

ASSOCIATION FOR MEDIA EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND

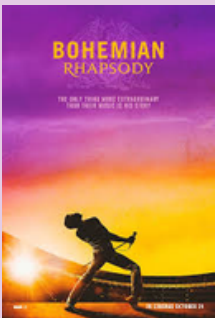
NEWS LETTER

April 2025

Welcome to the newest the AMES Newsletter! This April issue will explore biopics and the controversies around this topic, along with upcoming events and news from the AMES committee. For previous newsletters and our bank of resources, please visit our [AMES website](#).

Biopics - Controversial Filmmaking?

Bob Marley, Elton John, Maria Callas, Freddy Mercury, Pricilla Presley - biopics continue to be all the craze in filmmaking over the last years. Biopics have a great value to the audience as they allow an insight into a person's life, including the world around them, providing context and developing sympathies with the struggles of the time. And it is a genre that is well loved by film production companies. Biopics are easier to make because they do not require an original story yet carry a strong commercial value, especially if the biopic depicts either well-known personalities or stories. It is an easy way to secure an audience, minimising the financial risks of a film production. The audience will be attracted through interest in the topic even if the biopic has a challenging ending. This includes controversies and inaccuracies, plot inventions, or the use stereotypes. This secondary reading of a text can initiate fantastic opportunities in our classrooms - powerful discussions and the development of critical thinking skills. Here are some excellent examples of films that could be used in the classroom:



Bohemian Rhapsody (2018)

Depicting Freddy Mercury's life, this film will be a successful film in the classroom. Pupils might have seen it already which is always a great opportunity to watch something again with a fresh perspective. The film received criticism for its depiction of Mercury's bisexuality, namely the overemphasis of his relationship with women and the underrepresentation of his relationships with men. This choice could lead to fruitful discussion around representation and choices made to appeal to a wider audience.



The Greatest Showman (2017)

This biopic was a huge success and pupils will be very familiar with it and its songs. The main character, played by Hugh Jackman, is P T Barnum, a very famous showman, businessman and politician. The positive depiction of Barnum is extremely controversial because it completely omits his illegal activities to create sensational and profitable business and ignores his moral shortcoming when exploiting race, culture and disabilities of his showcases. In the classroom, this would be perfect for a research project into Barnum and his well known 'exhibits', such as General Tom Thumb or Myrtle Corbin. This film is a fantastic opener for discussion around whitewashing history but also on historical context or choices in characterisation.



The Swimmers (2022)

This biopic is an excellent example of the genre. It will offer young people a great insight into the plight of refugees but also teach about resilience and perseverance, and courage. *The Swimmers* is based on the true story of Yusra and Sara Mardini who fled the country of Syria to Germany in search of a better life and their dream to take part in the Olympics. While the film has some fictional scenes to illustrate the story better, most of the biopic is accurate. However, criticism include issues with casting and representation. One example is the the lack of dialogue in Arabic, the mother tongue of the sisters. The cast itself was dismayed by the filmmaker's choices to create a film that might be easier to be digested by the audience. Learners would benefit from a discussion around representation and appeal to target audiences.

Committee News

We are knee deep in preparations for our AMES conference on the 14th June 2025 in Perth, Scotland. Sana Bilgrami, an award-winning documentary filmmaker will open the conference with her key note. After that we will run three workshop sessions with a choice of topics for attendees. This year, we will have speakers about texts such as Barbie - The film and K-pop music videos but also topics like media literacy and SQA advice around qualifications. Of course, we also offer practical workshops around filmmaking. Stay tuned for the conference flyer!



↑
Sara Bilgrami

If you have questions or want to get in touch with us, please contact Wendy Elrick via wendyelrick@googlemail.com.

Dates & Events

Dates	Events	Description
12th April 2025	Horror Con Scotland	Horror Con features everything you would expect: directors, actors, prop makers, traders, authors and much more.
23rd April 2025	Earth Day Screening: X Trillion	Film by Eleanor Church depicts the journey of an all-women crew led by Emily Penn, as it follows them as they sail 3,000 miles across the North Pacific Ocean, exploring the plastic pollution of our seas. It is a life-affirming story of adventure, discovery, science, solidarity and a call to action that burns with optimism.
24 th to 27 th April 2025	Dunoon Film Festival	Dunoon Film Festival provides all-round offers this year: films for young audiences, screenings for teens and immersive experiences of films, line dancing included.
25th to 27th April 2025	SANDS25 - International Film Festival of St Andrews	The programme for this festival is jam packed with international films that celebrate the art of innovation and storytelling.
14th June 2025	AMES Media Education Conference	Our conference will feature a key note on documentaries, theoretical and practical workshops and networking opportunities.

Recommendations

One thing I've been finding fascinating is the biopic vs documentary. What can dramatic reconstructions add to the actual facts? This was really prompted by the Netflix series *Bank of Dave* (2023) and its recent sequel, starring Rory Kinnear. The events in the films had been part of a documentary shown on Channel 4 in 2012.

It was then turned into a "comedy-drama" that admits it is "true-ish". For me, there is an immediacy in the biopic that is lacking in the documentary version, where the audience can be up close and personal with the characters at the time of the decisions as opposed to interviews that took place later and archive footage, some of which wasn't even from the event. It made me rethink my acceptance of documentary as factual as well - something I'm hoping the AMES Conference will help me explore in even more depth.



**Biopic
Recommendation
by Wendy Elrick:**

The Bank of Dave