

Level: B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

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## The biggest film lies

**Controversy over debunked elements of Oscar-winning drama The Blind Side won't be the first time a film based on a true story has taken liberties with the truth**

### 🚢 Captain Phillips

Paul Greengrass's 2013 drama ostensibly tells the story of the 2009 Maersk Alabama hijacking, in which Somali pirates seized control of an American cargo ship. In the film, merchant mariner Richard Phillips saves the day with his quick thinking and steely nerves. The film was based on Phillips's memoir *A Captain's Duty*. But other Alabama crewmembers didn't see it the same way. In 2013, one went public, claiming that Phillips had ignored seven emails warning him of the presence of pirates and that he had no plan to deal with them when they boarded the ship.

### 🚢 Titanic

Obviously, the broad strokes of *Titanic* were historically accurate – there was a boat, and it sank – but that didn't stop James Cameron from running into trouble elsewhere. In the film, First Officer William Murdoch is the corrupt officer who panics near the lifeboats, shoots a passenger in the chest, and then kills himself. While some survivors claimed to have seen an officer kill himself, it has also been claimed that Murdoch was swept out to sea. After the film was released, Murdoch's family took issue with the film's portrayal of their relative, saying it negated his reputation as a hero who launched several lifeboats and threw deckchairs into the sea for people to cling to. As such, the Vice-President of Fox travelled to Murdoch's home town to apologise and donate £5,000 to a local school.

### 🎖 American Sniper

In this film, Bradley Cooper's Chris Kyle's arch enemy is an Iraqi sniper called Mustafa, but in reality, the pair barely encountered each other (if, indeed, he actually existed). But, then again, Kyle himself might not have been the most trustworthy storyteller. He made a number of unverified claims. He falsely reported the number of medals he won in service and said that he punched Jesse Ventura for besmirching the Iraq war. Ventura sued him for this last one, but no verdict was reached.

### 💛❤ Braveheart

*Braveheart* took liberties with the story of William Wallace. It showed him growing up in poverty (when he was actually a member of the aristocracy). It showed him in kilts (hundreds of years before kilts were invented). It depicted the Battle of Stirling Bridge (which took place on a bridge and not in a field in the middle of nowhere). Still, good for Scotland for playing along by commissioning a statue of William Wallace and making it just as inaccurate as the film by getting it to look exactly like Mel Gibson.

### 😊👨 Patch Adams

Meanwhile, the actual Patch Adams's list of grievances is long and not particularly specific. He told Roger Ebert: "I hate that movie." There's his depiction, which Adams says is oversimplified, reducing him to a gratingly funny figure while ignoring his medical work and activism. Adams now carries around business cards containing the titles of 50 books so that "when someone comes up and asks me for an autograph, I give them a little lecture on pop culture and how it's dummed our population and its consequences." So that's fun.



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Match the words to form phrases from the text.

- |                     |                |
|---------------------|----------------|
| • accidentally      | • accurate     |
| • historical        | • claims       |
| • wildly            | • encountered  |
| • pirate - infested | • fact         |
| • historically      | • funny figure |
| • gratingly         | • popular      |
| • barely            | • reported     |
| • unverified        | • wandered     |
| • falsely           | • waters       |



Complete the sentences with the words below.

Change the form of the word to the correct form of speech.

- I'm afraid that it would be impossible to check – the information is .....  
(**verify**)
- This is yet another film that is guilty of many..... inaccuracies.  
(**history**)
- The director was .....accused of fabricating the evidence. (**false**)
- This thriller is about a couple who are left behind in shark.....waters.  
(**infest**)
- The Queen, who was responsible for most of the critical decisions at the time, was  
..... mentioned. (**bare**)
- The shipwreck was .....discovered off the coast of Tahiti. (**accident**)