How to Make a DVD Clip Reel

If you're showing film clips in class, you'll probably want to make a DVD clip reel -- your own DVD with the clips you want preloaded on it. That way you can avoid the frenzied scan through chapter titles and the awkward dead time while you wait for the menu sequence to load. And making a clip reel is easier than you think.

As I've said, I believe -- as does the Society for Cinema and Media Studies -- that clip reels for the purpose of in-classroom teaching constitute fair use of copyright-protected material. But, of course, you should use your own judgment.

The instructions that follow are for Macs and some of the steps make use of software that isn't free (but is inexpensive). I've tried, however, to include links to Windows and free versions of this software.
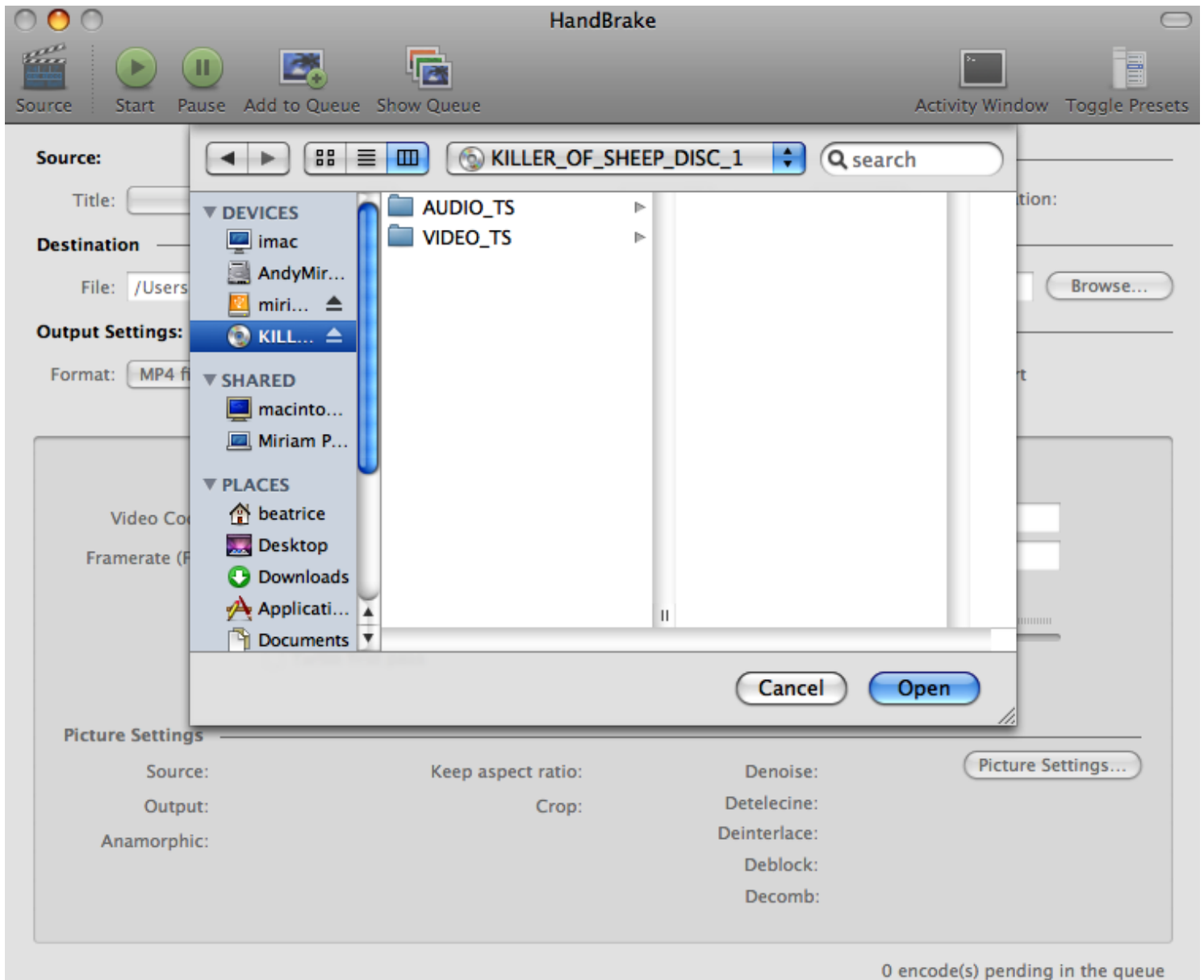
There are really three main steps to making a clip reel: *ripping* the original DVD, in which you transfer the DVD contents to your computer; *editing* the video into the clips you want; and *burning* your own DVD.

Here's what you need:

1. Software that can *rip* a DVD. I use HandBrake, which is free and easy to use. There are versions for both Windows and Mac PCs.

2. Software that can *edit* video. I use Quicktime Pro, an upgraded version of the Quicktime you get for free. It costs $29.99, but it's a dead-simple, lightweight tool that can also, incidentally, convert videos for viewing on an iPod or iPhone. Other options: Windows Movie Maker (free), Free Video Converter (free, Windows), iMovie ($79, if it's not already on your Mac).

3. Software that can *burn* a DVD and make a menu for it. I use iDVD because it's easy and it came free on my Mac. Other good options: ImgBurn (free, Windows), BurnAware (free, Windows), Burn (free, Mac).

4. A source DVD (obviously!).

5. A DVD burner. If your computer doesn't already have one, you can get one fairly inexpensively.

6. Enough hard drive space to hold your video. You might want to get an external hard drive if you're going to work with a lot of video.
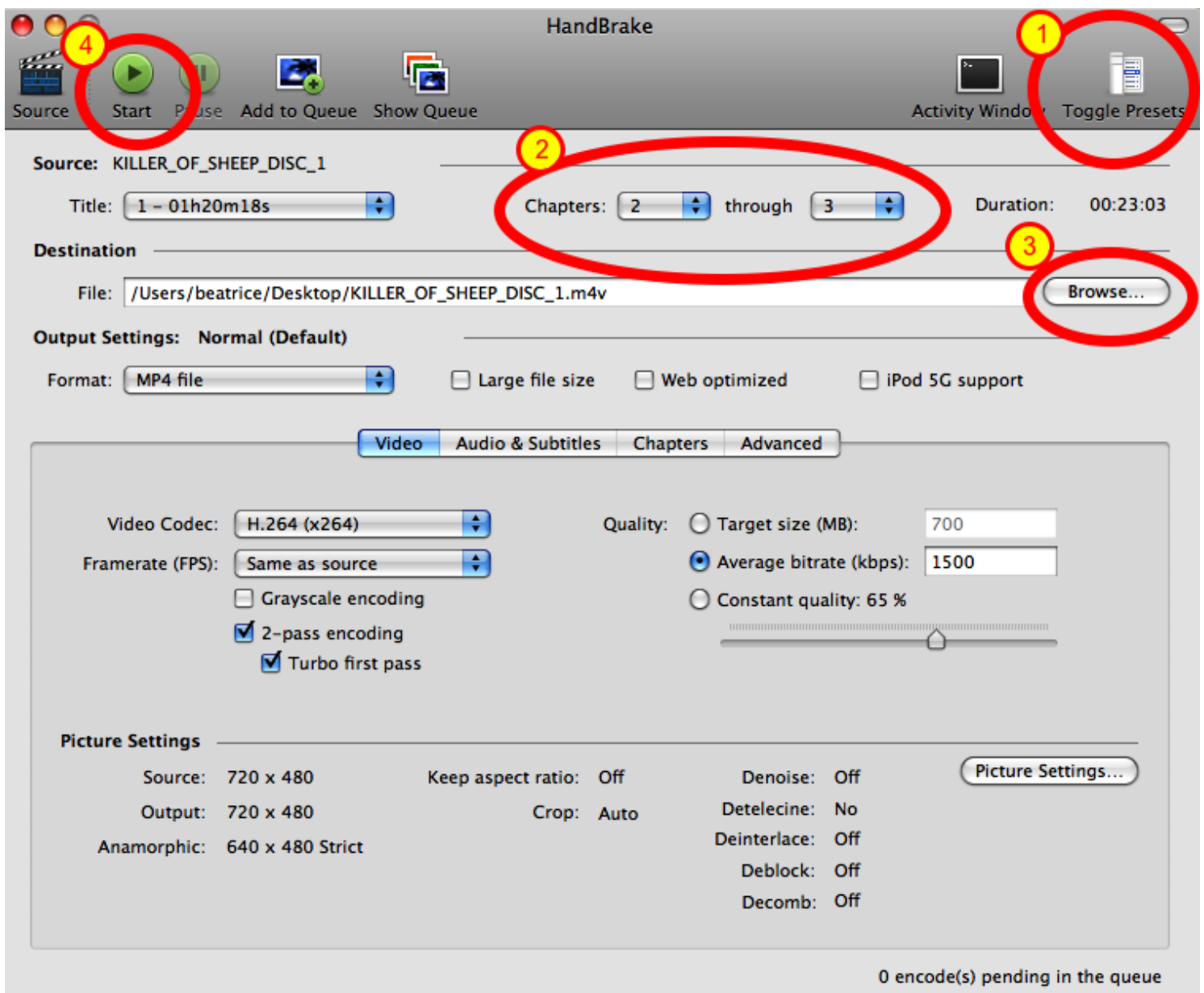
7. A blank DVD.

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Okay! Let's do it.

Since you're making a clip reel, you probably don't want the entire movie copied onto your hard drive. So before you start ripping, look through the DVD and make a note of which chapters contain the clips you want. Later, we'll chop up those chapters to include only the sequences you want to show your students.

Pop in the DVD. If it starts playing automatically, tell it to quit. Open up HandBrake and navigate to your DVD. You'll see files inside the DVD, but don't worry about those. Just click on the disc and then press "Open."

Step Two: Tell HandBrake what you want

This step looks kind of scary, but it's really not that bad.

1. Click on "Toggle Presets" in the upper right-hand side of the window to open up a list of output options (if it's not open already). Select "Normal." That sets all your output options. See, not so bad.

2. Near the top of the window, select the chapters that you want to copy from the dropdown menus.

3. Click "Browse" under the "Destination" heading to pick where you want your movie chapters to go.

4. Press "Start" at the top of the window. HandBrake will get to work. This may take a while.
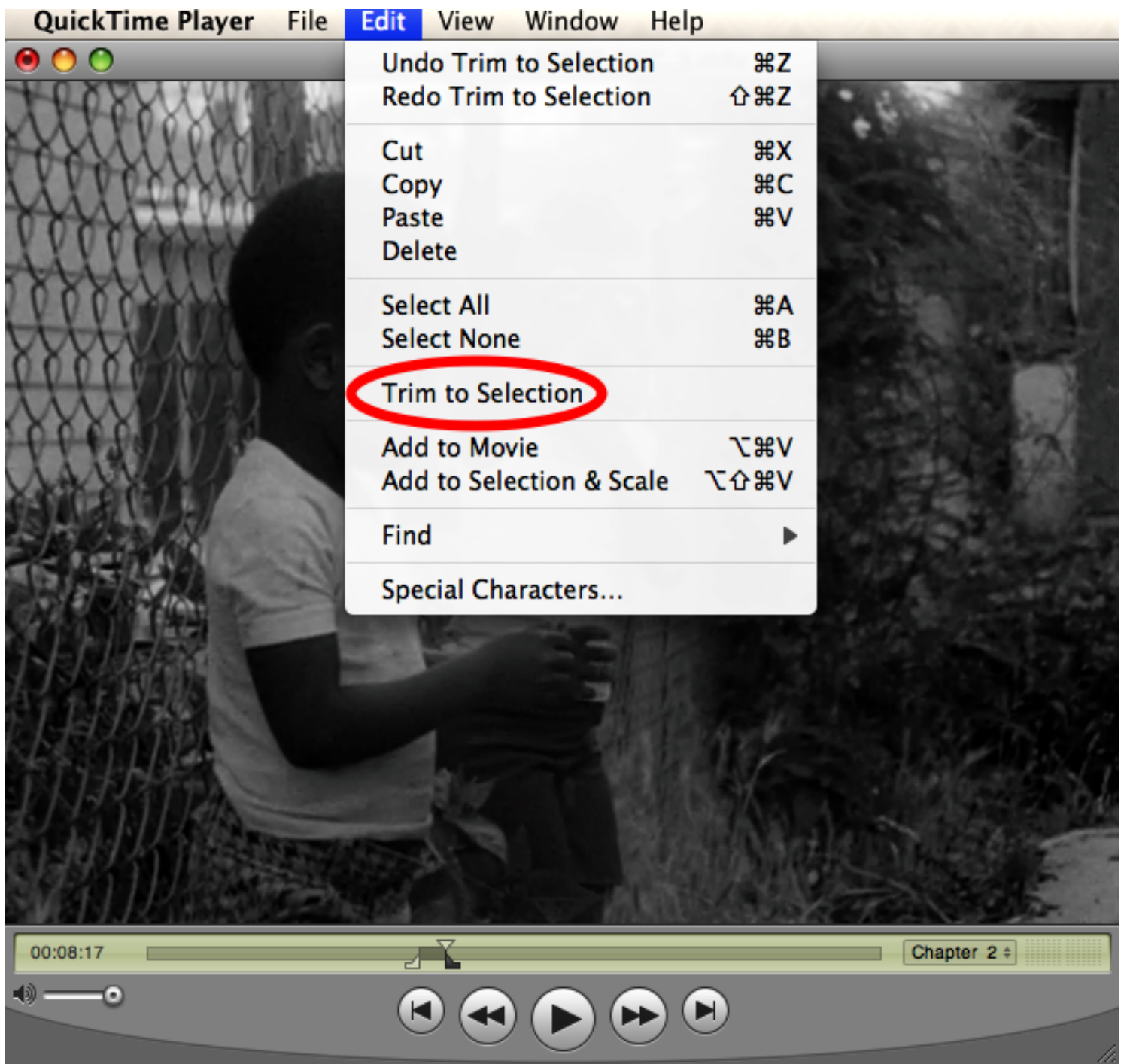
When HandBrake is done, you can quit it.

Step Three: Choose your clip with QuickTime

Navigate to the movie file HandBrake made for you and open it up with QuickTime Pro. Use the scrubbers at the bottom of the screen to trim the chapters into the short clips that you'd like on your clip reel.
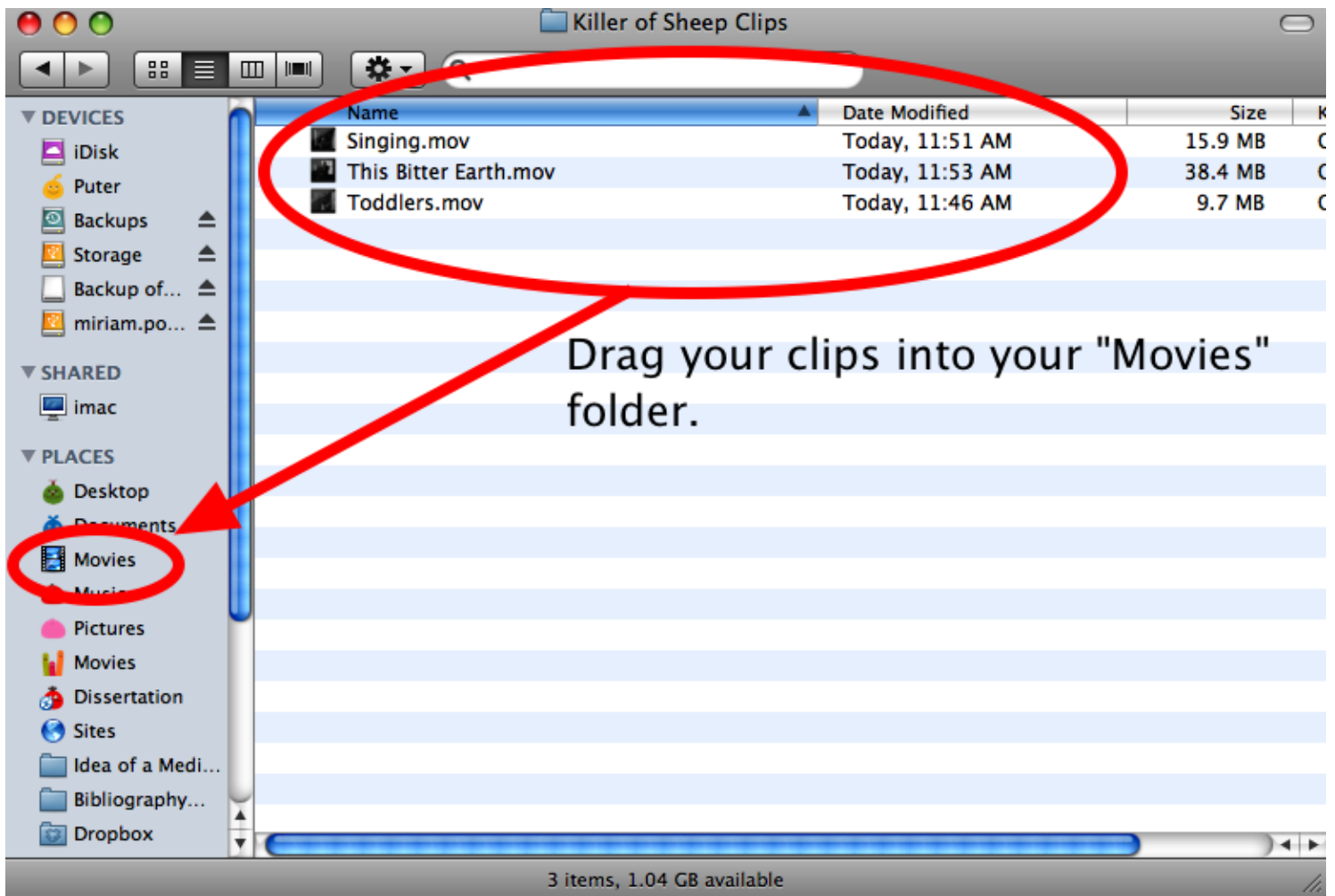
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When you're happy with the chunk of movie you've chosen, go to "Edit" and then pick "Trim to Selection." If you have trouble getting to just the part you want, repeat this step with progressively smaller chunks. It will get easier to refine your selection if you have less film to work with.

If you want more than one clip from the chapters you've copied, go to "File," then "Save as" and pick a descriptive name for your clip. Save it as "self-contained movie," not a reference movie. Close that clip, open up the longer version, and repeat as many times as you want.

Step Five: Move your clips to your "Movies" folder

In step six, you'll be using iDVD to burn a DVD of your clips. To make it really easy for iDVD to find your clips, it's best to move them into the "Movies" folder, which should be under "Places" in your Finder window.

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Step Six: Open up iDVD and create a new project
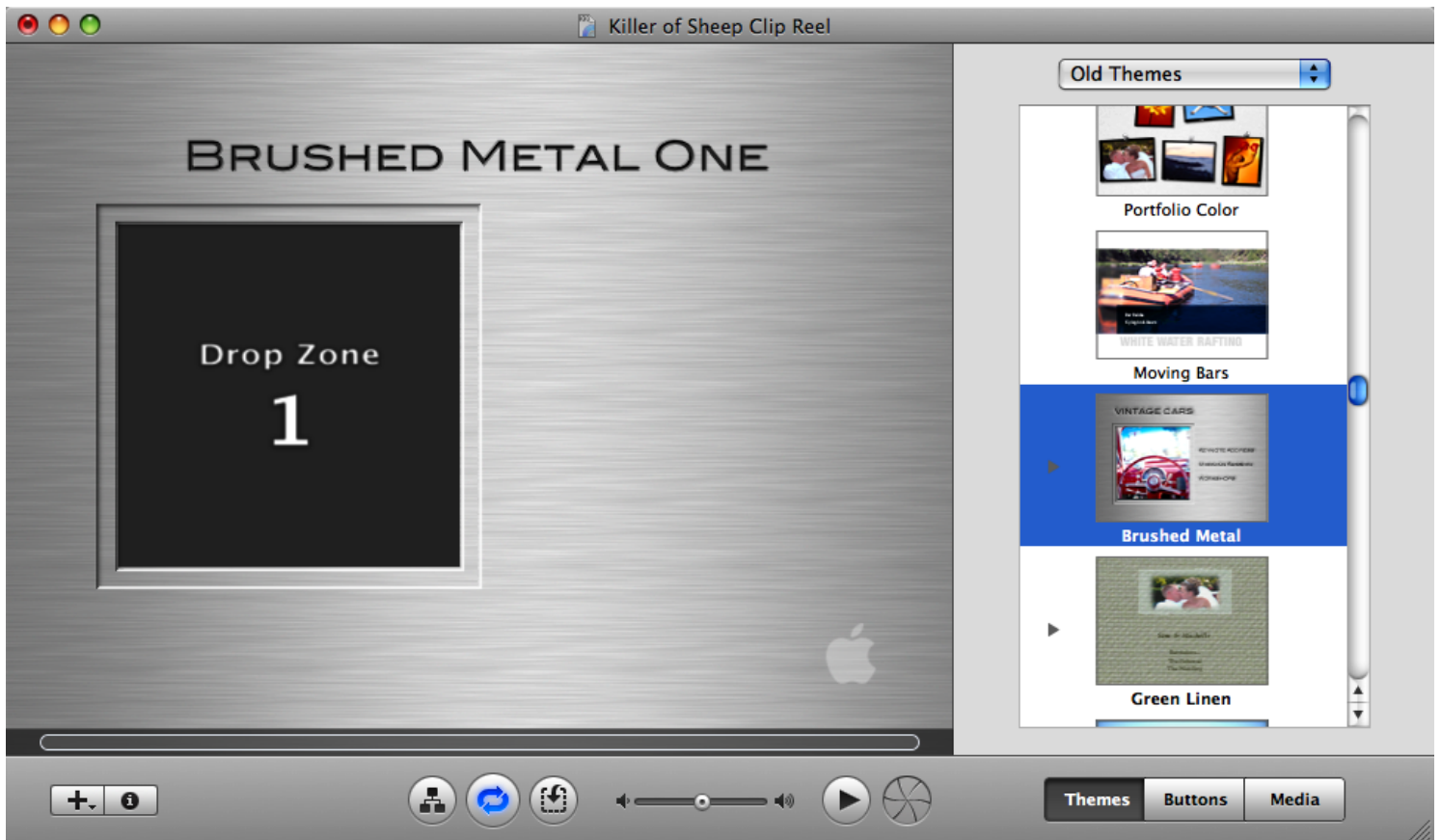

Close QuickTime and open up iDVD. Click on "Create a New Project" and, in the next pop-up window, give your DVD a name.

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You'll see the main iDVD window. You can decide how you want your menus to look by picking from a bunch of themes. Personally, I like to keep things as simple as possible -- no sound, no flashing text, no extra images -- so I tend to choose "Brushed Metal" under "Old Themes." But, hey, if you want something fancy, go nuts.
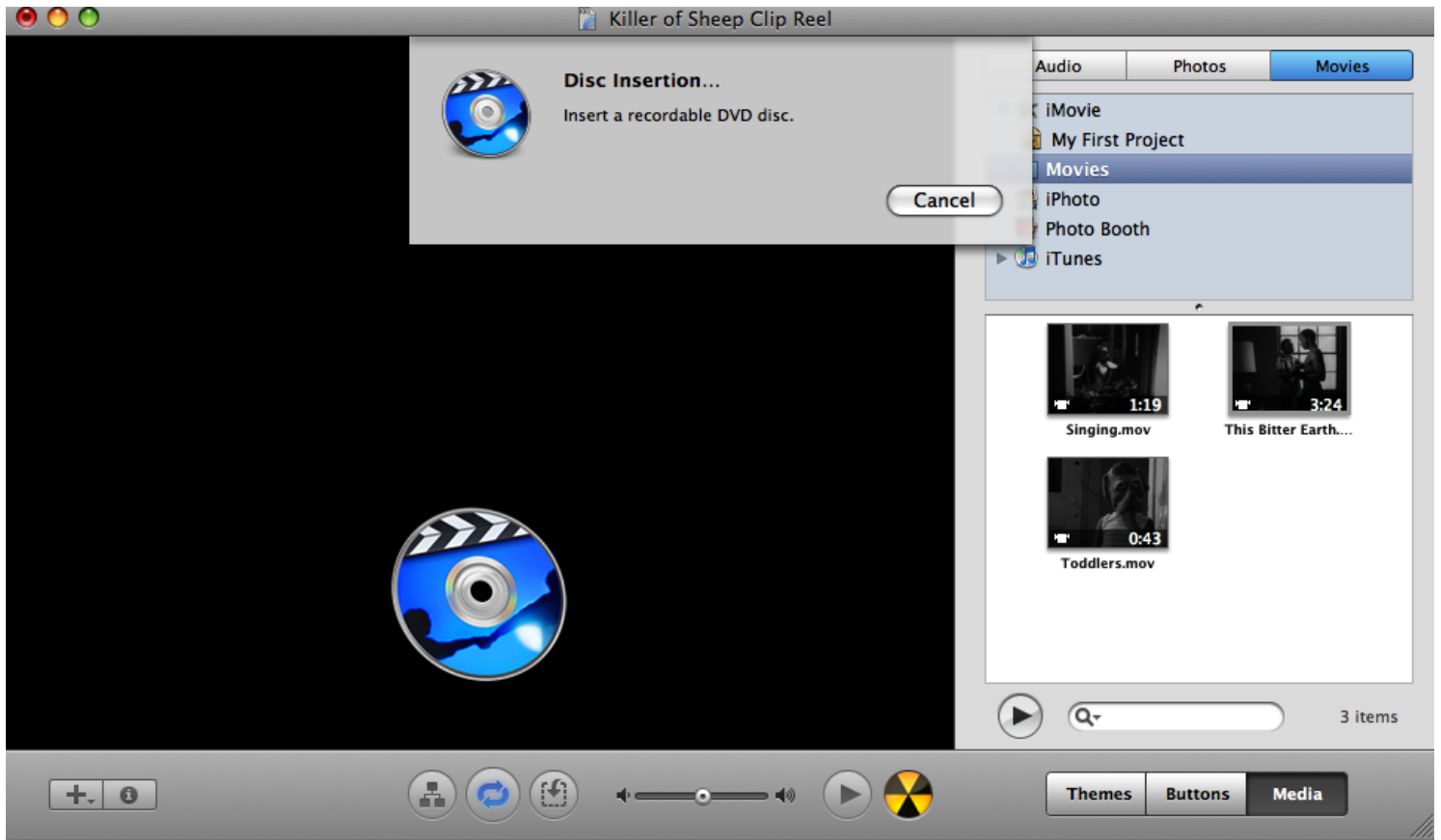
Step Eight: Add your clips to your DVD

To tell iDVD which clips you want on your DVD, click on "Media" in the bottom left-hand portion of the window. Click on "Movies" and then select the "Movies" folder. Drag and drop your clips onto the surface of the DVD menu.

Step Nine: Make it look nice

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Step Ten: Burn your DVD!

Once you're happy with the way your menu looks, click on the circle next to the Play button at the bottom of the window. For some reason, it now changes to a radioactive-looking symbol. IDVD will now ask you to insert a blank DVD, and then it will burn your clip reel for you.

Once this step is finished, you're through! Congratulations, you have a clip reel.

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