

Amazing Grace



Synopsis

Ioan Gruffudd plays Wilberforce, who, as a Member of Parliament, navigated the world of eighteenth century backroom politics to end the slave trade in the British Empire. Albert Finney plays John Newton, a confidante of Wilberforce who inspires him to pursue a life of service to humanity. Benedict Cumberbatch is William Pitt the Younger, England's youngest ever Prime Minister at the age of twenty-four, who encourages his friend Wilberforce to take up the fight to outlaw slavery and supports him in his struggles in Parliament.

Elected to the House of Commons at the age of twenty-one, and on his way to a successful political career, Wilberforce, over the course of two decades, took on the English establishment and persuaded those in power to end the inhumane trade of slavery.

Romola Garai plays Barbara Spooner, a beautiful and headstrong young woman who shares Wilberforce's passion for reform, and who becomes his wife after a whirlwind courtship. Youssou N'Dour is Olaudah Equiano. Born in Africa and sent as a slave to the Colonies, Equiano bought his freedom and made his home in London, where he wrote a best-selling account of his life and became a leading figure in the fight to end the slavery of his fellow countrymen.

Introduction

This resource is useful for students of History, Citizenship, Film and Media Studies. It aims to provide some useful points for discussion and develop their understanding of the film.

This resource can be used in connection with the official website. Certain questions make reference to sequences that can be found at www.amazinggracemovie.com

History

As history students you may have studied this period and be aware of other information, events and contributions that do not appear in the film.

It is important to remember that although Wilberforce did make an enormous contribution to the abolition of slavery in the UK, he was part of a number of other groups and organisations that worked tirelessly to bring about change.

Key questions:

- What other groups have you come across in your studies?
- Are they mentioned in the film?
- Why do you think this is?

Through the film we are able to see a representation of the historical period in which these events took place. From our vantage point in history we can see that values have changed and the abhorrent slave trade is now something we consider to be unacceptable. However, at the time the moral climate was in conflict, Wilberforce had to fight long and hard to change the minds of many members of parliament and those that they represented. During the film we see Wilberforce in Madagascar explaining to those gathered that the smell that they find so offensive is the smell of death. By making the experiences of the slaves real, those gathered were able to begin considering the slaves as human beings too.

Activity

Transport your self back in time and develop a case as if you were working with Wilberforce and Lord Fox and one as if you were working with Lord Tarleton and the Duke of Clarence.

Citizenship

During *Amazing Grace*, Wilberforce has to make a number of difficult choices.

Key questions:

- What personal qualities does he demonstrate during his campaigning?
- What risks do you think he takes by pursuing his goal?
- How important is a sense of faith to Wilberforce's idea of citizenship?
- In the short sequence 'You can do both' (www.amazinggracemovie.com) we see him grappling with these issues. Can you understand his point of view?
- Do you think that a moral code needs to be linked to religious beliefs?

Film & Media

The film is based on historical events. However the telling of the story cannot be completely accurate because it's a film and therefore needs to conform to certain structures.

Activity

Think about how these film narrative structures impact on the text that we finally see:

- Telling the story in around 118 minutes. This is a convention of cinema, but what approach does this rely on? How can you tell a story that happened over a course of years in a couple of hours? What would you need to do?
- The time that is available to tell this story (in this case 118 minutes) will have an impact on other aspects of the narrative, think about:

Characterisation – are there familiar character types that emerge?

Expectations – how did you expect the film to end? Would this have been possible if the story were told in 'real time'?

Audience – The film has a number of audience groups. If you were dealing with the marketing of the film how might you segment the audience? Think about age and interest, as starting points. Who do you think your core audience will be? Why?

Activity

Now that you have thought about the film in general terms how would you encourage other members of your school to watch the film and to get involved with the issues it raises? To do this develop an advertising campaign aimed at your school/college population. You need to develop materials for one or all of the following:

- website
- viral
- poster campaign

You will need to think about the USP (Unique Selling Point) for the audience that you want to reach. Think also about timing, when would be the most appropriate time for your campaign to come out? What other events etc. might help raise awareness of the issues involved?