

# TO KILL A KING

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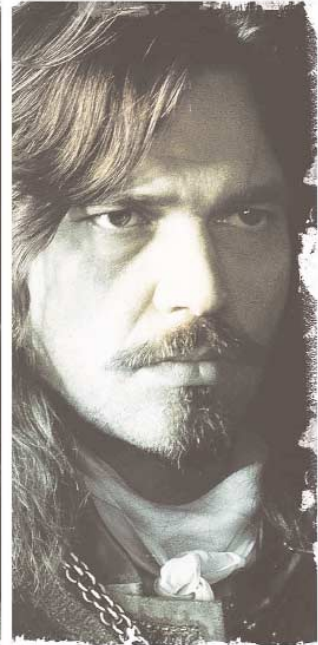
DOUGRAY  
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RUPERT  
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OLIVIA  
WILLIAMS



It takes a traitor and a hero...

# TO KILL A KING

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## STUDYING FILM, STUDYING HISTORY

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of using a feature film, in this case To Kill A King, as a possible piece of source material for the study of history.

Now view the trailer on the website of To Kill A King [filmeducation.org/secondary/tokillaking](http://filmeducation.org/secondary/tokillaking). In the chart below, write down what you think the advantages and disadvantages are.

<b>ADVANTAGES</b>	<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>



## FILM/HISTORY/STORY

A filmmaker producing a film that is based on a historical subject faces a dilemma – the audience will always know how the story ends!

Let us look at a few examples. The film that you are studying at the moment is *To Kill a King* which is based on events in the English Civil War and its aftermath. We see King Charles I very early on the film – but as people who have studied this period there is one thing that we know! – King Charles I will be beheaded!



Below are some other historical events/historical people that have been filmed. Can you say what the *ending* will have to be in such films?

- 1 The Life of Gandhi
- 2 The D-Day Landings (1944)
- 3 The Battle of Trafalgar
- 4 The Six Wives of Henry VIII
- 5 Voyages of Discovery (1492)

On all of these topics and lives we *know the ending*. But is this any different to other types of films? The French word *genre* means to combine films that are similar - have recurring conventions. Therefore, common genres of film could include science fiction, horror, crime, detective and romance etc. Can you think of any other genres of films? Do each of these genres also have typical endings? What are they?

The same thing could be said of a history book. If you read a book on a particular historical period then it is likely you will have some idea of what will happen. Books about the trial of Charles I will, towards the end, describe the King's execution.

The key questions to ask are...

What keeps us interested in these stories when we read them?

What historical information keeps us interested in a history book or film?



## FILM AND HISTORY

When a historian writes a book or an article about an event in the past, how do they research their information?

Obviously, one important point to bear in mind is the period of the event and the kinds of sources that are available for the historian to explore.

Are each of these types of sources as straightforward as they seem? Should the historian take them at face value or should they ask particular questions of each source?

Does a historian find out as many facts and opinions about a subject and decide how they will approach the subject? Or, do you think they have already decided on an approach to a particular event or period before they start looking for evidence and thus choose the evidence that will fit into what they want to say?

## STUDYING FILM, STUDYING HISTORY

### TASK

Below are four historical events from different periods in time. For each of these think about the possible primary sources that a historian could research in order to find out about the event. Following are sources to attach to the relevant event. Think of others that are not listed.

- The Death of Tutankhamen
- The Battle of Naseby (1645)
- The Battle of the Somme (1916)
- The Gulf War (2003)
  
- photographs
- newspapers
- journals
- diaries
- novels
- paintings
- oral testimony
- written testimony
- television footage
- radio broadcasts
- news footage
- artefacts

Once completed you will have a list of possible primary sources that a historian can consult in order to get information about an event. Try to group these sources together in types.



## QUESTIONING IMAGES

When we look at images, we need to ask a number of questions about each image. What are those questions? Here are some to start you off. Are there any others that you can add to this list?

- 1 The expression on the face of any person in the picture
- 2 Any gestures they are making or their posture (the position of arms, legs, head or body)
- 3 The clothes they are wearing
- 4 The surrounding in which the picture has been taken
- 5 Where the subject has been placed - are we shown things in close-up? Is it looking up at its subject from close to the ground?

Using the points and your own to guide your thinking, look carefully at the images on Source Sheet One (**Appendix A**) and work out what it says to you. Again, use the space to write down your ideas. What ideas do they give regarding their subject matter?

Ask questions not only about what is being shown but also about what is not being shown.

Another point to query is when they were engraved or painted? How close to the actual event were they created? And, therefore, how useful are they to us in understanding people and events that are shown in the film *To Kill A King*?



## THE ATTRACTION OF HISTORY

Historical films have always attracted filmmakers however, treating history holds certain problems for the filmmaker. Similarly, films hold problems for the historian.

### TASK

Below are six statements. Read them carefully and think about what each one says. Write down whether you agree or disagree with each statement and give reasons for your answers.

- 1 When we watch a film we know that it is only a film. We do not believe that we can do what is shown on the screen.
- 2 Film can tell us the truth about historical events.
- 3 Films cannot change anything. It can only reflect what is happening in the world.
- 4 There is nothing wrong with the ways in which films show the world.
- 5 There is nothing sexist or racist about films.
- 6 Films can teach us how to live our lives properly.
- 7 We only watch films for entertainment.



When you have completed this task, compare your answers with a partner and see if you agree. Discuss any disagreements that might be found in your answers.

A film works in constructing its narrative in many of the same ways that certain history books work. The characters are introduced, we see the events leading up to the main plot and follow these events through. At the end we see what has happened to the characters, how they and the world around them have changed. In a history book, the main characters could be a king, a queen, a prime minister, a general or whatever. True, these are real life characters but nevertheless, filmmakers tend to treat their characters in much the same way that historians treat theirs, although history books can go into more depth in explaining such things as motives etc.

The key question to ask of such films, if we are looking at them from a historical point of view is...

How do they choose to represent what has happened and how well have they caught, not simply the look of the period, but also the values, beliefs and ideas of the period?

Look back at the research work you carried out and see how well the film *To Kill A King* reflects the values, beliefs and ideas of this period. Consider the ways in which the film manages to convey these.

Whatever the genre films operate in the same way. We expect them to tell us a story and to conclude that story, tying up all of the loose threads that have been wound together in the narrative. Films are very good at showing *what* happened, but often not at *why* things happened.



## THE HISTORICAL CONSULTANT

Imagine you are a historical advisor or scriptwriter on the film *To Kill A King*. The film is in the early stage of development and you have been asked to prepare a briefing document for the production team, which should include the following elements:

- 1 The key historical events from the Battle of Naseby (1645) to a year after the execution of Charles I (1650).
- 2 A short background document (10 bullet points) about the causes of the English Civil War.
- 3 Background information on Oliver Cromwell, Sir Thomas Fairfax and King Charles I.
- 4 Definitions of the following...
  - Cavalier
  - Puritan
  - Roundhead

Present your briefing document either in print form or as a power point presentation.

One key point to consider - as a historian you would hope that the film gives an accurate description of the events of the period.

You may also wish to include in your presentation some guidelines as to how the film should look – costume, moments from the period which have been presented, particular book illustrations etc.



## THE FILM COMPANY

You have been asked to develop a story outline for the film *To Kill a King* based on events, which occurred in England between 1645 and 1650. Before you begin developing your story spend time thinking about how a story is represented on film.

Let us agree that there are five aspects of a filmed story (below) that the screenwriter needs to tackle in order to create a screen drama.

**PLOT** - not just the story but the order of events in the text

**SETTING** - the place where most of the events in the novel occur and the representation of a society

**CHARACTERS** - the people who interact in the text and whose behaviour we watch and learn from as readers and viewers

**VALUES** - the issues raised by the text

**STYLE** or **METHOD** - how the novel is written

All texts have the following structure...

**SITUATION** - what happens at the beginning of the text - where it is happening, who it involves.

**PROBLEM** - a complication in the form of a conflict or problem taking place that creates some form of tension or difficulty - the calm, order of the situation, is disrupted.

**CLIMAX** - the complications and problems increase or intensify until at some stage in the text they reach a turning point or unbearable limit - in some texts this is where the plot might end - literally as a cliffhanger.

**RESOLUTION** - the problems are solved and something similar to (but not necessarily the same as) the original calm and order of the **SITUATION** is returned to.

### TASK

Working with a partner try to fit the main events of the period 1645-1650 to the **Situation, Problem, Climax** and **Resolution** structure.

### WHAT WERE THE PROBLEMS YOU FACED?

List the difficulties you had and discuss in a group.

As you work out your story outline for *To Kill A King* take into account that an audience needs to concentrate on a few central characters. Historically, many people were involved in the events leading up to the execution of Charles I, however, showing cinema audiences a wide range of characters might serve to confuse them.

Concentrate on the characters of Oliver Cromwell, Sir Thomas Fairfax and King Charles I in your story. You may wish to add a romantic interest, in which case you could also include Lady Fairfax.





In order to help you construct your outline here is a very brief outline of some of the key events that took place in this period.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PERIOD

The 1640s was one of the most turbulent times in history, culminating in the trial and public execution of King Charles I, *the man of blood* who made war upon his own people.

The English Civil War took place between 1642 and 1651. The causes of the war were complex, but centred on religious issues and King Charles I's attempt to rule without Parliament. Both King and Parliament raised armies and campaigns were fought in England, Scotland and Ireland.

Parliament was victorious, largely due to the creation of a modern and professional fighting force called the New Model Army, which was led by Sir Thomas Fairfax.

King Charles I was imprisoned at Hampton Court Palace by Cromwell and the army in 1647 and tried for treason, found guilty and beheaded in 1649. With the support of the army, Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector - King in all but name.

Despite ruling by *the divine right of Kings*, Charles was the only monarch to be publicly tried and executed by his subjects.

## HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

### THE BATTLE OF NASEBY

### THE DEATH OF OLIVER CROMWELL AND THE RESTORATION

#### 1645

**JUNE:** The King is heavily defeated by the New Model Army at Naseby.

**JULY:** The Royalist Army is defeated at Langport, the west of England and Montrose in Scotland.

**SEPTEMBER:** The Royalists are defeated at Rowton Heath, Cheshire after which the King returns to Oxford for the winter.

#### 1646

**JANUARY-APRIL:** A French emissary sees Scottish commissioners in London and the King in Oxford proposing a Scottish settlement with the King. The French aim to split the Scots/English alliance. The emissary tells the King the Scots would welcome him. The King leaves Oxford in disguise and travels northwards where he joins the Scottish Army near Newark and orders the Newark Royalists to surrender.

**MAY:** King Charles I arrives at Newcastle under Scots escort. The English Parliament votes for the Scots Army's withdrawal from England.

**JULY:** Discussions on the King's future between Scotland and Westminster. Parliament raises loan to pay the Scot's Army arrears.

**DECEMBER:** The Scots Army prepares to leave England.



## 1647

**JANUARY:** The English Parliament takes control of the King.

**FEBRUARY:** The King arrives at Holdenby House, Northamptonshire.

**MARCH–JUNE:** Negotiations between the King and Parliament. Joyce seizes the King at Holdenby House and the New Model Army take control of the King, who is taken to Windsor and Caversham.

**AUGUST:** The King arrives at Hampton Court Palace.

**AUGUST–NOVEMBER:** Many people visit the King and the Army suspect intrigue. Rumours of threats to the King's life. The King escapes to the south coast but fails to find a ship. The King is taken to the Isle of Wight. The King signs Engagement with the Scots, which divides the Scottish nation.

**DECEMBER:** The English Parliament demands a settlement with the King. He rejects their proposals.

## 1648

**JANUARY:** Parliament votes to end all negotiations with the King.

**AUGUST:** English Civil War breaks out. Royalist and Scots are defeated at Preston.

**SEPTEMBER:** Parliament opens treaty discussion with the King at Newport on the Isle of Wight.

**NOVEMBER:** Newport Treaty ends with basis for settlement agreed and the Army takes the King to Hurst Castle in Hampshire.

**DECEMBER:** The Army marches from Windsor to London. Parliament votes to accept Newport Treaty. Pride's Purge. The Army and remaining MP's consider the trial of the King. King Charles I is taken to Windsor Castle. The Common Ordinance for the trial is approved and Commissioners for the High Court of Justice are named.

## 1649

**JANUARY:** The House of Lords rejects the Ordinance and adjourns for seven days to delay matters. The Commons ignore the Lords and approve the Ordinance for trial by 29 votes to 26. The High Courts of Justice plan the King's trial.

**20TH JANUARY:** Trial of King Charles I begins

**27TH JANUARY:** King sentenced to death

**28TH JANUARY:** King composes himself at St James' Palace

**29TH JANUARY:** Royal children say farewell to their father

**30TH JANUARY:** King Charles I beheaded at Whitehall

**MARCH:** English Parliament abolishes the Monarchy and the Lords. A Commonwealth is proclaimed.

**JULY:** Cromwell now Lord General of the New Model Army after Fairfax's resignation, leads an invasion of Scotland.



## HISTORIAN AND FILMMAKER

You will either have worked as an historical advisor or as a scriptwriter on the film *To Kill a King*. Now get together with a member of the other type of group and discuss what you have prepared.

**HISTORIANS** - How accurately do you think the screenwriters have shown the events of the period? Have any key incidents been omitted? Can you make a case for them being included in the script?

**SCRIPTWRITERS** - Are there any incidents that the historians have given you would consider including in your script outline?

How useful has the research been in helping you to decide on the *look* of the film?

## A SCRIPTWRITER'S VIEW

If you have completed the exercise on scriptwriting and historical research then you will have seen that there can sometimes be tension between the two.

### TASK

On the following page, the scriptwriter of *To Kill A King*, Jenny Mayhew, outlines the story that she tells in the film. Read this carefully and then answer the following questions:

- 1 Whose side do you think Jenny Mayhew is on – Cromwell's, Fairfax's or the King's?
- 2 How does Jenny Mayhew see drama being created in the film?
- 3 Jenny Mayhew looks to link the story told in *To Kill A King* with current events. In what ways do you think that the story told in the film echoes events that are happening today?
- 4 How does the story that Jenny Mayhew outlines link in with your own understanding of this period in English history?
- 5 For those of you who were the scriptwriters, how closely does Jenny Mayhew's story come to the one that you wrote? What are the differences?



## TO KILL A KING

### An Overview by screenwriter, Jenny Mayhew

The film opens in 1645 at the final, decisive battle of the English Civil War at Naseby Field, where the forces of the parliamentary army, led by General Fairfax, defeat King Charles I. After three years of fighting, Fairfax and his second in command Oliver Cromwell, survey the victory and plot their return to London.

What follows is an exciting examination of the nature of revolution of how a state can be reborn after years of internal conflict and bloodshed; Cromwell, the visionary leader, wants to fundamentally realign English politics and is desperate for this battle, like the military ones before it, to be fought by him and his closest friend, Fairfax. Fairfax's aristocratic wife Anne and his father-in-law Lord De Vere, wish for him to reach a more moderate accommodation with the King than the envisaged by Cromwell.

Much of the film's drama derives from the battle of loyalty, love and intellect as played out in the mind of Fairfax. Caught between Cromwell, the King and Anne, his position becomes increasingly impossible. When Cromwell stages the King's trial and execution, Fairfax defects – only to return, in a final bid to temper Cromwell's extreme zealotry. Eventually, realising he's in the midst of a high stake political game, Fairfax decides that he will have to remove Cromwell from the scene – a scheme he fails to carry through when he realises that the love and loyalty he feels towards his former ally cannot be entirely abandoned.

History is never neutral and throughout time, views of Cromwell have reflected the politics of the individual. Cromwell is an unsettling figure because he questioned things that haven't been questioned since. It's four centuries since England was a republic, we're living in the twenty-first century and we consider ourselves to be modern, free thinking, free living and fair minded creatures, but really we're still subjects not citizens and our whole national identity is bound up in the institutions of pageantry and monarchy.

Oliver Cromwell has always excited me as he proved it's possible to change the mindset of a nation – he changed the national identity under his protectorate and abolished the monarchy. There's an optimist in the Oliver in our film, which isn't necessarily the historical Oliver Cromwell that's been previously portrayed.

To Kill A King is about friendship, marriage, loyalty and love under fire and combines intrigue and historical drama with contemporary resonance, and explores why England has never sustained a lasting revolution.



## READING FILM AND READING HISTORY

Some people argue that when we watch a film, the images simply roll in front of our eyes and consequently we do not have to make any great effort to understand what is happening on the screen. However, we could argue that when we watch a film, we are all of the time making sense of what we see - making predictions.

All photographs, adverts, paintings and films have been thought out by someone - you, the professionals, advertisers, painters etc. Someone has considered what to put in the film/how to compose the film/the distance at which to shoot the filming etc.

Films then are **constructed** - they do not just happen.

As the audience we do not usually know about the decisions that are made during the film-making process or a sequence in it, but we can usually decipher why a film has a certain look.

Without being conscious of what we are doing, we automatically *read* films and images, making sense of them and their messages.

We do this by picking up clues, by **deconstructing** the images as we look at them. As a guideline for de-constructing, the following list of points will provide you with a framework:

**LIGHTING** - Lighting plays an important part in creating the atmosphere of any one scene and can have great impact on our understanding of a film. Lighting can emphasise/accentuate/disguise/reveal/conceal or imply.

**COLOURS** - What are the predominant colours? Grey/blue/white for example are quite harsh tones, while amber/pink/orange are used to suggest warmth. How is colour used to evoke a reaction from the viewer?

**EDITING** - Editing allows sequences to be built up. The joining of shots (montage) allows filmmakers to manipulate time creating a particular mood through the different techniques that are used.

**FRAMING** - When we watch a film, everything we see is enclosed in a frame. What we see may seem perfectly natural, but it will have been carefully selected and arranged within the frame by the director. S/he chooses where to place people and objects, and where to place the camera so that we understand, or *read* each shot in a particular way.

What is being framed provides an important clue as to what is being emphasised.

Notice what is being included or excluded from a film. Is our attention being directed or diverted for a particular reason? Does the framing suggest that we are seeing something from one person's viewpoint, or from a neutral standpoint?

**FOCUS** - Is the focus hard or soft, and to what effect?

Using the ideas given above, look at the three images from To Kill A King (**Appendix B**) and try to deconstruct them in the way that we have described above.



# TO KILL A KING

## F I L M E D U C A T I O N

The terms that we have used on page 13 are a guide to reading a film but are they also useful for reading history? Look at each term and instead of relating it to an image or a film compare it to a history book. What are the differences?

Now that you have worked through the various tasks on this website, answer the following questions:

Compare the film *To Kill A King* with your own study/knowledge of the historical period shown.

- 1** Which scenes in the film illustrate areas you have explored?
- 2** How has the film added to your understanding of the period?
- 3** Are there any major areas you consider relevant to an understanding of this period which are not addressed in the film?
- 4** How does the film represent the main historical characters and groups? Why do you think they were represented in the way they were?
- 5** Does the film depict the period it should represent? What evidence does it provide?



## THE STORY

When you have seen the film *To Kill A King* answer the following questions:

### THE OPENING

- 1 Who are the central characters and how did you recognise them?
- 2 What sort of characters are they? What information are we given about them in the opening section which help us to understand their character?
- 3 What settings are we shown? Do the settings help us solve what will happen or do they give us information about the characters?
- 4 How did the film pose a number of questions that you wanted answering? What were the questions?
- 5 Is there anything in the first part of the film that you did not understand? Was anything that you did not initially understand explained later in the film? Was there anything that, even at the end of the film, you did not understand?
- 6 From the opening section of the film, what type of film did you expect to see? How did this fit in with your expectations?

The opening of any film sets an **enigma** - a series of questions that we, the cinema-going audience, want answered. The development of the story answers these questions.

### WHAT'S IN A STORY?

You will have seen from the first exercise that the film *To Kill A King* has a number of different elements to it. You will have made some suggestions as to what you might think the story is about. Now let us look at some more details about the story. At the opening of any film we are given information about the key elements to the narrative. As members of a cinema-going audience we try to make links between these elements, to see how they might join together to form the basis of the story.

What are the key three story elements that we are given in the opening of the film *To Kill A King*?

How do you think that these three elements could be related? Now describe the various characters that we are introduced to in the opening minutes of the film.

How do each of these characters relate to the key elements of the story?

Your last clue to the narrative is based on the title of the film - *To Kill A King*.



## REPRESENTATION

In all media we are presented with views of the world - ways in which to behave, ways in which we could live, the types of clothes that we could wear etc. Values are suggested by the producers of all media products. Even though we might not be as aware of it as we are in adverts, all of the time we are being told how to live our lives in certain ways by identifying with what we see in a film and in other media.

### TASK 1

In the film *To Kill A King*, what are the values that seem to be admired and which values are we being asked to reject?

Remember, the view of the world we are given is not simply a *window*. This view is deliberately constructed through the whole production of the film-making process.

Influence is brought to bear on all films so that they look *right*. But who decides what is *right* - the producer or the audience? If you look back at your ideas about the values of *To Kill A King* then who has decided that the *good* values shown are in fact *good* and worthwhile?

### TASK 2

Look at the chart given in **Appendix C**. In each column, write down everything you know about each of the sides in the English Civil War.

- Which of these seems the more attractive from a modern-day perspective?
- What seems to be the values of each of the two sides?





## THE TRAILER

You will have seen the trailer for To Kill A King when you began working through this study guide. Consider all you have analysed and view the trailer again in more depth. Now answer the following questions:

- What information is given about the film?
- How well do you think this information sums up the film?
- Why do you think the various scenes and images from the film were chosen?
- What do they tell you about the film?
- How do they place the film with an audience?
- What captions are used in the trailer? How do these captions also give us information about what to expect in the film?



## FILM CLIPS

### SEQUENCE 1

King Charles I is confronted by Holles, Cromwell and Fairfax with the Peace Terms.

- 1 Why do you think that the filmmaker chose to start this sequence with the King looking at a chessboard?
- 2 How do the filmmakers get across to the audience the contents of the Peace Treaty?
- 3 As Charles talks to Fairfax we see Cromwell in the background. Why do you think that the filmmakers chose to place him there? What effect does this have on the way that we understand what is happening?
- 4 The scene ends with Fairfax saying 'Once your majesty is a true King again I shall be glad to serve him.' From your knowledge of the period, what do you think Fairfax means by a *true King*?

### SEQUENCE 2

The action takes place in Parliament as Holles proposes re-instating King Charles I. This is a key moment in the development of the narrative. If the King is given back his powers then the Civil War will have been fought in vain.

- 1 This sequence shows a moment of great drama in the film. Look back at the ways in which meaning is constructed in the film. Break the sequence down shot by shot and explain how each shot contributes to the build up of tension.
- 2 How is music used to add effect to the scene?

### WRITING TASK

Using this sequence as a basis, imagine that you had been present in Parliament that day. Write a letter to a friend explaining what happened and also why the event is important. Report the event either as a supporter of Cromwell or as a supporter of Holles.

### SEQUENCE 3

Cromwell confronts King Charles I as he talks to Lady Ann Fairfax.

- 1 Why do you think that when Cromwell starts to question the King we are not shown this in a close-up of them both? Why is the action taking place in the background as Lady Ann leaves the room in the foreground?
- 2 At the end of the sequence the King challenges Cromwell, saying that he is King *by divine appointment*. Why do you think that as he says this the camera starts to pull away from him? How does this affect our understanding of what is happening?
- 3 In what ways do the filmmakers stress the conflict between King Charles I and Cromwell?



## SEQUENCE 4

Cromwell and Fairfax argue about the King.

**1** Looking back on some of the earlier sequences how does the filmmaker show us visually that Cromwell has changed from earlier in the film?

**2** Fairfax says that he is a reformer. This obviously makes him different to Cromwell. How would you describe Cromwell?

**3** Look carefully at the way in which the filmmakers have filmed the conversation between the two men. What type of shots have they used? Why does the sequence end with a long shot of the room?

