

THE QUEEN

INTRODUCTION

This resource is suitable for GCSE and A Level Media, English and Film Studies. It examines the key themes of the film: ways of reporting; fact and fiction; the Royal family and British society.



SYNOPSIS

When news of the death of Princess Diana, undoubtedly one of the most famous women in the world, breaks upon a shocked and disbelieving British public, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II retreats behind the walls of Balmoral Castle with her family, unable to comprehend the public response to the tragedy. For Tony Blair, the popular and newly elected Prime Minister, the people's need for reassurance and support from their leaders is palpable.

As the unprecedented outpouring of emotion grows ever stronger, Blair must find a way to reconnect the Queen with the British public.



REACTIONS TO DIANA'S DEATH

Despite the film being about the Queen, we can see from the poster that Diana occupies more of the poster (see page 1) than the Queen herself. A major part of the film looks at Diana and how different groups responded to her life and death.



KEY QUESTIONS:

- We can consider these groups: + Royal Family + Government + British Public
- + Using key sequences from the film as evidence, make a list of adjectives to describe the behaviour of each of these groups.
 - + How important is the reaction of the public to both of the other groups? Can you find evidence from the text to support this?
 - + Are your views of the different groups the same as they were before you watched the film?
 - + Obviously these groups contain a wide range of diverse opinions; we see in the film that the Royals and the Government do not always share an opinion, and this is also true of the public. How does the representation of the public differ from the other groups? Why do you think this is?

WAYS OF REPORTING

Constant reference is made to newspaper reporting and media coverage in general, raising issues of managing events and setting agendas. Does this film provide insights into the way that media coverage may be manipulated by various groups?



KEY QUESTIONS:

- + We have broadly considered the groups involved here. Are there patterns in the way that they are reported? Is there a sense that there are 'goodies' and 'baddies'? Think back to the headlines that are quoted by the various camps throughout the film. You can further support your point by researching headlines from the time. Is there a difference between tabloid and broadsheet, national and local press? You might want to contrast your local paper with a national paper of your choice. What do you think is driving the agenda?
- + Do you think that there is a difference between behaving in a way that is popular and a way that is proper?
- + Given aspects of the Queen's personal history (information you may have learned from the film) can you understand her motivations and actions?



PUBLIC INTEREST?

Can you imagine what it must be like to have everything that you do or don't do (or say) recorded, photographed and discussed around the world? What kinds of interests are served by this kind of speculation and reporting?

KEY QUESTIONS:

- + Think of an event from your own life or that of someone you know (good or bad). Imagine it being reported and discussed around the world. How do you think that feels? Can you imagine reading an article that is completely untrue and/or very scathing? How would you react?
- + To what extent do you think that personal matters such as funeral arrangements and expressions of grief are legitimate areas for media coverage? Where would you draw the line?
- + How powerful do you think these sensationalist media reports can be? Do stars, celebrities, members of the public and also in this case the Royal Family get an opportunity to shake off perceptions that may possibly have been formed on false reports? Does this matter? Does fame and the modern media mean that this is 'just the way it is'? Do you think this is unfair?
- + The film provides an account of an event that happened in 1997. Do you have any memories of this time? If so, are they in line with the opinions expressed by members of the public in the film?

FACT AND FICTION

The process of constructing a narrative that contains high profile actual events with speculation about what happened behind closed doors is a complicated one. Here Peter Morgan, the writer discusses how he goes about this process.



'My method is to write what I want them to say and then research it,' he continues. 'Surprisingly, more often than not, I got it right. There are scenes that are complete fabrication, the scenes of the Queen in Balmoral estate where she encounters the stag, but there are others that you can take a very educated guess at. For example, why did Tony Blair defend the Queen so strongly? Well, we know he's a political pragmatist, we know he's rather more conservative than people think, and we know his mother would have been the same age as the Queen if she'd been alive at the time, and would probably have similar characteristics to the Queen. So that's how I can write a scene in which Cherie theorises about why her husband is behaving as he is.'

Press Notes, The Queen, 2006



Langan and Harries [the producers] were confident Morgan had the skill to write a screenplay that was authentic and dramatic and could broaden the scope of the story to make a gripping feature film. 'It was essential that the film get as close to reality as possible,' says Harries. 'Peter is very gifted at negotiating that fine line between what we know happened and what we imagine happened.'

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KEY QUESTIONS:

- + Have your sympathies changed now that you know that some of the plot was based on assumptions?

NEWS FOOTAGE

As mentioned earlier, Princess Diana is a central figure in the narrative. The device used to signify her presence is the news footage.

'We were keen to convey the idea that although Diana is dead, her presence is there all the time,' says Frears [director of The Queen]. 'There aren't many scenes where the television isn't on. Adam Curtis [Archive Consultant] brings his own unique sensibility to the archive sections but also he has incredible knowledge of where to find the good footage. We needed some of those very familiar shots, the shots that we are all aware of, such as Cherie opening the door in her nightie the day after the election, but we also wanted to surprise the audience with some of the images that Adam has found. There are two or three sequences when the archive is blended together so that you get a fairly seamless understanding of events.'

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KEY QUESTIONS:

- + Do you think that this combination of well-known and less well-known footage mixed in with the film is misleading?
- + Does the famous nature of the events mean that the audience will be aware of the fact and fiction divide here?

CONCLUSION

Helen Mirren, the actress who plays the Queen, received an Oscar™ and a BAFTA Film Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role. She says:

'I really got to love the Queen by playing her. I think she's a person who is genuine, she refuses to be fake.'

W Magazine, 2006

KEY QUESTIONS:

- + Consider Mirren's statement.
- + Having watched the film, have your attitudes towards the Queen and the Royal Family as an institution changed? Do you think that the Queen is a truly 'genuine' person? Can someone who lives such a high profile existence be completely genuine? Think of the Queen's relationship with the press, and compare it to Diana's before she died.



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