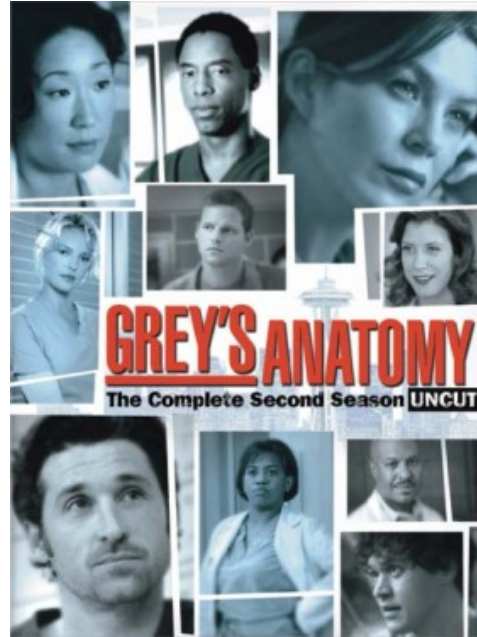


Video 2

Working in the Industry #1 – Television Producer



Shonda Rhimes

Creator and executive producer, 'Grey's Anatomy' and 'Private Practice'

I come from a family of readers. We had "book Sundays" in my house where my entire family—I have five brothers and sisters—all sat around and read. I always thought that I would end up being a novelist. I was making up stories and recording them into a tape recorder and my mom was transcribing them before I knew how to write. Then, when I was 17, I saw Whoopi Goldberg live on Broadway and George C. Wolfe's "The Colored Museum." Both made me absolutely fall in love with the theater. After college, I went to film school almost on a whim. At that point, I fell in love with writing and realized that was how I was going to tell stories.

I worked as an assistant for several years and also at a place called Portals, which helped the mentally ill homeless learn job skills. I paid the bills until I sold a spec script. Right about the time I sat down to write that script, I

remember feeling very strongly that this was it for me. I knew that I was an educated woman, and if I needed to, I could do something else. I actually looked into medical school. The script was called "Human Seeking Same" and it was a romantic comedy. It sold and then it resold and then it resold again. I lived off it for quite a while, but it really helped me get my first big job, which was "Introducing Dorothy Dandridge." It's such a joy when you get to do the thing that you would secretly do for free and get paid for it. I thought, I'm doing the thing I love to do. Not everybody gets to say that. I'm going to stick it out.

I felt an enormous responsibility to tell the story of Dorothy accurately. I interviewed people like Dorothy Dandridge's best friend and the Nicholas Brothers, who had been part of early black Hollywood history. It was so inspiring. I always think about Hattie McDaniel, when she was nominated for best supporting actress. They made her eat in a separate room because she was an African-American woman. It puts everything in perspective.

By the time I did "Princess Diaries II," I had become a mother. I always joke that the thing about having a child is that you suddenly realize you can never leave the house again. I spent a lot of evenings with my daughter lying on my chest catching up with DVDs on a lot of television shows I had never seen before like "Buffy" and "The West Wing."

I admired all this great long-term character development that was happening on television. It doesn't happen in the movies because you only have two hours. I also saw a lot of strong female characters on television.

I wrote a pilot about war correspondents. These were women who drank a lot and played very hard and enjoyed their jobs. And then we went to war in Iraq. Suddenly the charming idea didn't feel so charming when actual Americans were dying. The next year I was asked to develop something else. I really was in love with the idea of a world with strong competitive

women, so I looked for another like that and that's how I ended up focusing on surgery. And also because I was hooked on surgery shows. With the exception of McDreamy—who is simply the guy I wish was out there—all the characters felt like they were pieces of me. It made it easier to write them because they were people who lived in my head in a very good way.

Television is all about running your own show. And I felt that, like the interns, I was thrown into deep water and I was asked to swim. What I've learned is that if you swim hard enough and you pay enough attention, you create something great. You have to stick to your own vision.

I have a second child this year, the show "Private Practice." I have learned to delegate some things and to focus on the two things I love most, which are writing and sitting in the editing room. I feel absolutely up for it. I have no idea how my own story is going to end. But it's fun to know the answers here at the office.

Answer the following three questions and turn your answers electronically to [School Loop](#).

- 1. What did Shonda do to pay the bills before she sold her first spec script?**
- 2. What did she admire about television, that can't happen in a two hour film?**
- 3. What does she mean by the expression, "if you swim hard enough"?**