

TEACHERS' NOTES

This guide is designed for use within English and Media Studies lessons at Key Stage 4 (14–16). The focus within the English curriculum on Speaking and Listening in a range of contexts, as well as the studies of spoken English, makes THE KING'S SPEECH a highly appropriate film to stimulate discussion. Activities in this guide exploring promotional materials around the film's release, and the context of THE KING'S SPEECH as a British production, are ideal for Media Studies.

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A film **synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarise the film's narrative, genre, style and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for THE KING'S SPEECH:

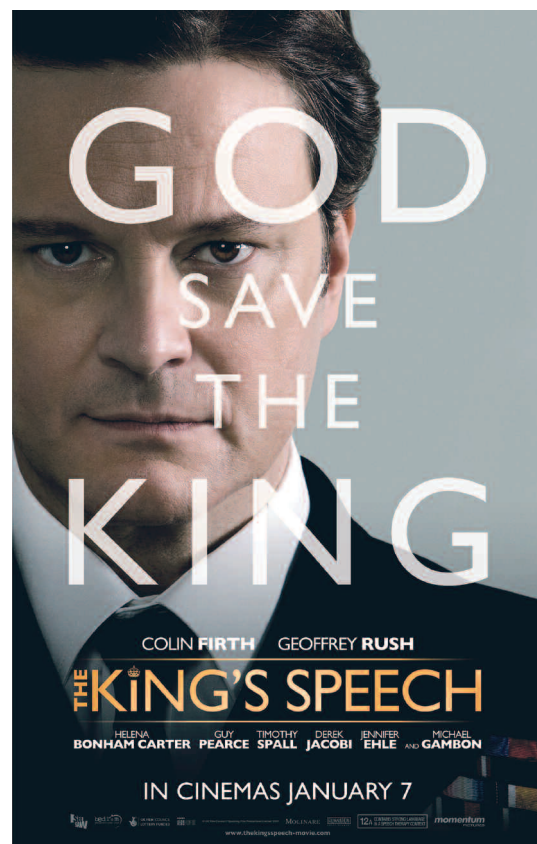
After the death of his father King George V (Michael Gambon) and the scandalous abdication of King Edward VIII (Guy Pearce), Bertie (Colin Firth) who has suffered from a debilitating speech impediment all his life, is suddenly crowned King George VI of England. With his country on the brink of war and in desperate need of a leader, his wife, Elizabeth (Helena Bonham Carter), the future Queen Mother, arranges for her husband to see an eccentric speech therapist, Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush). After a rough start, the two delve into an unorthodox course of treatment and eventually form an unbreakable bond. With the support of Logue, his family, his government and Winston Churchill (Timothy Spall), the King will overcome his stammer and deliver a radio-address that inspires his people and unites them in battle. Based on the true story of King George VI, THE KING'S SPEECH follows the Royal Monarch's quest to find his voice.

- From the text, identify the key plot and character points as well as the historical background to the film.
- Use an internet database to find out more about the roles the actors mentioned here have played in the past. From this additional information, what might you expect from the style and genre of the production?

THE KING'S SPEECH

Posters are another part of the marketing campaign designed to introduce an audience to the film. Displayed in cinemas, bus stops, tube and railway stations or on billboards they are designed to catch the eye and convey a range of information to attract the viewer.

- Explore the layout of these two banner posters for THE KING'S SPEECH. What information is conveyed and from what sources does it seem to be taken? Consider both words and images.



- How is the information structured? What could you say about the balance between image and text?
- Taking both posters together, consider how elements such as colour, message, image and layout give the viewer a sense of the film's subject matter, genre and style.

Now view the **trailer** for THE KING'S SPEECH on Film Education's website at www.filmeducation.org. What further information on the film's genre and audience appeal can you establish?

- Explain the role of the film's synopsis, posters and trailer in the overall marketing campaign for the film.



THE KING'S SPEECH

film education

CHARACTERISATION

The film focuses on the professional and personal relationship between Prince Albert, or Bertie (later to become King George VI), and Lionel Logue, his speech therapist. Look closely at how these two characters are portrayed in the film poster below:

- Work in groups to examine how the following elements are designed to convey character, status and relationships: positioning, costume, body language, expression, gaze.



www.filmeducation.org www.thekingsspeech-movie.com

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PICTURES

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ALLIANCE

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Now look closely at the image below from the film, showing Bertie and his wife Elizabeth:



- How do the actors' body language and expressions convey their individual feelings and establish their relationship?
- Can you construct a 'narrative' for this moment based on details from the image? Justify and explain your points.
- Finally, return to the film's trailer to develop your ideas about the characters and their relationship in the film. What indications does the trailer give concerning the roles of each character and how will these develop in the film?



SPEECH-MAKING

The speech which the King delivers at the end of the film was, in real life, delivered as a live radio broadcast in 1939. The broadcast was intended to help inspire people in the UK, overseas in the Empire and in the armed forces as Britain prepared to go to war. In the film, the King's anxiety before he first speaks into the microphone is painful to watch: with the public listening, there was no room for re-recording errors or mis-readings.



A recording of the actual 1939 speech, which is almost six minutes' long, can be heard online:

BBC Archive www.bbc.co.uk/archive/ww2outbreak/7918.shtml

YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAhFW_auT20

www.filmeducation.org www.thekingsspeech-movie.com



Listen carefully to the whole speech, then answer the questions below paying attention to the following aspects:

Accent
Choice of words
Content
Intonation
Pace
Pause

- If you didn't know the context for this speech, what clues could you draw on to tell you that this is a formal public speech, and one made in 1939 (as opposed to in the modern day)?
- What could you say about the accent and pronunciation of the King? What style of English does he seem to use?
- What elements of formal or informal speech can you identify here?
- In what ways do you think that the King's power, and also his humanity, come across in the speech?
- What techniques does the king use here that might be helpful for anyone having to give a speech or a talk in public?

If you've ever had to speak publically, alone, for a similar length of time, you'll know that speech-making is a skill that requires practise. In the film, THE KING'S SPEECH therapist Lionel Logue helps encourage the nervous king before he begins, saying *'Forget everything else and just say it to me – say it to me, as a friend'*.

- Create your own presentation covering the key points of good speech-making, working examples of good techniques into what you say and how you say it. Make at least five key points, take care over your delivery and aim for a duration of 90 seconds minimum.



LANGUAGE AND HISTORY

Since the time in which the film is set there have been many shifts and changes in British culture and society, as well as advances in media technology. There have been changes also to the way we use English, in terms of grammar, vocabulary and accent: English is a language that is evolving all the time under a wide range of influences. The challenge for the filmmaker is to present a version of the past that seems different enough from the present day, yet still makes sense to the modern viewer.

When looking to evoke the past on film, there are a variety of techniques filmmakers can use. For example, look at the still below:



- How is the *mise en scène** constructed to convey the setting, the period and the social status of the characters in the shot? Comment on as many details as you can – costume, hairstyle, jewellery, setting, props...

* ***mise en scène***: This term is used in film to describe what is in the frame and why. There are several areas to consider when talking about *mise en scène*: setting and props; costume and make-up; body language and facial expression; lighting and colour



Now watch the clip 'Exercise' on the official film website:

www.kingsspeech.com/media.html

In this clip, the future king is treated rather roughly by the speech therapist, especially considering the wide social gulf between them.

- Look closely – who appears to have the greater power or control in the opening of this clip? What elements of dialogue and film language convey the status of the characters?
- Listen carefully to the accents of the different characters. What are these intended to tell us about their status at the time the film is set?
- Do you think it is possible to make assumptions about people's status today, based on their accent alone? Explain your answer.

In the film, before the 1934 radio broadcast of the King's Christmas message, King George V says:

"This devilish device will change everything...In the past all a king had to do was look respectable in uniform and not fall off his horse. Now we must invade people's houses and ingratiate ourselves with them. This family has been reduced to those lowest and basest of all creatures. We have become actors."

Radio changed the way the monarchy interacted with the public. Since the time the film is set, many more changes in media technology and broadcasting have taken place. Consider the way the Royal Family use a range of media to interact with the public today, using a specific event or news item as a case study.

