



**Immediate Release**

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## Why Jack Needs Chloe Literacy in Popular Culture

NEWARK, DELAWARE, USA—According to Bronwyn T. Williams, University of Louisville professor, dominant ideas about reading and writing abound in popular culture, influencing perceptions of these basic skills in ways very different from films and programs that are set in schools and focus on teaching. To illustrate, he takes a brief look at the action heroes, their sidekicks, and the villains that populate television and the movies ("Action heroes and literate sidekicks: Literacy and identity in popular culture," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, May 2007).

Williams observes that the typically-male action hero is capable of reading and writing effortlessly, even under duress. His superior literacy practices give him an edge over supervisors, bureaucrats, and scientists, whose literacy skills may render them incorrect or narrow-minded, and allow him to outmaneuver the villain. What literacy cannot do is save the day, so the action hero employs a literacy surrogate who can do the reading, writing, and researching the hero needs, thereby freeing his time for car chases, gun fights, and other less literate pursuits. These literate sidekicks are generally women, like Chloe on the series *24*, or bookish and nerdy males. Villains, who are frequently portrayed as criminal masterminds or good scientists gone bad, share the highly literate profile projected by the action hero. Unlike the hero, their support staff is generally comprised of henchmen and thugs.

"Literacy comes in handy in solving problems in action films and television, but the identity attached to literacy is unmasculine, unheroic, and, when the chips are down, unnecessary," Williams points out. Although there are other examples of literate lives in popular culture, "It's not hard to see how popular culture may reinforce portrayals of literacy that run counter to what we hope to accomplish in the classroom," Williams concludes.