

Business films: fact or fiction?

The Social Network, a new film about Facebook has been criticized for not sticking to the facts. Just how 'true to life' should films on business be?

1 Which films in the box have you heard about? Which ones have you seen? Compare your answer with a partner.

<i>The Full Monty</i>	<i>Made in Dagenham</i>	<i>Wall Street</i>	<i>The Social Network</i>
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2 Scan the article and add the names of the four missing films in the gaps (1-6). Use the film titles from exercise one.

Facebook film- fact or fiction? Is David Fincher's new film, (1), fact or fiction? Well, in truth it's a mixture of both. It tells the story of Facebook, the social networking site. The 'geeky' founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, is played by actor Jesse Eisenberg. The audience is left to decide if Mark Zuckerberg is a techno-genius, or a bullying hacker. Aaron Sorkin adapted the screenplay from the book 'Accidental Billionaires' and by all accounts, he was very free with his adaptation. He invented scenes and changed the characters for dramatic effect. Already, websites are springing up listing the many inaccuracies in the film. The question is: are those bloggers missing the point?

So, to what extent should a film based on real events be true to those events? Oliver Stone's latest film, *Wall Street: Money never sleeps*, the sequel to his 1987 film (2), has no such problem: it's a work of pure fiction. Stone, the son of a stockbroker, is famously critical of the culture of Wall Street. It is said that he combined several real people to create Michael Douglas's character Gordon Gekko; the anti-hero of the two films. Despite being fictional, the original film caught the mood of the 80's perfectly in Gekko's famous declaration: 'greed is good'.

3 Read the complete article. What do you learn about each of the films mentioned?

4 Find words in the article from their definitions below.

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| (a) behaviour that frightens or hurts other people | (Paragraph 1) |
| (b) a strong wish to have more money or power than you need | (Paragraph 2) |
| (c) a situation where people do not have work or income | (Paragraph 3) |
| (d) unfair treatment of someone because of their religion, race or gender | (Paragraph 3) |
| (e) public praise for something | (Paragraph 4) |
| (f) the quality of being accurate and based in fact | (Paragraph 4) |

Definitions from or based on <http://www.macmillandictionary.com>

5 Work in small groups to discuss the questions. Be ready to report back to the whole class.

- After reading the article, will you go and see any of the films mentioned? Why / why not?
- How far should films based on business events be factual, and how far can they invent? Give examples.
- Which current business world event would you make into a film? What kind of film do you imagine?

Meanwhile, one film currently doing well at the UK box-office is a 'feel-good' film, on the same lines as (3)..... Although that much-loved film tackled the serious issue of unemployment, we all came away smiling. Like the Facebook film, (4)..... is based on a true story, the strike at the Ford motor plant in Dagenham in 1968, where female workers walked out in protest against sexual discrimination. Their action led to the Equal Pay Act of 1970. The lead character in this drama, Rita O'Grady, played by the actress Sally Hawkins, is a mixture of several people. And yes, the original strikers love the film!

When asked what he thought about making a film about the sub-prime mortgage crisis, Oliver Stone said: "people don't want to watch a business movie". However, Fincher's (5) is destined to show that view is wrong and is receiving great critical acclaim. So too is (6)....., which has been widely praised for its authenticity, capturing the sexist days of the 1960's beautifully. But it is not meant to be a social realist documentary. It's a drama, a 'feel-good film'. At the end of the day, we go to the cinema for entertainment. If we expect to be given a history lesson then we have made a mistake, not the filmmakers.