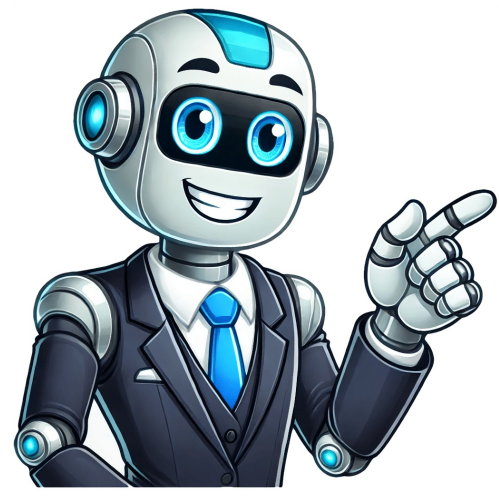


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The best mentors in cinematic history, regardless of the movie's genre, have valuable knowledge and experience and help protagonists become better versions of themselves. These mentors alternate between tough love, patient encouragement, and demonstrations of their own skills and wisdom, guiding their students to listen and learn. Mentors like Mr. Miyagi, Yoda, and Gandalf solidified the mentor archetype in fiction. The best mentors in cinematic history have a variety of traits – they encourage their proteges while checking their worst instincts, they have valuable knowledge and experience, and they pass on vital skills to their students. From fantastical worlds like Star Wars to stories based on real life, the best movie mentors help protagonists realize a version of themselves they never could have become on their own. Unfortunately, they are often killed off, especially in sci-fi and fantasy settings, because having a character around who knows everything makes the plot too easy for the protagonist. Unlike Dumbledore's notorious "don't tell the hero anything useful" strategy, the best mentors alternate between tough love, patient encouragement, and an occasional demonstration or two of their own skills and wisdom, so the students know to listen up. Through mentorship, some of them even learn more about their students and themselves. Good mentors appear in a variety of genres and circumstances, demonstrating the versatility of the mentor archetype in fiction. 15 Master Shifu (Kung Fu Panda) Learns while he teaches Master Shifu (Dustin Hoffman) is a mentor to several students, but he is also a student himself. The first Kung Fu Panda movie shows Shifu learning from his own teacher, Master Oogway (Randall Duk Kim), and incorporating those lessons into how he instructs Po and the Furious Five. Shifu is perhaps not the best mentor in the beginning, determined to drive Po away. However, he has a great character arc and becomes a better teacher than he would have been if he had entered the story as a perfect mentor. Master Shifu was a student himself the whole time. Woody Harrelson's Haymitch won the Hunger Games as a teenager, which is why Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) and Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) usually defer to his judgment. Despite his cold demeanor, he grows to care for his pair of tributes and operates in the dark to protect them. During their second Games, he is a part of the secret plan to rescue Katniss and Peeta from the arena. Later in the Hunger Games movie series, Haymitch becomes more of a comforting father figure to Katniss. However, he still offers wisdom and encouragement as she becomes the face of the rebellion. Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) thought he was going to be mentored by his dimension's version of Peter Parker (Chris Pine), so when Peter B. Parker (Jake Johnson) shows up, Miles expects the same. This second version is down on his luck and in no mood to mentor a plucky protagonist, but is forced to work with Miles and comes to care for him. In Across the Spider-Verse, Peter is eager to step back into the friendly mentor role. He tries to reconnect with Miles by sharing how Miles himself changed his life, and by being a friendly figure when all the Spider-People are chasing after Miles. Peter needed Miles as much as Miles needed him, which made for an incredible dynamic. Clarisse (Julie Andrews) wants to convince her granddaughter to inherit Genovia's throne because she wishes to maintain the family's legacy. In the first movie, she learns to understand Mia (Anne Hathaway) and even says it is okay if she abdicates, only for Mia to accept her position on her own terms. In the sequel, with Clarisse and Mia now on the same page, a much stronger mentor-student relationship is in place. Clarisse balances teaching Mia about being a ruler and being there for her as a grandmother, at certain points even saying things such as, "As a queen I say..." vs. "As a grandna..." Possibly the most iconic fictional mentor outside of sci-fi and fantasy, Mr. Miyagi's (Pat Morita) tactic is to instruct Danny (Ralph Macchio) to do a bunch of chores, without explaining why, to discreetly build up muscle memory of some basic karate moves. The reveal of Danny's new skills made it one of the most iconic "training sequences" in all of pop culture. Mr. Miyagi's style is based upon a core theme of the student-mentor relationship: The student must accept that the mentor knows more than them if they ever want to reach the same level of skill. Additionally, Mr. Miyagi was a father figure for Dani, as confirmed in Cobra Kai. Colette (Janeane Garofalo) worked tirelessly to secure a position at one of the top restaurants in Paris and takes being tasked with mentoring Linguine as an insult, something she is stuck with because she is the only woman. Little does she know Remy (Patton Oswalt) is also aptly listening to her from under Linguini's (Lou Romano) hat. At the end of Ratatouille, it looks as though Remy and Colette do most of the cooking together while Linguini waits tables at their small bistro. It would be fun to see some short films of Remy and Colette learning more from each other with their shared skills and passion. Based on a true story, Denzel Washington's Coach Herman Boone unites a divided football team following the integration of a Virginia high school in the 1970s. He accomplishes this by setting strict rules in place and making it clear that prejudice has no place on his team. Boone also knows that tensions will remain among the players if the coaches do not lead by example, and he makes an effort to work amicably with Bill Yoast (Will Patton), who was demoted from head coach to assistant coach when Boone was hired. There is a difference between leading people and players, and the character understands it. Stephen Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) is extremely arrogant, which means he needs a witty mentor to put him in his place. The Ancient One (Tilda Swinton), as she is called, is upfront with Strange about the dedication needed to master the mystic arts, explaining it in a way he will understand: "How did you get to reattach severed nerves and put a human spine back together?" she asks. "Study and practice. Years of it," he responds. She is also revealed to be very morally complex, drawing upon forbidden power to keep herself young, but is able to admit her failures with dignity. Superhero mentors can be quite cliché, but the Ancient One's dynamic with Strange was great. Starring Samuel L. Jackson, Coach Carter is also based on a true story about a high school basketball coach in Northern California. Carter made it clear to his players that they would only be allowed on the court if they maintained their GPAs and adhered to a code of conduct. When their grades dropped, he made the controversial decision to suspend the team. Despite the backlash, he did what was necessary to make his players not only better athletes but better people. He was focused on helping his students, not just making his team win, which is something only true leaders would do. Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) takes his name from the Greek god who communicates with mortals through dreams. Likewise, Morpheus communicates with Neo (Keanu Reeves) in his dream reality. Morpheus famously offers Neo the choice to take the blue pill or the red: to forget what he has learned and return to his fictional life, or fight for his and others' freedom. The band of rebels in The Matrix are in an intense situation and need more than just a literal leader; they need a figure who will guide them through their darkest moments. Morpheus does both and more for them. He also never stops believing Neo is the One. It's an animation staple: the half-wise, half-goofy character who plays the role of advisor in the hero's journey. Disney wasn't the first studio to prominently feature mentor characters: the trope is as old as storytelling itself. But given Disney's near-monopoly on animation, particularly in the 90s, the Disney mentor became a character archetype all of its own. Related Classic baddies for Sora to fight. Generally, the Disney mentor meets the protagonist near the start of the adventure, and helps them overcome their shortcomings over the course of the story. Often, they also play the role of trusty companion, sidekick and comic relief. Here are some of our favourites. 8 Rafiki The Lion King The baobab tree-dwelling Rafiki is a wise, shamanistic and mildly doty mandrill. He performs the presentation ceremony for newborn lion cubs, while also appearing as an advisor to the reigning king. Mufasa was also a mentor to Simba, but died before he could fully teach him how to be a king. Simba's carefree time with Timon and Pumbaa leads him to shun responsibility. Rafiki is the one who brings him back with some wise words about learning from the past. Rafiki can also hold his own in hand-to-hand combat, so he's the whole package. Arguably the most famous Disney mentor, Phil – or Philoctetes, to use his proper name - plays the role of Disney mentor straight, despite his comedic characterization. Just like Hercules, Phil once had dreams of his own: to be known as the one who mentored the greatest hero. Related If you're a fan of the Greek Pantheon and other tales from antiquity, these games are for you. By the time Herc shows up, Phil has given up after even his best and brightest students turned out to be failures. After the titular hero convinces him to come out of retirement, Phil puts Hercules through a grueling training regime that has hundreds of rules. He's also great comic relief, and one of Danny DeVito's most familiar roles among animation fans. Without these three good fairies in Sleeping Beauty, you wouldn't have a movie. When Maleficent curses Princess Aurora to die, Merryweather is able to lessen the sentence to a long sleep. The fairies raise Princess Aurora as their own, giving up the luxuries of magic so they can take care of her without Maleficent finding them. Under their guidance, Aurora grows up to be kind-hearted and humble, despite her royal lineage. Near the end of the movie, they help Prince Philip escape and enchant his sword so he can strike the final blow against Maleficent. Flora, Fauna and Merryweather are the true heroines of the movie. Tarzan signaled the end of an era: the Disney Renaissance was over, but it went out on a high note. Tarzan has a lot of great elements to it, and one of the most underappreciated ones is the beautiful bond between the eponymous hero and Kala. Having lost her own children to a leopard, Kala saves Tarzan from suffering the same fate. She takes him in and raises him as a son. Her motherly love helps Tarzan grow up as one of the apes, despite her mate Kerchak's disapproval. Their bond culminates when a grown-up Tarzan finally manages to kill the leopard that disrupted their lives all those years ago. 2000s animation was dominated by Pixar and Dreamworks, while Walt Disney Animation Studios struggled to reinvent itself after the end of the Disney Renaissance. The studio's second wind finally came with Bolt, the story of a dog who has lived his entire life on a set. Related These dogs are paws-tively great. Due to his sheltered lifestyle and belief that he has superpowers, Bolt is naive and helpless once he's lost in the big city. His mentor is Mittens, a grumpy cat who doesn't believe humans can care about animals. She gives him a crash course in stray survival and helps him process the knowledge that he's just a normal dog as the two become close friends. As far as computer-generated movies go, no sidekick is more lovable than Donkey from the Shrek series. Mushu was Donkey before Donkey; voiced by Eddie Murphy and sharing a similar nature that was nervous and loyal in equal measure, Mushu was an original character made for the 1998 adaptation of Hua Mulan's legend and ended up being one of the most popular characters in the movie. Mushu acts tough and self-assured until the chips are down, at which point he immediately succumbs to despair with hilarious dialogue to back it up. His strange decisions somehow always work out in Mulan's favour: he is Disney's most accidentally helpful mentor. The Emperor's New Groove might not have been the blockbuster Disney was hoping for, but the years have been kind to it. It is now among the most popular movies in Disney's hand-animated canon, with the humble Pacha being a beloved character as well as a meme. Unlike the emperor Kuzco, Pacha is all too familiar with the hardships of life. He is flawed: when he serves as a mentor to Kuzco, he goes through personal growth of his own. If not for Pacha's kindness in taking him in, the arrogant Kuzco wouldn't have made it. Russell is a surprising subversion of the Disney mentor role: he is not old or wise, but he has a heart of gold and ends up teaching life lessons to the aging protagonist. Years after Carl became a widower, he is still unable to let go of the past. The naive Russell gets on Carl's nerves often, but ends up giving him something to care about. One of the most crucial scenes in the film is when Carl throws away his belongings while rescuing Russell; it's just stuff, and the little boy who taught Carl how to live again matters more. Next if you're looking for some new adult-oriented animated TV shows to watch, check out our recommendations. By Megan Deppe Walt Disney once said, "Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children," and entertainment that inspires both children and adults is part of his enduring legacy. So many beloved Disney films have featured mentors who've taught their mentees—and us!—very important lessons. After all, where would Hercules be if Phil hadn't taught him to be a hero? And what about Princess Mia, who learned everything she knows about royal life from the great Queen Clarisse? We took a look back at some of our favorite Disney mentors and they've inspired us all over again! 1. Phil (Hercules) Phil might be a little rough around the edges, but he reminds us, "It takes more than sinew. Comes down to what's in you." He had given up on his own dreams, but when he meets Hercules – and sees how much potential the wannabe God has, Phil puts all of his effort into making Hercules' dream come true. Mentor Phil proves to all of us that everyone has potential to be a hero if someone believes in them. 2. Aggie Cromwell (Halloweentown) Aggie Cromwell's magical mentoring skills don't come from her mystical power, but rather from her kindly demeanor. She doesn't allow her students to look down on themselves, and her catchphrase—"Being normal is vastly overrated"—is a phrase to live by for Marnie, and for us. Aggie inspires us to look at the world differently, reminding us that you can't judge a monster by its cover. 3. Long John Silver (Treasure Planet) It's true that Silver might not be the best role model—after all, he is a pirate—but he encourages people around him to become better versions of themselves. When he realizes that Jim Hawkins is lost without a father figure to guide him, he teaches the teen to stay true to himself and to "stick to it, no matter the squalls!" 4. Edna Mode (The Incredibles) There is way more to our favorite costume designer than just a hatred for capes. Edna Mode is also a great teacher—albeit an unconventional one. Mr. Incredible trusts her with the knowledge that he's going out on missions again and Edna stands by him, knowing the world needs Supers. And Edna later smacks some sense—literally!—into a confused and emotional Mrs. Incredible, urging, "Go! Confront the problem! Fight! Win!" We believe we can because Edna believes we can! 5. Queen Clarisse Renaldi (The Princess Diaries) We can't all be princesses, but Queen Clarisse proves that we can all have queenly manners! We learned so much from her, everything from "A queen is never late. Everyone else is simply early," to her Mia-specific analogy, "You wouldn't stop driving your Mustang just because a couple of insects hit the windshield!" Even if we don't rule a country, Queen Clarisse teaches us all that we can still live our lives gracefully, like a queen, and we are more than happy to soak up all of her royal lessons. 6. Jiminy Cricket (Pinocchio) The little cricket has an innate sense of good and bad: He steers Pinocchio away from temptations; and he lets his own conscience be his guide when it comes to snitching on Pinocchio to his father. Jiminy Cricket reminds us that it doesn't matter who we are as we try to achieve our goals: "If your heart is in your dreams, no request is too extreme!" 7. Gordon Bombay (The Mighty Ducks) Gordon's transformation into a great mentor is especially inspirational in light of the fact that he had a terrible model in his youth, one who insisted that you were nothing if you weren't a winner. Gordon believed that for a long time, but when he's faced with a similar situation, he tells his students what is truly important: "You may make it. You may not. But that doesn't matter... what matters is that we're here." 8. Yoda (Star Wars) Part of a mentor's duty is to make sure that their student is fully prepared for the real world—and to recognize when that student no longer needs to be taught. Yoda, one of the wisest teachers of all, summed this up in the most eloquent way possible: "We are what they grow beyond." He knows that he does not need to worry about his students after they have grown stronger than him, it's a sign that he has done his job well. From the moment he stated that "there is no try," Yoda has been a stand-out mentor, and we will remember his lessons forever. 9. Doc Hudson (Cars) You know you've been a good mentor when your student paints himself to look just like you! Though Doc and Lightning McQueen didn't start off on the greatest of terms, they both learned to respect one another, and Lightning learned a great deal from the older race car. Perhaps the most important lesson was how to grow up - though Doc himself never said it, Lightning learned that the happiest time of Doc's life was when he was Lightning's teacher, and that compels Lightning to pass on his knowledge and talent to the next generation. 10. Mary Poppins (Mary Poppins) There's a reason that we're so excited to see our favorite nanny return this Christmas in Mary Poppins Returns! Mary Poppins is one of the best mentors we've ever seen—she knows how to have fun, but she is also strict enough to make sure that we understand the lesson. We might sing about a "Spoonful of Sugar" while we clean our rooms, but Mary Poppins makes sure that we don't get sidetracked—that room still gets clean! Most importantly, Mary Poppins reminds us that "anything can happen", as long as we are open to it! 11. Kanan Jarrus (Star Wars: Rebels) Because Kanan never finished his own Jedi training, he constantly worries that he does not know enough to be a good teacher to Ezra (and later, Sabine). Well, he can stop worrying—he's already proven that he is a great mentor. It's not just about how much Kanan teaches his students, but also how much he cares about what happens to them. Even when Kanan doesn't believe in himself, he believes in his students, and he never stops trying to make sure they will be the best versions of themselves that they can be. 12. Tony Stark (Captain America: Civil War) Who would've thought that the genius billionaire, playboy, philanthropist would become a great mentor? Nobody, least of all himself, but he proved everyone wrong by recruiting – and mentoring – young Peter Parker, aka, Spider-Man, to join the fray during Captain America: Civil War. Tony's mentorship abilities will be put to the test, though, when he, Spider-Man, and nearly all our favorite heroes face off against Thanos in Avengers: Infinity War. Tune into a monthly virtual event of fan-favorite presentations and panels on all things Disney. Step into stories highlighting the worlds of Disney with expert-led, in-person panel events for D23 Gold Members. Not a Gold Member? Become a D23 Gold Member, starting at \$49.99, for year-round magic—including access to these exclusive events, special offers, and more! Sort, filter, and find upcoming D23 Events in your area! Access Your D23 Benefits Anytime, Anywhere With the Disney D23 app, your membership card is just a few taps away. 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