

# Mirror, mirror on the wall, which remake will be the fairest of them all?

## ASU film and media studies professor on why studios are retelling past stories

By Megan Neely, ASU News  
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Everything old is new again.

At least, that's how some corporations are approaching modern filmmaking.

Studios like Disney are transforming their beloved animations into live-action features — most recently releasing a new take on “Snow White” and “Lilo & Stitch.” Dreamworks also put out a remake of their 2010 animated film “How to Train Your Dragon” on June 13, a story based on the Scottish Inner Hebrides islands and Scandinavian Scotland lore.

This past March, “Snow White” earned just [\\$205 million](#) worldwide during its theatrical run, falling short of its reported [\\$240 million budget](#). Meanwhile, the 2025 take on “Lilo & Stitch” has collected [\\$864 million](#) worldwide and is closing in on becoming Disney's fifth \$1 billion remake. And “How to Train Your Dragon” grossed [\\$218 million](#) globally in the span of six days.

[Kevin Sandler](#), a [film and media studies](#) professor at Arizona State University's [Department of English](#), studies censorship and animation — and has been closely watching Hollywood's growing reliance on recycled material.

“It's not simply about making movies or franchise pictures. Making the movie is the least important thing in this whole project. It's really about having people reconsume what they love — continually at a variety of different touch points on a variety of different platforms and manners,” he said.

Sandler sees that trend of reconsumption as a key strategy studios used to draw families back to theaters after the COVID-19 pandemic — especially while operating under tighter budgets.

Risk has become a major factor in whether a film gets the green light. With the average U.S. movie ticket costing around \$16, Sandler says studios are leaning toward familiar stories they believe are more likely to satisfy audiences and, in their eyes, justify the cost of a ticket.

“Studios will rely on something that they’re familiar with, but modernized and technified so it becomes a worthy night out with people’s hard-earned money,” Sandler said. “Most movies that launch are not unfamiliar things. ‘Inside Out 2’ is a sequel to what was an original and way exceeded expectations, but the reason it exists is because people are already familiar with that.”

On the same theme, Disney is set to release a second installment of “Zootopia” and a third installment of the “Tron” series later in 2025 — 15 years after the second movie’s release.

Sandler has also taught classes on Scooby-Doo — investigating mainstream, experimental and hybrid animation aesthetics. He has looked into the different variations and remakes, ranging from the Mindy Kaling spinoff, “Velma,” to its original form. He starts the class by looking into the “why” behind decisions to remake something into a fresher concept.

“How did Mindy Kaling get ahold of Scooby-Doo? Why did it become one of the lowest-rated scores ever for a television show on Rotten Tomatoes? Then how does it get a sequel? Part of it has to do with the fact that it’s really not about if the show is good, it’s about being in business with Mindy Kaling,” Sandler said.

“A lot of these decisions that are made are about being in business with creators because you have a handful of companies who want to make a lot of money, but the only way you make a lot of money is by entrusting artists to help you in making stuff.”

For students who want to explore this topic and other phenomena in film, television, digital media and screenwriting, ASU offers a film and media studies undergraduate [major](#) and [minor](#), which are both available online as well as in person on the Tempe campus. An online film and media studies [master’s degree](#) is also available.

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**Main image**



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**Text image(s)**



Kevin Sandler