

Всероссийская Олимпиада для школьников

Муниципальный этап (9-11 классы)

АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК

SCRIPT

Task 1.

In the book History Goes to the Movies, the author Joseph Roquemore gives films stars according to their historical accuracy on a one-to-five scale - five stars means a film's very accurate and no stars means it's very inaccurate. I'm going to look at two of the best-known films that Roquemore features in his book.

The first film is the Oscar-winning movie Titanic, which was directed by James Cameron in 1997. The film is historically accurate as regards the events leading up to the collision with the iceberg - the Titanic was sailing too fast and the captain ignored warnings about ice. The collision and sinking are also very accurately portrayed with amazing special effects.

However, where the film falls down is in its characterization. I must say I entirely agree with Roquemore when he criticizes director James Cameron for what he calls 'class-conscious overkill'. What he means by that is Cameron depicts all the third-class passengers in the film as brave and good, and all the first-class passengers as selfish, stupid, cowardly, or downright evil. And this can't have been the case.

Then a large part of the film centres on the love story between Jack, a third-class passenger, played by Leo DiCaprio, and Rose, a first-class passenger, played by Kate Winslet. Obviously, these characters and their story are fictitious and were just added, presumably to sell the film to a younger audience. But many historians have pointed out that a romance between Jack and Rose is totally improbable, because at that time there was complete class segregation on board ship.

Roquemore also criticizes the film's portrayal of Captain Smith. He is made out to be indecisive and frankly useless throughout the disaster. But this contradicts

everything which was said about him by survivors of the sinking.

And for me, though, even more indefensible was the film's portrayal of the ship's First Officer, William Murdoch. On the night of the sinking he behaved heroically. In his home town in Scotland there's even a memorial to him, but in the film he's shown taking a bribe from a passenger (in exchange for a place in a lifeboat), shooting passengers dead, and finally shooting himself in the head. In fact, the film company 20th Century Fox, who produced Titanic, were eventually forced to admit that there was no historical evidence that Murdoch did any of these things, and that they'd included these details purely and simply to make the story more interesting.

Roquemoire gives Titanic three stars, describing it as 'Great pyrotechnics - mediocre history. ' All in all, I think his assessment is about right. The main events are true but the characterization is definitely the weak point in the film.

Moving on to the second film, Braveheart, this is one of the films to which Roquemoire gives five stars for historical accuracy. He gives the film five stars because despite what he calls some 'small fictions' he thinks Braveheart is, I quote, 'true to the spirit of William Wallace'. Well, that may be the case, but I'm afraid I have to take exception to the phrase 'small fictions'.

The historian Elizabeth Ewan described Braveheart as a film which 'almost totally sacrifices historical accuracy for epic adventure.' William Wallace is portrayed as a kind of poor primitive tribesman living in a village. In fact, he was the son of a rich landowner and he later became a knight.

You'll remember too that in the film Mel Gibson wears woad, a kind of blue face paint. Apparently, the Scots stopped wearing woad hundreds of years earlier.

And while we're on the subject of costume, in the film the Scottish soldiers wear kilts. No surprises there you might think, but in the 13th century, which is when the events of the film are set, the Scots did not wear kilts, and in fact, they didn't start wearing them until four centuries later.

Another of these 'fictions' is that in Braveheart, William Wallace has a romance with the beautiful French princess, Isabelle. However, the historical reality is that

Wallace never met Isabelle and even if he had, she would only have been nine years old at the time!

Finally, anyone who's seen the film will remember the famous battle scene. The battle was the Battle of Stirling, so called because it was fought on Stirling Bridge in Scotland. Basically, the reason why the Scots won the battle is because the English soldiers got trapped on the narrow bridge. In Braveheart the bridge does not appear at all in the battle. In fact, Mel Gibson originally planned to film the scene on the actual bridge, but he found that the bridge kept 'getting in the way'. Apparently, when he mentioned this to one of the Scottish history advisors on the film, the man's reply was 'Aye, that's what the English found.'

Mel Gibson defended all the inaccuracies in the film saying that the film's version of history was more 'compelling cinematically'. Admittedly, it is a very entertaining film, and it does give you a strong feeling for William Wallace and how he must have inspired his countrymen, but I don't think you can give this film five stars or even two stars for historical accuracy.