



What Makes a Movie Great?

Exploring film, art & culture — personal taste vs objective quality, comparison and evaluation language, and the question of whether critics and audiences can both be right.

Level: Upper Intermediate (B2 CEFR)

Duration: 90–120 minutes · 1:1 General

English Coaching

Skill Focus: Speaking, Vocabulary,
Grammar, Reading, Listening

Grammar Focus: Comparison & evaluation
language



Scan to visit our website.
Fluentora.com



1

warm-up

Discuss these questions before we begin.

1. Think about the last film you watched purely for enjoyment, not because anyone recommended it. What made you choose it?
Follow-up: *What mood were you in? Would you choose the same film again today?*
2. What kind of films do you find yourself drawn to again and again, and what do they usually have in common?
Follow-up: *Is there a genre you actively avoid? Why?*
3. Think of a film you'd confidently call well made. What specifically makes you say that?
Follow-up: *Was it the writing, the acting, or the visuals that stood out most?*
4. Compare two films you've seen recently — which was more enjoyable, and which did you think was better made?
Follow-up: *Were they the same film? What made the difference?*
5. Can a film be excellent and still not be something you personally enjoy? Can you think of an example?
Follow-up: *What's the difference between "I didn't like it" and "it wasn't good"?*

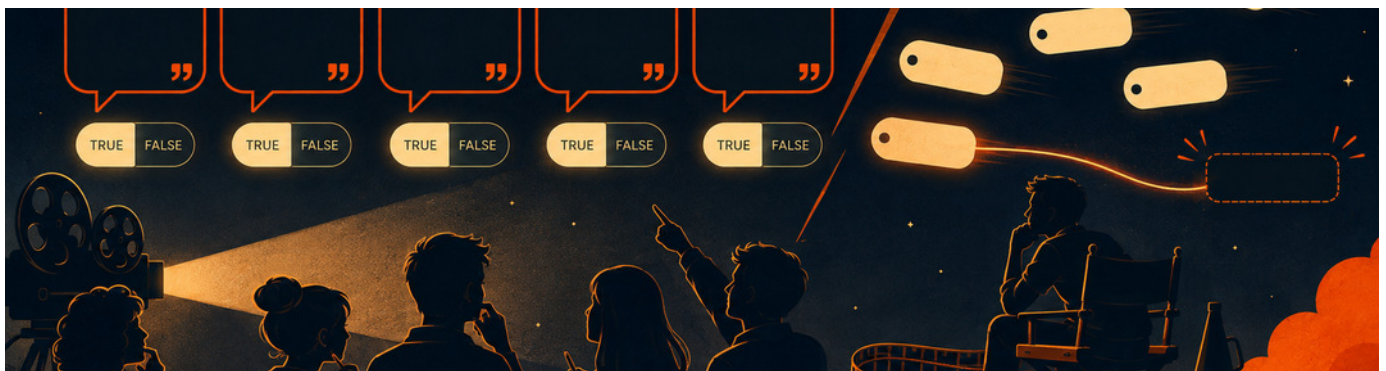
**video comprehension****2****Watch the video before completing the exercises —
a montage of different voices answering “what makes a movie great?”**▶ Watch here: youtube.com/watch?v=EIMqTOMhHzA**SCAN
ME****Part A — True or False**

T/F	Statement
---	According to Aaron Sorkin, a movie can still be great even with a weak script, as long as the visuals are strong.
---	Jessica Chastain says a truly great film is one whose meaning keeps developing in your mind after you leave the cinema.
---	Jordan Peele suggests that great films should only appeal to a small, specialized audience.
---	According to George Clooney, older films can feel surprisingly original because they were often the first to do certain things.
---	Hugh Jackman says great movies should avoid making the audience feel challenged or uncomfortable.

Part B — Fill in the Gaps**WORD BANK**

wringer · evolving · transport · script · hearts

- Kumail Nanjiani describes great films as ones that put the audience through the _____.
- Jessica Chastain says a great film's meaning keeps _____ even after you've left the theater.
- Hugh Jackman believes great films should _____ the audience to worlds they couldn't otherwise imagine.
- Aaron Sorkin insists that no film can be considered great if its _____ is weak.
- Patty Jenkins says filmmakers put the world into their own _____ before sending it back out through their films.





2

video comprehension**Part C — Comprehension**

1. Choose two different speakers from the video and briefly explain what each one believes makes a movie great.

Follow-up: Which of these two views do you personally agree with more?

2. Why does George Clooney say older films can feel surprisingly original when you rewatch them today?

Follow-up: Can you think of an old film that still feels fresh today?

3. What does Jordan Peele mean when he says great films should “work for everybody” while still “saying something”?

4. Compare Aaron Sorkin's view (a strong script is essential) with Hugh Jackman's view (films should transport and challenge you). Do you think one matters more than the other?

5. Are all the qualities these filmmakers describe things that could be judged objectively, or are some more a matter of personal taste? Which speaker's definition feels most subjective to you, and which feels most objective?

Follow-up: Could two people disagree about a film and both still be “right”?

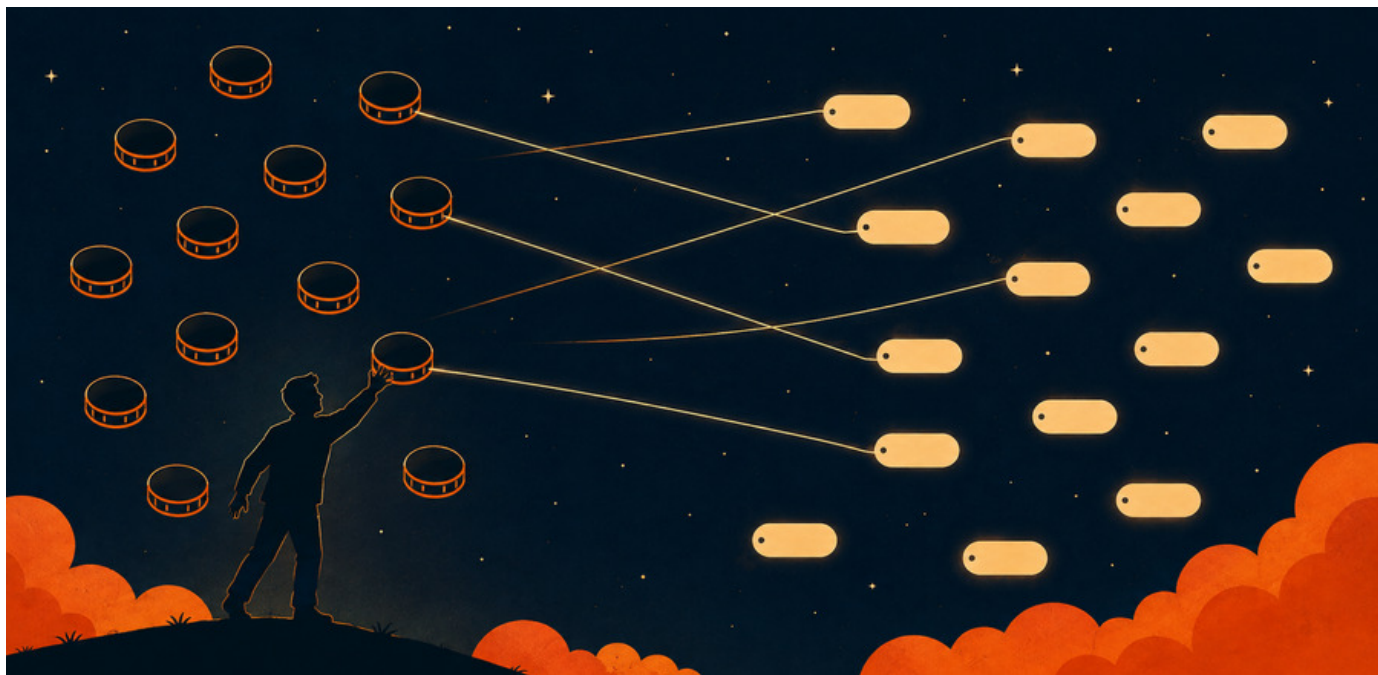


**3 pre-reading vocabulary**

Read, repeat, and master these words before reading the article.

 Match each word to its definition. Definitions are shuffled — write the correct letter in the Answer box.

#	Word	Def.	Answer	Definition
1	Craft	A		to have an effect that removes or balances another effect
2	Landmark	B		to begin liking someone or something, often gradually
3	Cultural weight	C		to genuinely deserve to be included, rather than being there by accident
4	Lived-in	D		to remain good or effective, especially after a long time
5	Tight	E		to match or agree with each other
6	Cancel out	F		to change, often significantly
7	Warm to	G		to be judged very positively according to a particular measure
8	Earn its place	H		the skill and technique behind how something is made
9	Hold up	I		something extremely important or influential, marking a turning point
10	Line up	J		the level of influence something has on society or a group of people
11	Shift	K		feeling natural and authentic, as if fully inhabited
12	Score highly on	L		well-structured, with nothing unnecessary or wasted





4

reading

When Critics and Audiences Disagree: What Makes a Film Great?

 Read the article silently first. Don't worry about every word — focus on the overall argument.

You're leaving the cinema with a friend, and something's clearly wrong — except it isn't. She's wiping her eyes, already talking about seeing it again next week. You're checking your phone, wondering if there's still time to grab dinner before the last train. You just sat through the exact same two hours and forty minutes, in the same dim room, watching the same frames flicker past at the same speed. Neither of you says it out loud, but you're both thinking some version of the same question: how did we watch the same film and come out feeling like we saw two completely different movies?

This happens constantly with *The Godfather*. Ask a room full of people what they think of it, and you'll get everything from “the greatest film ever made” to “I respect it, but I've genuinely never wanted to sit through it twice.” Both of those reactions can be true at once, and neither one cancels out the other, because they're actually answering different questions. One is about whether you enjoyed it. The other is about whether it's well made. Most of the time, people run these two questions together without noticing, and that's usually where the argument starts.

Personal taste is the easy part, even if it doesn't feel like it in the moment. You either respond to something or you don't, and there's rarely a good reason attached — you just don't warm to slow pacing, or long dialogue scenes leave you checking the time, or the tone doesn't match what you were in the mood for that night. None of that says anything about the film itself. It says something about you, on that particular evening, watching that particular film. Two people can sit in the same row, watch the same frames in the same order, and walk out having had two entirely different experiences, and both experiences are simply true. There's no version of taste that needs defending with evidence, because it was never making a claim about the film in the first place.

Perceived quality is a different question entirely, and it's the one that actually explains why a film like *The Godfather* keeps showing up on “greatest of all time” lists decades after release, including from people who'd never choose to watch it again for fun. The dialogue is tight. Every scene earns its place. The performances feel lived-in rather than performed. You can recognize all of that — genuinely recognize it, not just repeat what critics say — while still finding the whole thing a bit slow for your taste. Craft and enjoyment are simply answering different questions, and a film can score highly on one while leaving you cold on the other. This is exactly the gap that makes people uncomfortable, because we're used to assuming that recognizing something is good and actually liking it are the same act. They aren't, and the sooner that distinction feels normal rather than contradictory, the easier these conversations get.

Then there's a third, messier category that often gets confused with the first two: impact. Some films matter not because of how they're made or how much any individual enjoys them, but because of what they did to everyone watching, all at once, at a particular moment. A film can shift what an entire industry thinks is possible, or become the thing an entire generation quotes at each other without thinking, and that kind of influence has almost nothing to do with whether it holds up as a personally satisfying watch today. *Titanic* is a useful contrast here: it isn't usually praised for subtlety, but its scale and the sheer number of people who experienced it together gave it a cultural weight that has little to do with anyone's private verdict on the dialogue. Impact is really a claim about a film's relationship to a culture, not to any one viewer sitting in a dark room. A film can lose most of its original power decades later and still deserve its place in the conversation, simply because of what it once did to the people who saw it first.

The confusion starts because these three things — enjoyment, craft, and impact — usually travel together. Most films that are genuinely well made are also the ones people enjoy, and the films people love in large enough numbers are often the ones that end up shaping what comes next. So it's easy to assume the three always line up, and easy to forget that they can just as easily split apart. A film can be beautifully constructed and leave you cold. A film you love without reservation might not be one you'd defend as a landmark of the art form. A film can matter enormously to an entire culture while individual viewers, decades later, shrug at it politely and move on. Neither of those is a contradiction. They're just three different rulers measuring three different things, and nothing requires them to agree.

Which brings us back to the cinema lobby, and your friend still talking about seeing it again next week. She isn't wrong that it's a great film. You aren't wrong that you didn't enjoy watching it. Both of you watched the same two hours and forty minutes, and both of you are right, because you were never actually measuring the same thing. You're just measuring different things, and only one of you has actually noticed.



4

reading**Part B—Gist & Part D — Vocabulary in Context****Part B — Gist / Main Idea**

1. In one sentence, what is the main argument of this article?

2. What does the article suggest is the real reason critics and audiences can disagree about the same film?

Part D — Vocabulary in Context

 Find these words in the article. Based on the context around them, work out what each one means — don't use a dictionary yet.

Word	Your guess
flicker	
messier	
verdict	
contradiction	
shrug	
constructed	





4

reading**Part C—Phrase Gap-Fill****PHRASE BANK — 3 PHRASES ARE NOT USED**

A walk out having had two entirely different experiences · **B** recognizing something is good and actually liking it are the same act · **C** become the thing an entire generation quotes at each other · **D** impact is really a claim about a film's relationship to a culture · **E** beautifully constructed and leave you cold · **F** three different rulers measuring three different things · **G** sat through the exact same two hours and forty minutes · **H** gave it a cultural weight that has little to do with anyone's private verdict · **I** these three measurements always perfectly agree · **J** personal taste requires solid evidence to defend · **K** cultural impact always fades if a film isn't personally enjoyable

1. You just _____ , in the same dim room, watching the same frames flicker past at the same speed.
2. Two people can sit in the same row, watch the same frames in the same order, and _____ .
3. We're used to assuming that _____ . They aren't.
4. A film can shift what an entire industry thinks is possible, or _____ without thinking.
5. Its scale and the sheer number of people who experienced it together _____ on the dialogue.
6. _____ , not to any one viewer sitting in a dark room.
7. A film can be _____ .
8. They're just _____ , and nothing requires them to agree.





4

reading**Part E—Comprehension & Part F — Personal Response**

1. According to the article, what is the difference between personal taste and perceived quality?

2. Why does the article say a film's cultural impact is different from whether an individual enjoys it?

3. What does the author mean by "three different rulers measuring three different things"?

4. Why do you think enjoyment, craft, and impact "usually travel together," according to the article?

5. Do you agree that someone can recognize a film is well made without personally enjoying it? Why or why not?

6. Which of the three ideas — enjoyment, craft, or cultural impact — matters most to you personally when deciding if a film is worth watching?

Part F — Personal Response

Think of a famous film you personally dislike but can recognize as well made — or a film you love that you wouldn't necessarily call a great film. Which film is it, and why does it fit that category? Be ready to share in the discussion later.





5

listening**Emma & Leo disagree about Titanic — two reasonable opinions, one film.****Audio:** A natural conversation between two friends who watched the same film and came away with very different opinions.**Part A — Comprehension**

1. What is Emma's overall opinion of *Titanic*?

2. What is Leo's overall opinion of *Titanic*?

3. What specific reasons does each of them give for their opinion?

4. What do they disagree about most clearly?

5. Whose reaction is closer to how you'd probably feel? Why?

Part B — Fill in the Gaps**WORD BANK**

old · film · people · feeling · greatness

1. "The effects still hold up incredibly well for a film that _____."
2. "That score is genuinely one of the best ever written for a _____."
3. "I never connect with Jack and Rose as _____."
4. "I think I fell in love with the _____ of the film."
5. "Popularity isn't proof of _____, though."

Part C — Speaking Extension

1. Whose opinion was closer to yours? Why?
2. Can you think of a film you enjoyed even though you would not describe it as a great film?



6

grammar — comparison & evaluation

Notice → Guided Discovery → Explanation

Notice

1. *The Godfather* is far more critically respected than most action films.
2. *Titanic*'s soundtrack is not as subtle as some other award-winning scores.
3. The more people discuss a film, the more its cultural impact grows.
4. Some films are considerably better made than they are enjoyable.
5. *Titanic* was, by far, the most successful film of its year.

Guided Discovery

Look at sentences 1–5 above. Which one shows: a stronger comparison? a weaker/lower comparison? an equality/inequality structure? a superlative? a relationship between two changing things?

Short Explanation

Structure	Example
Standard comparison: -er / more/less + than	more critically respected than
Equality/inequality: as...as / not as...as	not as subtle as
Stronger/weaker: much, far, considerably, slightly, a little + comparative	far more, considerably better
Superlative: the most / the least / by far the most	by far the most successful
Complex comparison: the more..., the more...	the more people discuss it, the more it grows
Contrast: whereas, while, compared with/to	compared with most films...



6

grammar — controlled practice**Complete each sentence with the correct comparison form.**

1. *Titanic* is ___ (much / far) more expensive to produce than most films of its time.
2. *The Godfather* isn't ___ as ___ (fast-paced) as a modern action movie.
3. Some critics argue *Titanic* is ___ (slightly) overrated compared to other classics.
4. This is, ___ (by far), the most memorable soundtrack in film history.
5. The ___ (more) technically advanced a film becomes, the ___ (more) it can rely on spectacle instead of story.
6. Audience opinions are ___ (increasingly) divided about franchise sequels compared to original films.

Transformation

Rewrite each sentence using the structure in brackets, keeping the meaning the same.

1. *The Godfather* is better written than most films. (far / much)

2. *Titanic* isn't as subtle as some critics would like. (less)

3. As films become more expensive, audience expectations increase. (the more...the more)

6

grammar — personal evaluation**Now use comparison language to evaluate real films.****Important distinction:** Better ≠ more enjoyable. You can say: "I think X is a better film, but I enjoy Y more."**Choose a Pair (or use your own)***Titanic* vs. *Avatar* · *The Godfather* vs. *The Dark Knight* · *The Lord of the Rings* vs. *Harry Potter*

Don't worry if you haven't seen one of the films — use a pair you both know instead.

1. Which is more memorable?
2. Which has stronger characters?
3. Which is more visually impressive?
4. Which has a more effective soundtrack?
5. Which is more enjoyable?
6. Which is better made?

Explain your reasoning for each answer — and notice if your answers to "better made" and "more enjoyable" are ever different films.



7

discussion**The main speaking stage — take your time with these.**

1. Tell me about a time you disagreed with a friend about whether a film, show, or book was good.
Follow-up: *What was your main argument? Did either of you change your mind? Do you still feel the same way now?*
2. What makes a film good, in your opinion — not just enjoyable, but genuinely well made?
Follow-up: *Is that different for different genres? Can a comedy be “great” in the same way a drama can?*
3. Think of two films in the same genre. How would you compare their quality versus how much you enjoyed each?
Follow-up: *Which one would you recommend to a friend, and why? Does that depend on who the friend is?*
4. Why do you think professional critics and general audiences sometimes rate the same film very differently?
Follow-up: *Whose opinion do you trust more, and why? Do you check reviews before watching something?*
5. Do you think it's possible to judge a film objectively, or is all judgment ultimately personal?
Follow-up: *What would “objective” even mean for something like art? Is this different for something like a bridge or a phone?*

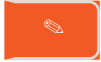
 **Useful language:** “I see your point, but...” · “I’d argue that...” · “To some extent, I agree...” · “It depends on...” · “I wouldn’t necessarily say...”

Final Discussion Challenge

“A film that millions of people enjoy must be a great film.” Do you agree or disagree?

Challenge: “If millions of people enjoy it, doesn’t that prove it has some kind of quality?”



**homework****Complete before the next lesson · approx. 20–30 minutes.**

Part 1 — Vocabulary in Use: Choose 6 of the 12 vocabulary items from this lesson. Write original sentences about films, music, art, or culture. Use at least 2 collocations or expressions (not single words).

Part 2 — Grammar in Context: Write 6 short sentences comparing films or art, including:

- One standard comparative
- One intensified comparative (much / far / considerably)
- One softened comparative (slightly / a little)
- One superlative
- One as...as / not as...as structure
- One the more..., the more... structure

Then write one original sentence comparing two films of your choice.

Part 3 — Main Communication Task: “Can a Film Be Great If You Don’t Like It?”

Choose one well-known film that you either personally enjoy but don't think is especially good, OR personally dislike but recognize as well made. Record a 2–3 minute voice message (or write 200–250 words) answering:

- What film did you choose?
- What do you personally like or dislike about it?
- What aspects are objectively strong or weak?
- How would you compare it with another film?
- Does personal taste affect your judgment?

Use at least 4 target vocabulary items, at least 3 comparison structures, and at least one expression for giving or qualifying an opinion.

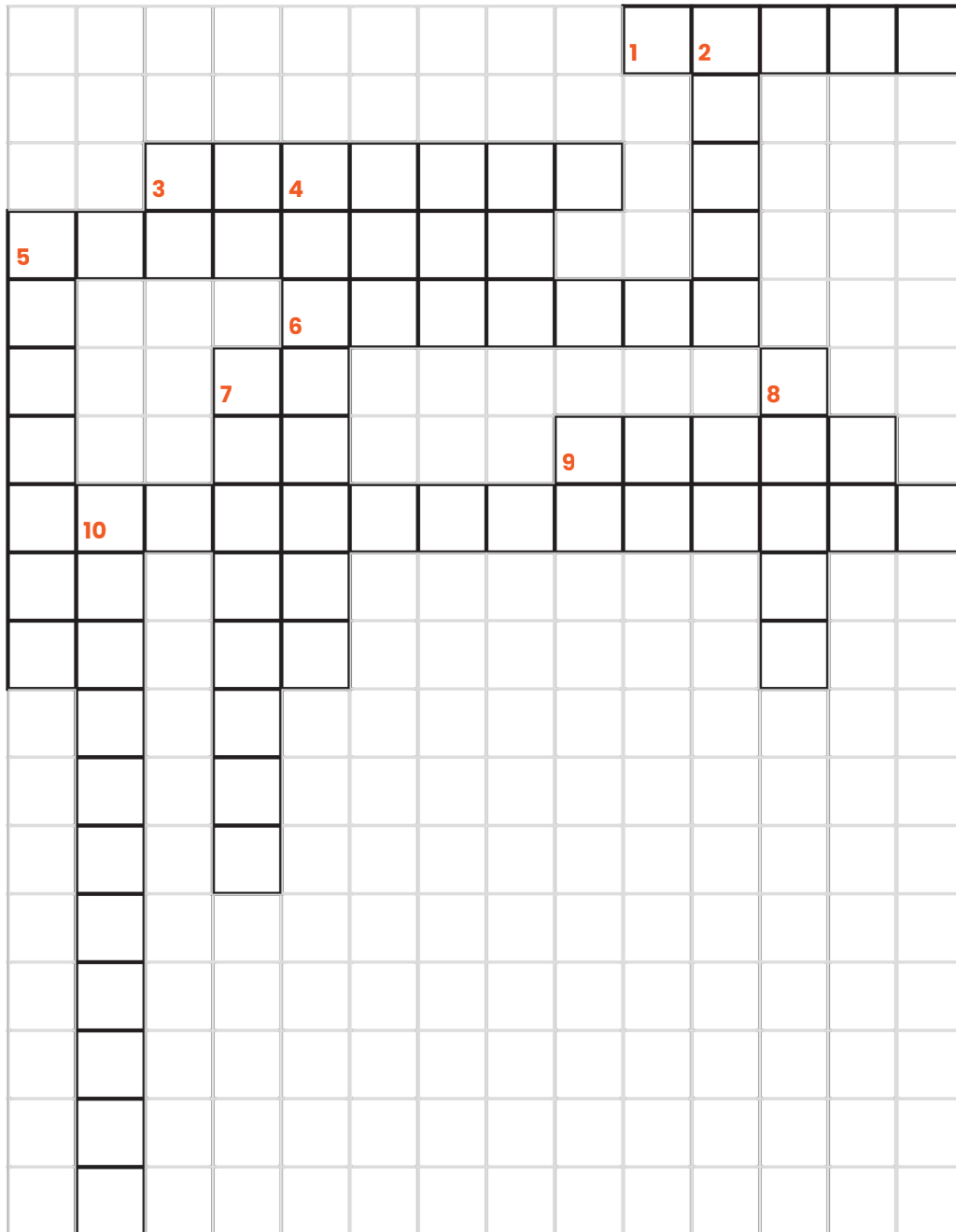




9

crossword

A solo homework activity — complete independently after the lesson.

**ACROSS**

1. Grandeur (5)
3. Flutter (7)
5. Realistic (8)
6. Judgment (7)
9. Concise (5)
10. Paradox (13)

DOWN

2. Skill (5)
4. Engaged (8)
5. Authentic (7)
7. Milestone (8)
8. Change (5)
10. Built (11)

 **Video Reference**

This lesson's video section is a montage of film industry voices answering the question “what makes a movie great?” As this is copyrighted video content, we are not able to reproduce the full script here. Please watch the original video at the link below before completing Section 2.

youtube.com/watch?v=EIMqTOMhHzA

Who's in the video

Speaker	Known for
Kumail Nanjiani	The best movies are the ones that make me sort of feel everything. I like movies that sort of have everything them, like that they're funny and they're moving and they're complicated. I like movies that kind of put you through the wringer.
Greta Gerwig	Director, “Lady Bird” :The best movies. The best movies point at the truth.
Jessica Chastain	Actor, “Molly’s Game” The best movies are the ones that when you leave the theater, Your opinion about them keeps evolving.
Aaron Sorkin	Director, “Molly’s Game” The best movies are well written. There's no such thing as a good movie that has a bad script.
Jordan Peele	Director, “Get Out” The best movies are movies that work for everybody and say something at the same time.
Hugh Jackman	Actor, “The Greatest Showman” The best movies are able to transport you to worlds that you couldn't imagine yourself, that make you feel things that you may not feel in an everyday level and that challenge your life.
George Clooney	Director, “Suburbicon” The best movies are on late at night. You flip the channel or you go on Netflix or one of those things and you pull up a Philadelphia story or one of those and you realize that when you go back and watch these films, the reason they were the best was because they were doing it first.
Steven Spielberg	Director, “The Post” Some of the greatest narrative stories were told for like the first 50 years of this business.
Patty Jenkins	Director, “Wonder Woman” The best movies are when the filmmakers and the people take the world into their hearts and selves and send it back out into the world.

What's covered: Nine film industry figures each offer their own answer to what makes a film great. Kumail Nanjiani says great films make you feel everything at once and put you through an emotional wringer. Greta Gerwig says they point at the truth. Jessica Chastain says a great film's meaning keeps evolving after you leave the cinema. Aaron Sorkin insists no film can be great with a weak script. Jordan Peele says great films work for a mass audience while still saying something meaningful. Hugh Jackman says they transport and challenge the viewer. George Clooney observes that classic films often feel original decades later because they did certain things first. Steven Spielberg adds that many of the greatest narrative stories were told in cinema's early decades. Patty Jenkins closes on the idea that filmmakers put something personal into a film before sending it back out into the world.

 **Audio Transcript**

Emma: Okay, I rewatched *Titanic* last weekend for probably the tenth time, and I cried just as much as the first time.

Leo: See, I've never gotten that. I respect it — the effects still hold up incredibly well for a film that old — but I don't feel anything watching it.

Emma: How? The music alone gets me. That score is genuinely one of the best ever written for a film.

Leo: The score, sure, I'll give you that. It's more the dialogue that loses me. Some of those lines between Jack and Rose are just... a bit much.

Emma: "I'm the king of the world"?

Leo: Exactly that one, actually.

Emma: Okay, that one's a little cheesy, I'll admit. But I think you're focusing on a handful of lines and missing what the film actually does well, which is scale. It makes you feel like you're really on that ship, right up until it isn't there anymore.

Leo: I won't argue with the scale. The production is genuinely impressive. It's just that I never connect with Jack and Rose as people. They feel more like symbols than characters to me.

Emma: Symbols of what?

Leo: Of young love, I guess. Freedom versus rules. It works as an idea, but I don't feel invested in them specifically, the way I do in a film with more grounded characters.

Emma: I think that's fair, actually. I don't think I fell in love with Jack and Rose as complex people either. I think I fell in love with the feeling of the film — the loss, the scale of the tragedy, the idea that this whole world just vanished in a few hours.

Leo: That's a really different way of watching it than mine.

Emma: I guess I went in wanting to feel something big, and it delivered that. You went in wanting complex characters, and it didn't give you that.

Leo: Which might just mean we wanted different things from it.

Emma: Right, but does that make it a bad film, or just not your kind of film?

Leo: Genuinely not sure. I'd probably say it's a well-made film that isn't for me, rather than a bad film.

Emma: See, I'd go further than that. I think it's a genuinely great film, not just a well-made one.

Leo: What's the difference for you?

Emma: I think a well-made film does the technical side properly. A great film actually changes how you feel, and this one changed something for me the first time I saw it, and it still does now, years later.

Leo: That's hard to argue with, honestly, because I can't feel what you feel. I can only tell you what I don't feel.

Emma: Which is completely fair. I just don't think that makes the film worse. I think it means it wasn't made for exactly you.

Leo: Maybe nothing's made for exactly everyone.

Emma: Maybe. Though this one came close, given how many people saw it.

Leo: True. Popularity isn't proof of greatness, though.

Emma: No, but it's not nothing either.



Thank You for Learning with Fluentora!

We hope this lesson inspired and supported your learning journey. Your feedback means the world to us, it helps us improve and empowers other learners to achieve their goals.

👉 **Share your thoughts and follow us on:**

Facebook: facebook.com/fluentora



Support Our Mission

If you'd like to help us continue creating high-quality, impactful lesson plans for learners worldwide, you can contribute here:

PayPal: paypal.me/MuhammadUmerH

Your support allows us to reach more learners and keep developing meaningful educational content.



Take the Next Step

Want to experience lessons with native speakers at an affordable cost?
Book a FREE trial lesson today with one of our Fluentora Fluency Stars:

Website: fluentora.com

🌟 Thank you for being part of our learning community. Together, we're building confidence, fluency, and success—one lesson at a time.

