. Jane Arden was one of the prototypes for Lois Lane, the newswoman reporter in the Superman movies.

Looking at media today, do you see any women news reporters in recent Hollywood movies or current television or streaming shows (for example, Jennifer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon on The Morning Show on Apple TV+) and how do they compare with the image of a strong-minded fictional reporter like Torchy Blane?

Check out our [Women in Journalism & Media Digital Choice](#).

## Activity: Design a Poster for a Movie, TV Show, Podcast, or Streaming Series about a Woman Journalist

- Use the [Teacher and Student Guide to Critically Analyzing Images](#) to examine the design techniques used in posters for Torchy Blane movies, such as [Torchy Blane Playing with Dynamite](#).
- Then, spend 10-15 minutes free writing your thoughts for a movie, TV show, podcast, or streaming series about a woman journalist. Consider the following prompts:
  - Who would be the characters?
  - What would be the setting?
  - What would be the storyline?
  - What are the main tensions/conflicts facing the characters?
  - How would the main character balance the demands of presenting news as objective and truthful at a time when entertainment and fake news spread faster than truthful news?
- Finally, design a digital or print poster for the movie, TV show, podcast, or streaming series.

### Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Design a Poster for a Movie, TV Show, Podcast, or Streaming Series about a Woman Journalist](#) by Elva Zheng

## Additional Resources

- [Torchy Blane Collection](#), Warner Bros
- [Torchy Blane was scorching newspaperwoman](#)
- [A Look at How Hollywood Depicts Female Journalists. \(Hint: It's Not Always Positive.\)](#). *The Washington Post* (April 27, 2017).
- BOOK: *Undaunted: How Women Changed American Journalism*. Brooke Kroeger. Alfred A. Knopf. 2023.

## Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Writing the News: Different Formats and Their Functions](#)



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