

Level: Upper intermediate (B2)

Age: Teenagers

Time: This lesson can be divided up in various ways to suit the time you have with your students. Below are three time options which you can choose from depending on the length of your class. However, these are just suggestions and there are plenty of other ways you could divide the lesson up.

90 minutes – Complete all activities in Changing history and Fixing history.

60 minutes – Complete all activities in Changing history and Fixing history but students do not write their own historical facts.

45 minutes – Complete all activities in Changing history and Fixing history but students do not present their ideas for a Hollywood blockbuster nor write their own historical facts.

Summary: This lesson is divided into two sections: Changing history and Fixing history. In the lesson, students will:

1. read how Hollywood changes history;
2. discuss history quotations;
3. unjumble names to correct historical facts;
4. write a history fact sheet.

Key skills: reading, speaking, writing

Subskills: learning about historical events, expressing opinions, correcting errors in a text

Materials: one copy of each worksheet per student; enough copies of each fact sheet for one third of the students; one set of answer sheets, cut up

CHANGING HISTORY

1. Ask students what films they have seen recently. Ask if any of the films were based on real events.

2. Write the following film titles on the board.

- Saving Private Ryan
- U-571
- The Patriot
- Braveheart

Have students seen any of the films? Tell them that these films have been criticized. Can anyone say why? Don't reveal why yet.

3. Hand out the worksheet. Get students to read the article quickly to find out.

Key: Because they are historically inaccurate.

4. Write the following names on the board.

- James Loewen
- Mel Gibson
- Spike Lee
- Enigma
- Steven Spielberg

Tell students to read the text again and then to cover their worksheets. They should then discuss with a

partner how the different names fit into the story. Check comprehension by eliciting the correct answers from the class.

Key: James Loewen is the author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, a best-selling book that accuses American schools of teaching “feel-good history”, instead of tackling the truth; Mel Gibson has made two historically inaccurate films: *The Patriot* and *Braveheart*; Spike Lee complained about the *The Patriot*'s vision of the past; *U-571* makes out that the Americans go on a mission to capture the secret German coding device, *Enigma*, but, in truth, it was the British; Steven Spielberg made the historically inaccurate *Saving Private Ryan*.

5. When they have done this, put students in small groups and tell them to discuss the questions on the worksheet. Tell students that you will ask one student from each group to summarize their group's views at the end of the discussion.

6. Nominate one student from each group to summarize their group's views.

7. Next, direct students to the History quotes activity. Students read the famous quotations about history. They should tick the quotes they agree with and put a cross against those they disagree with. Then, get them to exchange their views with a partner.

8. Students then choose an event from the history of their own country and distort some of the facts

to make it into a Hollywood blockbuster. They must complete the sentences on the worksheet with information about their film.

9. Get students to present their ideas, either to the whole class or in groups. Do a vote: which film do the students think has the best chance of success at the box office?

FIXING HISTORY

1. Write the following dates and categories on the board:

1990–1999

around the world

sport

people

As a whole class, ask students to tell you about one news story from the last decade of the twentieth century for each category. Encourage them to explain the details of the story, including which year it happened.

2. Divide students into three groups and allocate one category to each group. Tell them that they are going to read ten sentences related to their category in which history has been re-written. They must find the inaccuracies in them.

Give each student a copy of the fact sheet for their group. Tell students to read the ten sentences. Then, tell them that they must work together as a group to:

- underline the incorrect information
- move the names and key words around to make the sentences correct
- write the correct year next to the corresponding fact

Before they start, point out the Phrasebook. Go over the useful phrases and tell them to make use of them during their discussions. You may also want to do an example for each fact sheet as a whole class to get them started.

3. Ask one member of each group to hand their corrected fact sheet to another group. Then, hand out one answer sheet to every group, and have students correct the other group's fact sheet, and write the score at the top. They should give one point per correct fact and one point per correct year. Which group got the highest score?

4. Students continue working in groups and write six sentences of their own. The sentences should be about events that took place in the first decade of the twenty-first century (2000–2009). They should write two sentences for each of the categories: around the world,

sport and people. They then change the names around to make incorrect facts, as on the fact sheets.

5. The groups read out their sentences, and the other students correct them. Alternatively, groups pass their sentences round and correct them as a writing activity.

Homework task

Assign each student a historical mystery to research on and report back on in the next lesson. Make sure you tell them that they must not copy text verbatim from websites they find; they must make notes and then present the mystery in their own words, without referring to their notes.

This website has 25 historical mysteries: <http://list25.com/the-25-biggest-mysteries-of-history/?view=all>.



CHANGING HISTORY

HOLLYWOOD'S VERSION OF HISTORY



Many films are based on true events but sometimes those events can be changed in the process.

There have been many films that have been accused of distorting history. In 1998, Steven Spielberg distorted historical facts to make *Saving Private Ryan*. Anyone watching the film might be forgiven for thinking that the British didn't take part in World War II.

In the World War II submarine movie *U-571*, it was the United States Navy that went on a mission to capture Enigma, the secret German coding device, whereas in reality it was the British Navy that went on the mission in May 1941, six months before the United States joined the war.

The British did appear in Mel Gibson's movie *The Patriot*, which was set during the American struggle for independence. Unfortunately,

they were portrayed as either incompetent or psychopaths. When the film opened, its star (who also made the historically inaccurate *Braveheart*) admitted that the film was "not historically accurate". It presented an idealized view of the War of Independence, which angered many people in the United States. Film director Spike Lee complained about the film's vision of the past in which slaves fought side by side with their white masters.

Distorting history is not just a Hollywood problem. James Loewen, a professor at the University of Vermont, is the author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, a best-selling book that accuses American schools of teaching "feel-good history", instead of tackling the truth. Loewen can't understand Hollywood's attitude to history: "What I find so hard to understand is why they fictionalize these events when the facts are already so amazing."

Discussion questions

- What are the disadvantages of films distorting reality?
- Can you think of any advantages (for example, for the producers of the film)?
- Is the history taught in schools accurate?
- Do you think that it is important to study history? Why?



History quotes

Do you agree with these quotations? If not, what is your opinion about each issue mentioned? Exchange your views with a partner.

"Historical movies should keep to the truth. People believe what they see at the movies."
– an American film critic

"History does not repeat itself. Historians repeat each other."
– Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), British statesman

"History repeats itself."
– proverb

"All our ancient history is no more than accepted fiction."
– François-Marie Voltaire (1694–1778), French writer

"History is an endless repetition of the wrong way of living."
– Lawrence Durrell (1912–1990), British writer

"History is the sum total of the things that could have been avoided." – Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967), German statesman

"It is impossible to write ancient history because we do not have enough sources, and impossible to write modern history because we have far too many." – Charles Pierre Péguy (1873–1914) French writer

"What we know of the past is mostly not worth knowing. What is worth knowing is mostly uncertain. Events in the past may roughly be divided into those which probably never happened and those which do not matter." – Dean Inge (1860–1954), British churchman

CHANGE HISTORY

Think of an important event in the history of your country and think of how it might be portrayed in a Hollywood blockbuster. What facts do you think Hollywood could change in order to make the event more entertaining? Complete the sentences with information about your film.

Title

My film's called ...

Actors and who they play

It stars _____ as _____, and _____ as _____.

Where and in what era the action takes place

It's set in _____, in _____.

Summarize the plot

It's about ...

What historical facts have been changed

I've changed ...

FIXING HISTORY

Fact sheet - Around the world

Read the facts about events that took place in the world between 1990 and 2000. Underline the incorrect information. Then, move the names and key words around to make correct sentences. Finally, write a year between 1990 and 1999 next to each fact (there is one fact for each year).

1. One hundred and fifty-six years of British rule in South Africa end as the former colony is handed over to the Chinese government.
2. An earthquake hits Japan in the industrial area of New York, killing about 4,000 people.
3. The Gulf War, which has divided Germany since 1945, finally comes down, as East and West Germany are reunited.
4. The Berlin Wall is launched and adopted by 11 European countries.
5. The euro ends with the liberation of Kuwait.
6. Bill Clinton wins the elections in South Africa and becomes the first black president.
7. General Pinochet is elected the 42nd president of the USA.
8. Nelson Mandela, the former dictator of Chile, is arrested in a London clinic.
9. White rule ends in Hong Kong as the parliament votes for majority rule.
10. A TWA plane, on its way to Paris, crashes into the sea shortly after taking off from Kobe.



PHRASEBOOK



Correcting errors in a text

- The error here is definitely ...
- This word doesn't go here. It goes here.
- This doesn't sound right to me.
- I've got a feeling this word goes here instead.

Assigning a date

- I think this happened in around about ...
- This can't have happened in ... because ...
- ... in the early / mid / late 90s.
- That date must be wrong because there's no way ... happened before ...
- I could be wrong, but I think the date for this one is ...



FIXING HISTORY

Fact sheet - Sport

Read the facts about events that took place in the world between 1990 and 2000. Underline the incorrect information. Then, move the names and key words around to make correct sentences. Finally, write a year between 1990 and 1999 next to each fact (there is one fact for each year).

1. In July, a bomb kills two people and injures many more at the Olympic Games in Barcelona.
2. West Germany become the first team to win the treble when they win the European Champions' Cup in Barcelona.
3. Ben Johnson retires from basketball after announcing that he is HIV positive.
4. The French win their fourth football World Cup, beating Italy on penalties.
5. Manchester United wins the World Cup.
6. Tiger Woods is banned for life from racing after tests show that he has used performance-enhancing drugs.
7. Atlanta football team beats Brazil to win the World Cup.
8. The Olympic Games take place in Brazil.
9. Miguel Indurain, aged 21 and in his first year as a professional golfer, wins the US Masters.
10. Spanish cyclist Magic Johnson wins the Tour de France.



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FIXING HISTORY

Fact sheet - People

Read the facts about events that took place in the world between 1990 and 2000. Underline the incorrect information. Then, move the names and key words around to make correct sentences. Finally, write a year between 1990 and 1999 next to each fact (there is one fact for each year).

1. Heaven's Gate, the restaurant chain owned by film stars Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, is declared bankrupt.
2. The Leaning Tower of Boris Yeltsin is closed for safety reasons.
3. Thirty-nine members of the Buckingham Palace cult commit suicide near San Diego, California.
4. Mickey Mouse moves to France as Planet Hollywood opens near Paris.
5. Dolly, the whale that starred in films, begins his journey to freedom.
6. Euro Disney, which links England and France, is inaugurated.
7. Pisa, the former US football star, is found not guilty of murdering his ex-wife and her friend in a much-publicized trial.
8. In London, the Queen opens the Channel Tunnel to the public for an entrance fee of £8.
9. A team of research scientists in Edinburgh, Scotland, produces O J Simpson, the first clone of an adult animal.
10. Keiko is elected president of Russia.



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ANSWER SHEETS

**Around the world**

1. 1997, Hong Kong; 2. 1995, Kobe; 3. 1990, the Berlin Wall;
4. 1999, euro; 5. 1991, Gulf War; 6. 1994, Nelson Mandela;
7. 1992, Bill Clinton; 8. 1998, General Pinochet;
9. 1993, South Africa; 10. 1996, New York

Sport

1. 1996, Atlanta; 2. 1999, Manchester United; 3. 1991, Magic Johnson;
4. 1994, Brazil; 5. 1990, West Germany; 6. 1993, Ben Johnson;
7. 1998, the French; 8. 1992, Barcelona; 9. 1997, Tiger Woods;
10. 1995, Miguel Indurain

People

1. 1999, Planet Hollywood; 2. 1990, Pisa; 3. 1997, Heaven's Gate;
4. 1992, Euro Disney; 5. 1998, Keiko; 6. 1994, the Channel Tunnel;
7. 1995, O J Simpson; 8. 1993, Buckingham Palace; 9. 1996, Dolly;
10. 1991, Boris Yeltsin

