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Extra!**

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Lights! Camera!

If Your
Kid Wants
to be in
Movies,
Spend a
Day as an

Extra



Action!

by Helen Newling Lawson

Does your kid love to ham it up? Georgia's booming film industry might give them the chance to be in the spotlight – or at least in the background.

Last year, 248 projects filmed in Georgia, and many, including "Mother's Day" and "Allegiant: Part 1" hired kids to work as extras (also known as background artists). Letting your kids get in on the action sounds pretty cool, and might even be the first step in an acting career. But is it right for them (or you)?

If you've ever wondered if your kid should be in movies, a day as an extra will make it clear. Cris Loveless, whose son, Luke, 10, started his acting career as an extra on "Mockingjay: Part 2," says, "Being an extra is the epitome of what you do: It's hurry up and wait." Cris knew the movie business was a fit for Luke the day they spent 10 hours on set. They never got called, but he never got bored. He had a great time meeting people on set and winning the heart of his casting director.

Ann Wittenberg of New Life Casting says it's these kids who are best suited for acting. As she describes it, "In school, they are the ones who are just a little bit of trouble – but they're the ones the teachers remember." She's also seen shy children blossom, so it might be worth seeing how your child responds to a new experience.

What isn't a good indicator? According to Brian Beegle, casting director with Annette Stilwell Casting, "the common misconception is 'My kid is cute and should be an actor.'" Instead, he says, "the best child actors are great listeners and love to perform. Cuteness can't hurt, but an outgoing and directable child makes the best actor."

Everyone from parents to talent agents to casting agents agrees: You should only pursue films if your child is truly interested and has fun doing it. Wittenberg believes pushing kids to do it, "will only make everyone miserable." But what your child enjoys might not be what you'd expect. Christine Taylor's son, Nick, 12, decided his favorite part was the snack table!

Answering the Casting Call

If your child has the right blend of patience, personality, and passion, how do you find the opportunities? And do you need fancy head shots?

All Atlanta extra agencies use social media almost exclusively to list opportunities. Follow their Facebook pages for the most up-to-date info.

Extras need to fit a very specific set of requirements (usually physical attributes). If your child isn't the requested gender, size or hair color, don't bother submitting.

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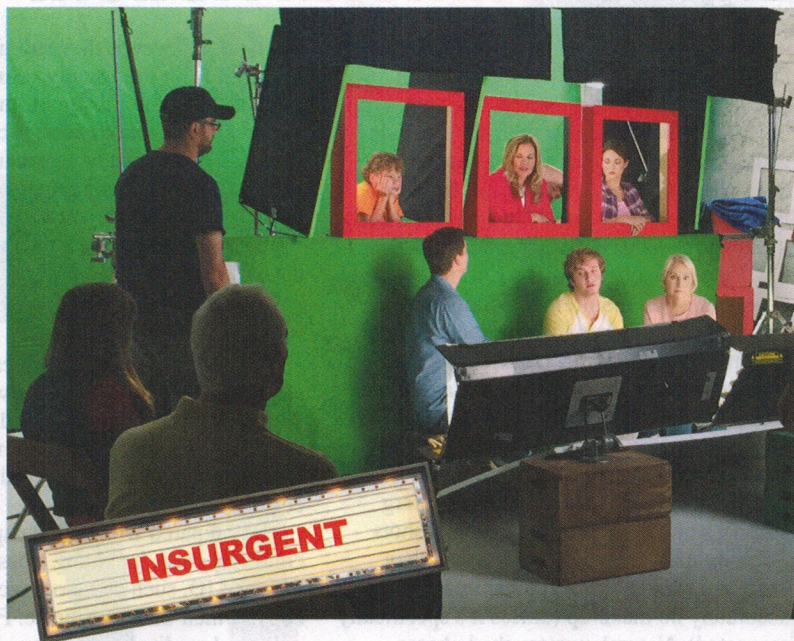


Photo by Cris Loveless



Photo by Cris Loveless



Photo courtesy of Georgia Dept. of Economic Development

Lights! Camera! Action!

Be sure to look at the days you'd be needed, too. If you aren't available for all possible dates, don't submit. As a parent, Taylor says being flexible with her schedule is the most difficult part. She has gotten calls at 11 p.m. for a 6 a.m. casting call the next morning. She warns that "you have to be ready to say yes if you want to get called back."

If the project seems like a fit, follow the submission requirements to the letter. Provide all the information requested in the order it is asked for (someone on the other end has to enter it into a database, and they'll pass over anyone who makes them work harder).

Most importantly, send clear, up-to-date photos in the requested poses. Wittenberg doesn't want to see professional headshots – she wants to see your kids the way they look on a normal day. And that means absolutely no make-up (unless it's specifically requested). Natural, unretouched photos against a neutral background are best.

What to Expect

Once you've agreed to a project, be prepared to devote your day to it. There are age-based time limits for how long a child

can work. However, they still might spend up to 10 hours on set, usually sitting quietly in a room so they don't disrupt filming.

To make the day easier, pack extra food and something to entertain your child. Loveless brought card games so Luke could make friends with the other kids, turning the waiting time into one of his favorite parts of the experience.

On-Set Etiquette

Wittenberg says that pros can "spot a stage mom a mile away." She warns that the quickest way to turn off a director is to ask that your child get more time in front of the camera. Instead, come ready to listen, cooperate and be patient.

Be prepared with all the paperwork your child will need, including a passport or other forms of ID, such as school records and a copy of their birth certificate. Find out if they will need medical records or what they should wear to fit the part.

Safeguards for Kids

Besides time limits, other regulations protect kids' interests. If your child will be on set more than two consecutive school days,

the production company must provide a tutor.

The company will need you to sign off on an application from the Georgia Department of Labor so kids can work legally. Look for a Child Labor Coordinator on site when filming begins.

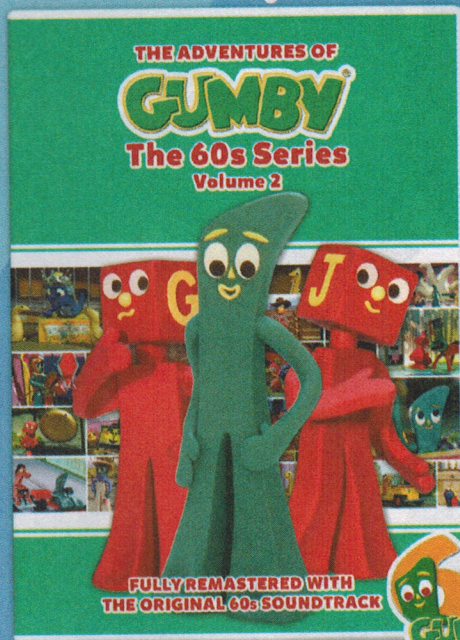
And both parents and pros agree you should insist on your right to keep your child in eyesight at all times, including when they are in wardrobe.

Loveless sees these guidelines as a starting point, but will also (respectfully) speak up on Luke's behalf. She remembers a week-long outdoor shoot in the dead of summer. Knowing how hot it can get in Georgia, but also knowing wardrobe can't be changed once filming starts, she spoke up in time to ask an accommodating wardrobe crew to try a short sleeve top instead of a long-sleeved thermal shirt. She says, "You want to be your child's advocate – without costing them their next job."

Be Alert to Scams

Unfortunately, you'll need to watch out for scams. The most common of these is charging for professional photos to be

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submitted for extra work (although you will need headshots if you get serious enough to look for an agent or speaking roles).

Wittenberg also says you should “never, ever” pay to be listed in a database, for “parent education meetings,” or for representation before an agent lands you a role.

The Payoff

Acting is indeed work, so what can your child expect to earn? It can vary, starting at minimum.

Listings will show what your child will be paid for the number of hours you’re required on set, so “\$64/8,” means \$8 per hour for an 8 hour day.

Georgia does not require “Coogan accounts,” trust funds required in some states to hold child actors’ earnings. Think about how you can be a good steward of your kids’ money and teach some lessons about saving for the future.

The Next Act

Being an extra is “good set experience to get started in the business,” according to Jayme Pervis of J Pervis Talent Agency. If your child had fun, you might want to let him take the next step. Most commonly, this is an acting class, although Pervis generally doesn’t recommend classes for kids younger than 7.

Besides teaching kids everything from dramatic techniques to the specific skills they need to find work, these classes can be another way to gauge if your kid has natural talent for and interest in acting. Even if your child isn’t planning an acting career, Wittenberg recommends them for building confidence and speaking skills.

Some schools will also help your kids prep for auditions. Ones that host showcases can help get you in front of talent agents, the next important step.

These classes will require a fee, of course, so evaluate them carefully and ask around for recommendations.

Resources

■ Georgia Department of Labor, Child Labor Entertainment

Employment: Read about rules for children in the entertainment industry at dol.georgia.gov/child-labor-entertainment-employment

■ **Georgia Film and Music:** For information on how to become an extra and a list of casting companies visit tourgeorgiafilm.com/article/how-to-become-an-extra




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