

French miss: is the future of movie kissing in jeopardy?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Read the short film summary below. Answer the questions.

Movie: *You People*

Release Date: 27 January, 2023 (Netflix)

Starring: *Jonah Hill, Lauren London, Eddie Murphy*

Plot: *A new couple and their families experience modern love and deal with cultural clashes, societal expectations, and generational differences.*

- Have you seen this movie above? What did you think of it? If not, are you interested in it?
- Do you recognise the actors' names? What else have they been in?
- What do you think of films made directly by streaming companies and services like Netflix? Are they better or worse than those released in cinemas?
- Look at the title of the article. What do you think it relates to?

2 Key words

a. Match the words from the box to the definitions.

airbrushed	climactic	clump	comeback	confetti
consensus	contractual	critique	fleet	forewarning
foundations	gesture	gonna	legitimate	mash
morph	perspex	schemed up	workaround	

1. agreed to or stated in a written legal document _____
2. an event or moment that is the most exciting or important one in a series

3. fair and reasonable _____
4. used to describe something that has been digitally altered, such as a picture or photograph

5. used to describe when someone or something becomes successful or popular again

6. a solid transparent plastic that can be used in doors and windows instead of glass

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7. a group of objects, especially when they are owned by one organisation or person

8. a group of things very close together _____
9. movement that communicates a feeling or instruction _____
10. a warning about a problem or dangerous situation that is likely to happen

11. a way to overcome a problem _____
12. agreement among all the people involved _____
13. small pieces of coloured paper that people throw in the air during celebrations

14. the most essential part of something from which the rest of it develops

15. thought of or planned _____
16. short for 'going to' used in informal conversation _____
17. criticise using your own opinions _____
18. crush something or blend it together _____
19. gradually change one image into another using computer technology _____

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In Netflix romcom *You People*, the two leads allegedly share a CGI kiss at the end, a strange forewarning of what big stars might demand in the future

Stuart Heritage

8 February, 2023

- 1 As a film, Netflix's *You People* raises all manner of questions. Questions like "Do we really need an update of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* in 2023?" and "Shouldn't a 2023 remake of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* have more to say than this?" and "Shouldn't the leads of an expensive streaming romcom have more chemistry than Jonah Hill and Lauren London, two actors who for much of the film look like strangers who literally just met in a lift and don't particularly like each other very much?"
- 2 But the question "Did they actually kiss?" probably shouldn't be one of those questions. Because, after all, we can see that they do. Right at the end, Hill and London get married, and they lean into each other, and they kiss. Confetti falls from the sky and lands on them. A supporting character even negatively critiques the kiss, pointing out that Jonah Hill is using more tongue than is generally considered acceptable. Regardless of anything else you think about the film, which should be a lot because it isn't very good, they kiss at the end. They definitely kiss.
- 3 Except maybe they don't. On a recent episode of *The Brilliant Idiots* podcast, comedian Andrew Schulz revealed that the whole kiss was nothing but a CGI construction. "I don't even know if I should share this," Schulz said before immediately sharing the weird staging of the kiss on set. "It's CGI. Swear to God. I'm there, I'm watching the wedding, and I see them go in for the kiss, and their faces stop like this far. And I'm like, I wonder how they're gonna play that in the movie. Oh, they're probably just gonna cut right there.' But in the movie, you could see their faces come close, and then you could see their faces morph a little bit into a fake kiss."
- 4 If this is true, it's hard to know what to make of it. On the one hand, of course, you can make two characters fake kiss with CGI. You can do anything with CGI. CGI helped Thanos throw a moon at Iron Man, so it only stands to reason that it could make Jonah Hill kiss Lauren London. But on the other hand, it does feel a bit like cheating. *You People* is a romcom, after all, and people do kiss each other in romcoms. Depriving us (the viewers) of that moment (a climactic romantic gesture) in favour of something much worse (mashing two clumps of pixels together with a computer) robs the moment of intimacy.
- 5 Obviously, this is not the first time that a kiss between leads has been faked. As recently as last year, Netflix's big Lindsay Lohan comeback film *Falling For Christmas* ended with a kiss between Chord Overstreet and what was very obviously Lohan's stand-in. And in his fleet of Christian films, Kirk Cameron will only ever kiss his wife - even if she has to dress up as his co-star - so as to not destroy the foundations of their marriage.
- 6 Post-Covid, this isn't really that much of a big deal. During the pandemic, when films didn't know if they could ever show regular kissing scenes again, all sorts of workarounds were schemed up. Although they eventually settled on a consensus involving actors thoroughly disinfecting their mouths after each kiss, in the thick of it, continuing dramas like *EastEnders* made their stars kiss through perspex screens that were subsequently airbrushed out and, perhaps taking their cue from Cameron, brought in the actors' real-life partners to dress up and kiss.
- 7 So this has been done before. But at least all those examples were real kisses, whether through stand-ins or through plastic. CGI is a whole new level up. That's taking two people and making them do something that they did not, and that raises a lot of issues about the future of acting. If you're signing on for a project, how can you trust the director not to rush out and make you do things you didn't physically film? Is the future of intimacy in Hollywood going to be deepfaked sex scenes? Will actors need to seek out specific contractual clauses promising them that they won't be turned into a horny avatar in post-production? There are a lot of legitimate questions to be asked here. How strange that it was 2023's dumbest romcom that started asking them.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Underline the parts of the article that correspond to each summary below.

1. The writer believes *You People* is too similar to an older film with a different name.
2. The writer compares CGI in *You People* to other CGI scenes.
3. The writer considers how the use of CGI for romantic scenes may develop.
4. The writer describes the film's final scenes, where they supposedly kiss.
5. The writer describes ways actors kissed during the pandemic.
6. The writer gives examples of other fake kisses using different methods.
7. The writer quotes a comedian who says the actors didn't physically kiss.

4 Key language

a. Complete the crossword with the cinema and film-making words and clues.

avatar	CGI	chemistry	Christian movies	cut	deepfaked
director	lead	on set	pixels	post-production	remake
romcom	scenes	staging	stars	supporting character	

The crossword puzzle grid consists of 17 numbered starting points for words:

- 1: Down, 10 letters
- 2: Down, 6 letters
- 3: Down, 4 letters
- 4: Down, 4 letters
- 5: Down, 4 letters
- 6: Down, 8 letters
- 7: Down, 6 letters
- 8: Across, 6 letters
- 9: Across, 6 letters
- 10: Across, 5 letters
- 11: Across, 8 letters
- 12: Across, 10 letters
- 13: Across, 4 letters
- 14: Across, 4 letters
- 15: Down, 6 letters
- 16: Across, 3 letters
- 17: Across, 6 letters

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Across

8. the main actor in a film
9. a movie or TV show that is done again with a new cast and crew
10. the most important and famous actors in a film
11. the person in charge of making a film
12. a character that is not as important to the story as the main ones
16. the acronym for Computer-Generated Imagery
17. setting up a scene to make it look real

Down

1. when someone's face has been placed on another's body through digital editing
2. the work done on a film after the action has been filmed
3. the smallest units of an image on a screen
4. parts of a film in which events happen
5. an image that represents a person on a screen
6. films based on beliefs or messages of Christianity
7. how well actors work together
13. the location where a film is being made
14. move quickly from one scene to another
15. a film that deals with love and relationships in a humorous way

- b. Choose five words or phrases from the previous task and write personalised sentences with them.**

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5 Discussion

a. Use the prompts to have discussions.

- Do you think films and TV use too much CGI nowadays? Why (not)? Give specific examples.
- Should celebrities be worried about people's ability to portray them doing things they didn't do? How has deepfaking affected society?
- Do you think CGI kisses will become more popular? Give reasons for your answer.

6 In your own words

- a. Use your phone or a computer to find a clip of one of the kisses mentioned in the article: the CGI kiss in *You People*, Lindsay Lohan's stand-in kiss in *Falling For Christmas*, or one of Kirk Cameron's stand-in kisses. Discuss if you can tell if the kisses are real or fake.
- b. Find another famous CGI scene from a movie or a TV show. Research how it was made and present it to your class.