

## The Last King of Scotland



### Synopsis

In an incredible twist of fate, a Scottish doctor (James McAvoy), on a Ugandan medical mission, becomes irreversibly entangled with one of the world's most barbaric figures: Idi Amin (Forest Whitaker). Impressed by Dr Garrigan's brazen attitude in a moment of crisis, the newly self-appointed Ugandan President Amin hand-picks him as his personal physician and closest confidante. Though Garrigan is at first flattered and fascinated by his new position, he soon awakens to Amin's savagery - and his own complicity in it. Horror and betrayal ensue as Garrigan tries to right his wrongs and escape Uganda alive.

### Introduction

The film *The Last King of Scotland* raises a number of interesting issues that are of interest to students of English Language, Media, Film, Politics and Citizenship, at GCSE, AS, Highers and A2 level.

## Identity

The film raises a number of questions dealing with how we identify ourselves and what these categories mean. At the beginning of the film we see Nicholas Garrigan eating with his parents. How would you describe the atmosphere in this scene? Was it something you could identify with?

A person's identity is made of a huge number of interacting elements and is constantly changing, for example think of your favourite film from when you were very young. You may have affectionate memories of it but it is less likely that you'd like to watch it again now.

### Key questions:

- How do you define identity? Black British? British? British Asian?
- Or is perhaps your age, gender or sexuality more important to you than nationality?
- In the film, British identity is made interesting through the characters of Dr Garrigan and the diplomat. The national characteristics of English and Scottish are opposed through these two characters.
- What does it mean to be British as opposed to being Scottish or English?

In addition to these aspects of identity you may also identify yourself as for example a fan of a particular football team, or through other interests. They may have no relationship to your geographical location, e.g. you may live in Cornwall and support Manchester United, yet this is something that you choose to identify with.

We see in the film the complex identity of Idi Amin. He says in a conversation with Garrigan that the British soldiers that occupied Uganda when it was part of the British Empire gave him a sense of himself. Amin's relationship with Scotland in particular is reflected in his clothing, and those of his troops as well as the naming of his son Campbell. Did your attitude to Amin change during the course of the film? (This might be particularly true if you didn't know much about him before you saw the film.)

## Amin and Empire

One of the most dramatic and shocking aspects of the film and the story of Amin's policy in Uganda was his treatment and expulsion of Asian Ugandans. As people that live in the UK, this aspect of the film has a particular relevance to our own history. The British Empire was one of the biggest in history and it included many African Nations. As the Empire began to break down, many countries fought for independence. Amin is not uncommon in so far as he is from a military background; other leaders also mounted coups and took power. The history and legacy of the British Empire on those countries that made up the Empire provides a fascinating context for this film - something that the links at the end of this resource might be able to help you research further.

Amin's expulsion of Asian Ugandans had a big impact on the UK.

### Activity

Research the history of the British Empire to help you to contextualise the reasons for this.

- Did you learn anything about this wave of forced migration from the film?
- Is this the kind of representation of immigration with which you are familiar?
- Has the film challenged any of your ideas about immigration?

### Journalist Activity

Essential to any kind of journalistic product is good and thorough research. Use the local museum/library to research newspaper cuttings from the time (the 1970s).

- Was there local opposition?
- Did it make the papers at all locally?
- If not you may have to focus on the national papers from the time.

Once you have researched the above, in groups or individually, choose one of the options below.

- a) Write a short film script that documents the events at the time. You will need to have looked at the research and thought carefully about whom you might quote from these sources and whom, for the purposes of this article, you might invent. The character Dr Garrigan in the film is fictional. Once you have researched the events you may invent individuals to express the hardships faced by refugees from Amin's Uganda.
- b) Write an article about the impact that this period had on where you live. It may be possible to interview members of your community that were forced to come to the UK as a result of Amin's policy. You could work with your local museum/library to organise a joint community project. You may want to explain who Amin was and about his policies toward Asians. You may be able to interview someone who came to the UK as a result. What was their journey to the UK like? What was the reception when they got here? You may want to know what it was like living in Uganda before Amin took power and how it changed during his rule.

## Useful Links

[www.2.foxsearchlight.com/thelastkingofscotland/](http://www.2.foxsearchlight.com/thelastkingofscotland/)

There may be extracts from the site that you could quote in your final piece, or that might be useful in your research.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/devon/community\\_life/features/uganda\\_story.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/devon/community_life/features/uganda_story.shtml)

You may wish to use this as a starting point as it provides interviews and background information.

<http://ukafrica.org.uk/>

Further information on Uganda. This is aimed at various age groups within the Scout movement. Depending on your audience you may find the information here a useful starting point.

[www.empiremuseum.co.uk/](http://www.empiremuseum.co.uk/)

Teachers and students may find this useful as a way of looking at the Commonwealth and British Empire. The museum also produces resources.