Lesson: Truth and lies: how Hollywood films compare to real life!

This is a quick, easy, English lesson plan that will inspire your students. It'll also give them opportunities to improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. This lesson comes with Teacher's Notes, a Resource Sheet, a PDF of the lesson, and an audio file. Simply follow the lesson ideas for a fantastic class that'll really motivate your students.

1 Warm-up

Discussion: Historical films
Students Have a discussion about the historical films below. Either print off the film titles, or write them up on the board. Students can use the questions below or any others. See the **RESOURCE SHEET** at the end of this pack.

2 Lesson activities

Go through the activities for the lesson on the sheet **at the end of this document**: the Pre-reading, Reading I and Reading II activities.

Remember, as part of the Learn Hot English method, we recommend three rounds of reading:
1. Read the text once without stopping for a general understanding (reading for gist).
2. Then, read the text again to answer comprehension questions.
3. Finally, read the text again but this time look up the meanings of any words you couldn't guess.

3 Follow-up activities

Retell it!
Assign a story (or two, etc.) to each student. Students have a minute or two to try to remember the text. When they're ready, students try to recount the information, using as much of the language as possible.

Dialogue
In pairs, students write up notes for a dialogue between a reporter and someone involved in a historical film (the director or actor, for example). The reporter should ask questions using *who, what, where, why, when, how* to get as much information as possible. Tell your students to make the dialogue as funny, silly or serious as they like. When they're ready, ask for volunteers to act out their dialogues (from memory or by using notes, not reading it out word-for-word). Other students listen and vote on the best ones.

Idea & presentation
Students think of an idea for a new historical film. Remind them it could be a very recent even from their country – it doesn't have to be from far back in history. Then, they write notes for a one- or two-minute presentation on it, explaining what it is, why they have chosen this person or event, what the film's called, who it's going to star, what's going to happen, the plot, a tagline, how it differs from the real story, etc. When they're ready, ask for volunteers to give their presentations (using notes, not reading it out word-for-word). Other students vote on the most interesting ones.

Debate it!
Hold a debate! For the purpose of this, you could focus this debate on a particular film, or just make it more generally about historical films. Title: *When making a film, should the producers let the truth get in the way of a good story?*
Divide the class into two. Half the class believes that historical films should be as accurate as possible; the other half doesn't think it's necessary and that the truth shouldn't get in the way of a good story. In their groups (or in pairs or smaller groups), students prepare arguments either in favour of or against zero-hours contracts. (even if they don't agree with it personally). When they're ready, allow representatives from each group to stand up and present their arguments. When both sides have finished, open up the debate so anyone can make comments, respond to previous points, etc. At the end (after a few minutes), hold a vote and see which idea is the most popular. Tell students they can vote either way and that they don't have to vote according to their initial group and the stance that they were representing.
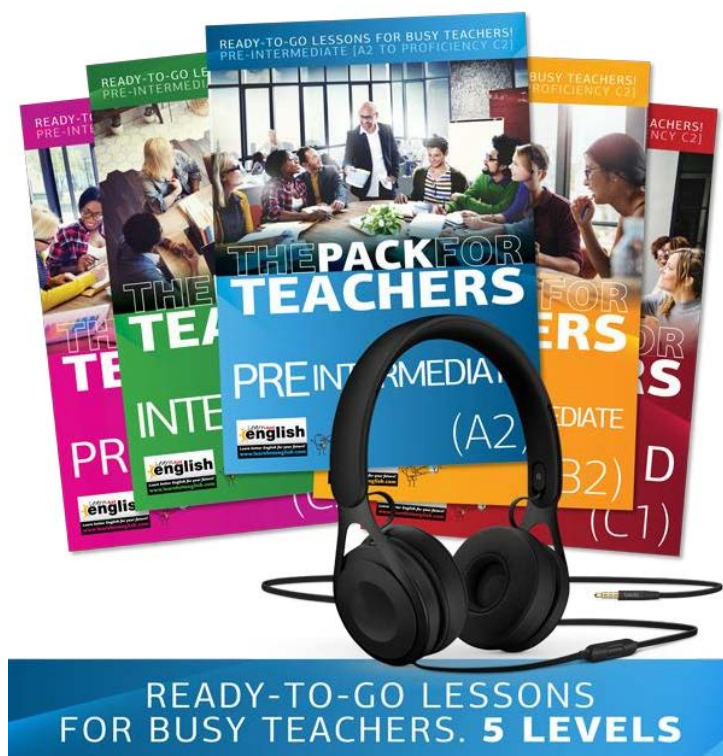
Resource Sheet

Discussion: Historical films

Have a discussion about the historical films below. Either print off the film titles, or write them up on the board. Students can use the questions below or any others.

• Which of these films have you seen? What did you think of them?
• What were they about? Which historical characters or events were they based on?
• What do you know about the real events or people?
• What differences are there between the real events or people and the film?
• How important is it for historical movies to be as accurate as possible?

• 12 Years a Slave (2013)
• Agora (2009)
• The Alamo (2004)
• Apollo 13 (1995)
• Ben-Hur (1959)
• Black Hawk Down (2001)
• Bloody Sunday (2002)
• Braveheart (1995)
• The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957)
• Che (2008)
• Das Boot (1981)
• Elizabeth (1998)
• Enemy at the Gates (2001)
• Gandhi (1982)
• Gangs of New York (2002)
• Gladiator (2000)
• The Great Escape (1963)
• Henry V (1989)
• JFK (1991)
• King Arthur (2004)
• The King's Speech (2010)

• The Last Emperor (1987)
• The Last of the Mohicans (1992)
• Lawrence of Arabia (1962)
• Lincoln (2012)
• Malcolm X (1992)
• The Patriot (2000)
• Patton (1970)
• Pompeii (2014)
• Saving Private Ryan (1998)
• Schindler's List (1993)
• Selma (2014)
• Spartacus (1960)
• Troy (2004)
• The Young Victoria (2009)
• Zulu (1964)
• Valkyrie (2008)
• The Impossible (2012)
• Argo
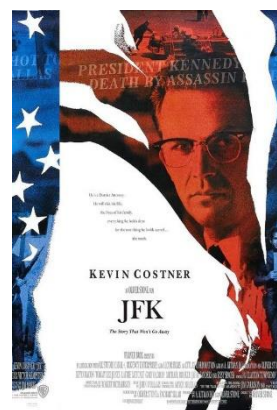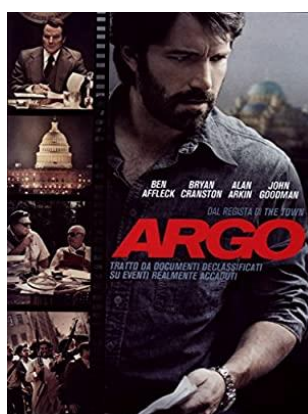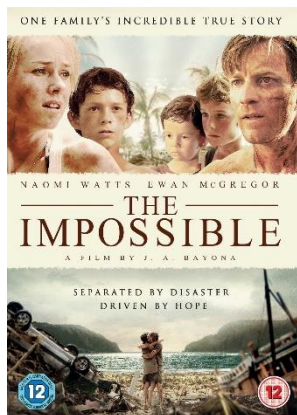
Objective	To improve your reading and listening skills.
Think about it	Do movie directors have an obligation to make sure that films reflect the truth as accurately as possible? Why? Why not? Have you seen any historical films? How true to real life do you think they were?
Exams	This reading and listening activity will help prepare you for English exams such as CAE, IELTS and TOEFL.

READ & LISTEN II
TRACK 25: NEW ZEALAND MAN & ENGLISHMAN

TRUTH AND LIES:
HOW HOLLYWOOD FILMS COMPARE TO REAL LIFE

by JohnMichael Mulderig

Hollywood films are often based on real-life events. But how close are they to the truth? Here are two movies that were inspired by true stories.

1 The Impossible

In December 2004, the Alvarez-Belon family were enjoying a holiday at their beach side hotel in Phuket (Thailand) when disaster **struck**. Early in the morning of the 26th, a 10-metre **tsunami** crashed into the resort, **slamming** Maria, the mother,

into some nearby trees. After the initial shock, she found her eldest son Lucas. Sometime later, villagers carried Maria to a hospital in Takua Pa so that medical staff could operate on her **life-threatening injuries**. Maria's husband and two younger boys were in the swimming pool at the time. Miraculously, they also survived, and the family was **reunited** a few days later. In total, the wave killed over 200,000 people.

The film version of the event captures the terror and destructive power of the tsunami, and was partially filmed at the resort where the family were staying. But despite the similarities, there's one major difference: while the real-life Alvarez-Belon family are Spanish, the family portrayed in the movie are British. In the film, Maria and Quique are played respectively by British actors Naomi Watts and Ewan McGregor, with Enrique's name becoming Henry and the family's surname changed to Bennett. Director Juan Antonio Bayona, who is actually Spanish, explained that they needed international actors in order to **raise funds** for the film. He added, "This is not a film of nationality, race or social class. All that was **swept away** by the wave."

2 Argo

On 4th November 1979, radical Iranian militants **took** more than sixty **hostages** from the United States Embassy in Teheran (Iran). Six US diplomats managed to **evade capture** and were **sheltered** by Canadian Ambassadors Ken Taylor and John Sheardown.

With little chance of escape, Canadian and United States officials needed a plan to get them out. CIA operative Tony Mendez eventually came up with an idea: the six would pretend to be Canadian citizens working on a Hollywood film. Canadian Ambassador Ken Taylor said, "We thought the (Mendez) plan was OK... but we didn't think we really needed something that **intricate**." They had some other more straightforward schemes, but **ultimately** went with the Mendez plan. On 28th January 1980, the diplomats **passed themselves off as** Canadian **film crew** and left Iran safely. The remaining hostages weren't released until a year later on 21st January 1981.

So, how does the film compare to reality? In the film version, CIA operative Tony Mendez is presented as the hero, while the Canadians **take a back seat**, only providing housing for the diplomats. Director Ben Affleck said that this was to provide greater dramatic tension by making it seem as if everything was **resting on** Mendez's **shoulders**. On top of that, British diplomats are shown refusing to help the Americans, something which is **hotly disputed** by those who were actually there at the time. Defending the film, Affleck explained, "Because we say it's *based* on a true story, rather than *this is a true story*, we're allowed to **take** some **dramatic licence**." The late singer-songwriter

John Lennon once said, "Reality leaves a lot to the imagination." It's clear that the directors of the *Impossible* and *Argo* felt this way too. ✪

THE IMPOSSIBLE (2012)
Starring Naomi Watts and Ewan McGregor. Directed by Juan Antonio Bayona.

ARGO (2012)
Starring Ben Affleck and John Goodman. Directed by Ben Affleck. *Argo* is the name of the film they invented as part of the plan to get the Americans out.

GLOSSARY

to strike *vb*
if a disaster "strikes", it happens suddenly
a tsunami *n*
a very large wave (a mass of water in the sea), often caused by an earthquake (a violent movement of the earth)
to slam into *phr vb*
if A "slams into" B, A crashes into B with great force
life-threatening injuries *exp*
an "injury" is damage to a person's body. "Life-threatening injuries" can kill you
to reunite *vb*
if two people are "reunited", they meet again after being separated
to raise funds *exp*
to collect money for something (a charity, etc.) by asking people for that money
to sweep away *phr vb*
if someone is "swept away" from an area, they're taken away from that area very quickly (in this case, by the tsunami)
to take hostage *exp*
if criminals "take hostages", they catch people and hold them until their demands are met
to evade capture *exp*
if you "evade capture", you escape from a place where people are trying to catch you
to shelter *vb*
if you "shelter" someone (particularly someone the police are looking for), you give them a place to hide or live
intricate *adj*
something that's "intricate" has many small parts or details
ultimately *exp*
in the end / eventually
to pass yourself off as *exp*
if you "pass yourself off as" a prince (for example), you act as if you're a prince, even though you aren't
film crew *n*
the "film crew" are the people who work on a film: the sound engineers, the camera operators, etc.
to take a back seat *exp*
if you "take a back seat" during an operation (for example), you don't do much and let others lead it
to rest on someone's shoulders *exp*
if responsibility for something "rests on your shoulders", it's your responsibility
hotly disputed *exp*
if something is "hotly disputed", people don't agree with it
to take dramatic licence *exp*
if a director "takes dramatic licence", they tell the story the way they want to, often ignoring the facts

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Answers on page 44

1 Pre-reading
What changes can filmmakers make to real-life stories? Think of as many ideas as you can. They can... *change the dates, change the names of the people, set it in a different country, change the sequence of events...*

2 Reading I
Read the article once. Were any of your ideas from the Pre-reading task mentioned?

3 Reading II
Read the article again. Then, answer the questions.
1. Why was Maria taken to hospital?
2. Why was it a miracle that everyone in her family survived?
3. What was the major difference between the film and reality?
4. What was the film *Argo* based on?
5. How did the diplomats get out of the country?
6. In the film version, what is one of the major differences?