

From Titanic to American Sniper: the biggest lies in fact-based movies

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions.

- Which of the following types of films do you enjoy most?
 - films about real people
 - films about events in history
 - films about true crime
 - films about war
- When you watch a film based on a true story, do you expect *all* of it to be true?
- Do you know of any fact-based films that have inaccuracies?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. In some example sentences, you need to change the form of the word.

adopt

court

crewmember

pirate

sue

- If you _____ a child, you legally become his/her parents.
After Sophie's parents died, her aunt _____ her.
- A _____ is a place where a judge decides if someone is guilty of a crime.
Tom had to appear in _____ because he witnessed a car accident.
- A _____ is someone who attacks ships to steal from them.
There were many _____ in the Caribbean a few hundred years ago.
- A _____ works on a ship with other people.
The captain asked all the _____ to get the lifeboats ready.
- To _____ is to take legal action against someone.
Sarah _____ the driver who caused the accident.

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accurate

activism

aristocrat

dumb

medal

6. An _____ is someone of high social rank.
The French Revolution was a difficult time for _____.
7. If something is _____, it is correct and without any mistakes.
This book is such an _____ description of life on the island.
8. _____ is the use of public methods to try and make social and political changes.
Martin Luther King is known for his social and political _____.
9. _____ means stupid or silly, showing little intelligence.
I love _____ comedies!
10. A _____ is a small round piece of metal that is given as a reward for a brave action.
The soldiers all got _____ for their brave actions.

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Stuart Heritage

17 August 2023

- 1 *The Blind Side* is a 2009 film about how a 'brave' real-life wealthy white family adopted a troubled black teenager. Sandra Bullock won an Oscar, and people loved it. But now people are not thinking so positively about the film.
- 2 In August 2023, Michael Oher, the ex-NFL star whose teenage life was shown in *The Blind Side*, asked a court to end his relationship with the Tuohy family legally. He said they got millions of dollars from the film, but he got nothing. He also said that the Tuohys never really adopted him.
- 3 Here are some other films that aren't completely true.
- 4 **Captain Phillips**
This film is about Somali pirates who hijacked the Maersk Alabama ship. In the film, the captain, Richard Phillips, is a hero. The film was based on Phillips's memoir. In 2013, a crewmember said Phillips got seven emails warning him about pirates, but decided to ignore them. Other crewmembers sued Maersk for \$50m after the hijacking, saying he put them in danger.
- 5 **Braveheart**
Braveheart told the story of William Wallace. It showed him growing up poor (but actually, he was an aristocrat). It showed him in kilts (hundreds of years before kilts were invented). Still, Scotland got a statue of William Wallace made. It looks exactly like Mel Gibson, so it's also not accurate!
- 6 **Titanic**
Some things in *Titanic* were true – there was a boat, and it sank – but not everything. In the film, First Officer William Murdoch shoots a passenger and kills himself. Murdoch's family were unhappy about this. They said it didn't show him as the hero he was: he launched several lifeboats. The Vice-President of Fox travelled to Murdoch's hometown to apologise and give £5,000 to a local school.

7 Patch Adams

The real Patch Adams told Roger Ebert: "I hate that movie." Adams says it showed him as a simple, funny character, ignoring his medical work and activism. Adams now carries around business cards with the names of 50 books and gives them to people who ask for his autograph. He tells them that pop culture has made people dumber.

8 American Sniper

In this film, Bradley Cooper's Chris Kyle's enemy is an Iraqi shooter, Mustafa, but they almost never saw each other (and maybe he didn't even exist). In real life, Kyle lied about how many medals he won in service. He also said he punched Jesse Ventura for saying bad things about the Iraq war. Ventura sued him for this, but no verdict was reached.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Michael Oher is happy with his new family, the Tuohys.
2. Michael Oher got no money from the film *The Blind Side*.
3. Richard Phillips was a hero who was surprised by pirates.
4. Crewmembers sued Richard Phillips because he put their lives in danger.
5. William Wallace wore a kilt and grew up poor.
6. First Officer William Murdoch was shown as a hero in *Titanic*.
7. The real Patch Adams wasn't happy with how he was shown in the film and wanted people to know about his work and activism.
8. Mustafa and Chris Kyle were friends in real life.

4 Key language

a. Match the words to form phrases from the article.

an autograph a teenager a lifeboat a medal / an Oscar a relationship a story a verdict

1. adopt _____
2. end _____
3. tell _____
4. launch _____
5. ask for _____
6. win _____
7. reach _____

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b. Now, ask and answer these questions using words from the previous activity.

1. Do you enjoy _____ stories?
2. If you've met someone famous, did you _____ their autograph?
3. Have you ever _____ a medal?
4. Do you know anyone who wants to _____ a child?

5 Discussion

a. Discuss the statements.

- "Films should be fun, and it doesn't matter if they don't teach you anything."
- "Films based on a true story do not need to be 100% accurate."
- "Hollywood is making people dumber. Directors should make their films more accurate."

6 In your own words

a. Choose a film that you like based on a true story or events. Research the actual events and investigate if any parts of the film are untrue.

b. Report your findings to the class.

Useful language

In real life, ...

In the film, ...

It is (not) true that ...

The film is (not) accurate when it shows ...