



Study notes • The Post



Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep in *The Post*. | Niko Tavernise / Twentieth Century Fox / NTB scanpix

Before you watch the film

1 a The first scene in the film is from the Vietnam War, 1966. Brainstorm in class what you know about the Vietnam War. Check that your facts are correct.

b Can we argue that the Vietnam War is still important in American politics? Explain.

c What are the Pentagon Papers?

d Who was Katharine Graham?

While you watch the film

2 Note down scenes or quotes that make an impression on you.

After you have watched the film

3 Work in pairs or in class on the following:

Setting: Where and when do the events take place?

Characters: Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks portray the two main characters, Katharine Graham and Ben Bradlee. Would you say that Streep's character Mrs Graham is a static character, or does she change throughout the film? Explain, and give examples.

Plot: Sum up briefly the main events of the film – what happens?

Theme/message:

a What would you say the film is about? Do you find there is more than one theme?

b The film describes events of the past, but many critics have argued that the film is highly relevant today: "This story is more relevant than ever, and it is told with wit, precision and understated passion." (The Guardian, 21 January 2018). Do you agree? Discuss, and give at least one argument or example to support your view.

c You could argue that the film also makes a case for another important issue in today's society – feminism. How is this expressed in the film?

d What creates suspense in the film? Here are some points to help you:

- Create engaging and dynamic characters with opposing goals.
- A conflict that is important to your characters.
- Raising the stakes: Your story needs several points where tension reaches a peak.
- Tension both in characters' inner lives and in the world around them.
- Multiple sources of tension (examples: an up and down love affair, workplace politics, grappling with an antagonist or environmental hazards)
- The story unfolds in a short, urgent space of time.

Language work

Allusion

- 4** A moral dilemma in the film is expressed in this way: To print or not to print. What is this an allusion to? Why is this in fact a highly suitable allusion?

Speaking

Expressing opinions

- 5** The board of The Washington Post discuss putting the paper on the stock market. This raises a question: Why should investors invest in news and good reporters? Argue this case.

- 6** The film *The Post* follows in the tradition of films like *All the President's Men* and *Spotlight* about investigative journalism, and *Snowden* about the whistleblower Edward Snowden.

- a** Why do people become whistleblowers? Who are the whistleblowers in *The Post*?

- b** The press, a free press, is often called “the fourth estate”. What does this mean? The film makes a strong case for the important mission of a free press as a counterforce to the political establishment and a necessity to defend democracy. Find examples from the film, and note down arguments for a free press.

- c** What would you say is the basic dilemma in the film? What advice would you have given Mrs Graham: To print or not to print? Why?

- d** Who are the “brave heroes” in the film? Why?

- e** Would you argue that this is an important film? Give your reasons.

Writing

- 7** Write a short text where you recommend that the public watch *The Post*.
- 8** Write a short text where you argue that we need a free press to protect democracy.