

Stars Shine in "The Ides of March"

Difficulty:

DIFFICULT

Date of release:

Monday 17th October 2011

Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about the recently released film, "The Ides of March". What is the subject of the film? Who are the actors? Who directed it and who wrote the script? Was it fact or fiction? What have viewers' reactions been so far?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = "The Ides of March" and other films reflecting America's political psyche.

1. What does the report say about the storyline of the film "The Ides of March"?
 - Stephen Meyers is a campaign manager for presidential hopeful Mike Morris.
 - Meyers clashes with Morris because, although he believes in him, he fears Morris is too uncompromising and might lose.
 - Tom Duffy, the opponent's campaign manager, meets Meyers in secret.
 - Meyers loses credibility when this becomes known, and loses his job.
 - Meyers finds out that Morris has a secret and blackmails him in order to get his job back.
 - Meyers puts pressure on Morris to make political compromises, and the two succeed.
 - George Clooney says the film is fiction, but it depicts politics today accurately.
2. What further details of the film does the report tell us?
 - It has a stellar cast (Ryan Gosling, George Clooney, Paul Giamatti, and Oscar winners Philip Seymour Hoffman & Marisa Tomei).
 - It was directed and co-written by Clooney.
 - It touched a nerve with audiences in Washington DC, the US political epicenter.
 - It is the latest in a series of films about America's political psyche.
 - It takes cutthroat politics, political amorality and cynicism to new heights.

Have you seen "The Ides of March"? If so, what other interesting details can you add?

3. What is the other (older) film mentioned in the report? What can you say about it?
 - "All The President's Men", set in the early 1970s.
 - It chronicles the unraveling of the Nixon administration after...
 - ... two Washington Post reporters exposed the Watergate cover-up.

Have you seen "All The President's Men"? If so, can you add any other interesting details?

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Handsome politicians.

1. The film "The Ides of March" is fiction - but is it a coincidence that the actor playing aspiring politician has been voted one of the most attractive men in the world over the years, in magazines and internet surveys? His campaign manager Stephen Meyers is also good-looking. To what extent do you think this is because handsome actors help sell the film, and to what extent do you think they were typecast (given a role suitable for their appearance)?
2. Is it useful for a politician to be handsome / beautiful? In what way(s) can it help? In what ways might it cause problems? Has this situation changed over the course of time (e.g., since the days of television and moving film footage)?
3. What do you consider to be the most important characteristics of a good politician? Are those attributes the same for a local politician as for someone in a nationally elected position?

OR, Topic = Political scandals.

Find out all you can about a past political scandal in your country or elsewhere which has interested you, and report your findings to the group or to your teacher.

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Changing career.

1. George Clooney co-wrote and directed "The Ides of March", which was not his first film to scrutinize the world of politics. The subject clearly interests him. He frequently speaks in public on subjects of a political nature. The two friends in activity 3 of the report discussed his possible move into politics. A number of actors in the past have made this move: (e.g., Ronald Reagan, past US president - Eva Perón, founder of Female Peronist Party, Argentina - Sunil Dutt, former MP for Congress Party, India - Vinod Khanna, MP for BJP, India - Arnold Schwarzenegger, former Governor of California - Clint Eastwood, former mayor of Carmel, California... Others?)
What qualities or skills do you think actors have that can help them in the world of politics? What possible difficulties do you think they might experience? Would it be possible to become a politician and remain an actor at the same time? Why? Why not?
<http://www.indiastudychannel.com/forum/46887-What-do-you-think-Actors-Actress-entering-politics.aspx>
2. In the modern world, many of us change career at least once in our lifetime. What other careers would you consider taking up? What qualities have you developed (transferable skills) that would help you in such a career change? What is the likelihood of you changing?
3. What careers could you suggest for other people that you know, or know of (celebrities, or people in your English group!). Discuss your reasoning.

Audioscript

[- You OK?

- We're going to be fine. We have to do it. It's the right thing to do. If nothing bad happens, we'll be doing the right thing]

In "The Ides of March", Stephen Meyers, played by Ryan Gosling, is the brilliant campaign manager of Democratic presidential hopeful Mike Morris. Governor Morris, played by George Clooney, is trying to win the Ohio primary. It's key to clinching the Democratic nomination for president.

[- Help people get an education... we're going to create national unity, we're going to teach young people a trade, and we're going to get them out of debt for their college loans. Now where does that fail?

- Oh, that's exactly right, governor. It's just if you're gonna do it... do it!]

Stephen Meyers believes in Morris. But as he tries to outline the governor's political agenda, the two clash. Morris is uncompromising, and Meyers fears the governor might lose.

[- Tom Duffy!

- Got a couple of minutes? I'd like to sit down with you.

- I can't be talking to you!]

Tom Duffy is the campaign manager for Morris's opponent. Duffy tries to undermine the governor by stealing Stephen Meyers.

[- Did you tell anyone?

- No. Did you?

- No.

- Did you admit to meeting with me?

- No!]

The meeting destroys Stephen's credibility and gets him fired. But there is a twist.

[- I'm just a lowly intern]

Stephen finds out the governor has a secret. With that knowledge, he blackmails Governor Morris to get rehired and forces him to make political compromises.

[- Dignity matters! Integrity matters! Our future depends on it!]

Through their unholy alliance, the ambitious campaign manager and the morally compromised politician make their way to the top.

The film touched a nerve with audiences in Washington DC, the country's political epicenter.

"(It) not only reflected the political climate, but just our society as a whole... . Many people are just 'me, me, me' and will do anything to get ahead."

"I think all the back door deals are always happening."

George Clooney also directed the film and co-wrote the script.

In addition to Ryan Gosling as Stephen Meyers, Paul Giamatti plays Tom Duffy. Oscar winners Philip Seymour Hoffman and Marisa Tomei complete a stellar cast.

Clooney says although the film is fiction, it accurately depicts politics today.

"If this film reflects some of the cynicism that we've seen in recent times, that's probably good. It's not a bad thing to hold a mirror up and look at some of the things that we're doing. (It's) not a bad thing to look at how we elect our officials."

[- I can't do it.

- You know, you're on a sinking ship, Steve. Tell her what she wants to know, and jump! Come over to our side, we can control this thing.]

"The Ides of March" is the latest in a series of films that have reflected America's political psyche. One of the most iconic was Alan J. Pakula's "All The President's Men". It chronicled the unraveling of the Nixon administration in the early 1970s as two Washington Post reporters exposed the Watergate cover-up.

[- The beauty of it is that everybody who's over the age of 18 or past the age of eligibility will be for it. Why not?

- And all of the others...

- ... can't vote! ... too young]

"The Ides of March" focuses on a new menace: cutthroat politics, political amorality, and cynicism taken to new heights.

[- ... and that is what you didn't do!

- I'll do or say anything if I believe in it, but I have to believe in the cause.]

Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.