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# Big Screen Strategies

**S**uccessful trial lawyers know the importance of good storytelling. A trial is a contest of competing stories, replete with plot twists, heroes, villains, and denouement. The story you convey must be the more compelling version.

That Kelly Lynn Anders employs film classics to teach (or reinforce) critical trial skills in her latest book, *Advocacy to Zealousness*, should not be surprising. Movies are just stories on film. But trial lawyers are typically the weavers of the story, not the intended audience. So when Anders deftly turns the tables by using cinematic storytelling as a tool, the result is both surprising and entertaining. While primarily written for law students and academics, this book is an enjoyable read for all lawyers, imparting knowledge to the novice and sharpening the skills of the seasoned practitioner.

The 26 trial techniques discussed in separate chapters are arranged alphabetically—from advocacy to zealously—and each belongs in the lawyer’s toolbox. The book discusses 26 films, which Anders selected to underscore each skill. A synopsis of the film is followed by a section listing discussion topics. But the book’s most useful feature is its list of “Exercises for Improvement” at the end of every chapter, offering concrete techniques for mastering each skill.

The films are classics, all released before films were rated for explicit content. Most are worth viewing again. For example, Anders chose *The Blackboard Jungle* to exemplify “the skill of yielding to authority.” In that film, war veteran Richard Dadier (Glenn Ford) begins his teaching career at an all-male, inner-city high school. His students are uncooperative and belligerent. Dadier ultimately bonds with one student, developing a relationship of mutual benefit and regard. As Anders explains, and the movie exemplifies, “yielding to authority” means displaying deference to a person or rule out of respect rather than coercion.

Proficiency in negotiation is an even more essential skill but, as Anders points out, it is neither consistently nor universally taught in law school. Anders includes *12 Angry Men* as a model of negotiation skill. A New York City jury deliberates a capital murder case in a stuffy, sweltering room, voting 11-1 to convict. Despite flaring tempers, Juror 8, the lone “not guilty” vote, negotiates an acquittal by convincing fellow jurors to decide based on the evidence and facts rather than prejudice and speculation. Anders pairs *Anatomy of a Murder* with advocacy, *Gentleman’s Agreement* with empathy, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* with compassion.

Anders explains the importance of these films in the nexus between law and culture, but she also demonstrates that “legal skills training needn’t be dry or cumbersome.” So dim the lights, put an old movie in the DVD player, butter some popcorn, and learn.

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## Advocacy to Zealousness: Learning Lawyering Skills from Classic Films

Kelly Lynn Anders  
Carolina Academic Press

[www.cap-press.com](http://www.cap-press.com)

236 pp., \$28.00

Reviewed by Kenneth J. Allen

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