TEACHING THE CULTURE OF LIFE:
The King’s Speech
A Culture of Life Studies movie review

Note to parents
Besides frequent use of British swear words (bloody, etc.), this film contains several scenes with very strong language, but the swearing is not so much used to degrade another person as it is to help the main character learn how to speak without stuttering. The beauty of the film and the moral of its story supercede its use of language, and the movie deserves a viewing by high school students. It is recommend that concerned parents mute these scenes:

• After the party with David and Wallis, Bertie returns to see Lionel and complains about not being able to respond to his brother, even after all the training. Lionel observes that Bertie doesn’t stutter when he swears, and so encourages Bertie to swear. About one hour into the film.

• When Bertie is practicing his radio speech and Lionel tells him to take it from the top again, Bertie inserts swear words instead of long pauses to keep himself from stammering. About one hour and thirty-eight minutes.

• Parents should also be aware that the final scene when the king is delivering the speech involves Lionel mouthing swear words to give the king confidence.

Adultery between the Prince of Wales and Mrs. Simpson is mentioned constantly, but is seen as clearly wrong by all other characters.

STORY SUMMARY
Prince Albert (nicknamed Bertie), Duke of York, son of King George V of England, is plagued with a stammer. The film opens with Bertie giving a speech in London, stammering and stuttering beyond control. Over the years, Bertie sees many different doctors with many different techniques for helping him overcome his speech defect, but to no avail. Finally, out of desperation, Bertie begs his wife Liz not to make him to go any more doctors. Despite her husband’s resistance, the duchess visits Lionel Logue, a speech therapist, and is convinced by him to try one last time to help her husband. Lionel is originally from Australia, which puts even more barriers between him and the prince due to prejudice against the colonies. Lionel insists on calling Bertie by his familiar name and makes a recording of Bertie speaking into a microphone while listening to loud music to convince the prince that his speech defect can be fixed.
After being ridiculed by the king and his family at the Christmas celebration for not being able to “get it out,” Bertie agrees to Lionel’s terms and they begin a daily regimen of therapy. Bertie gives small short speeches, but nothing elaborate. The lessons come to a pause when George V becomes gravely ill. After his father’s death, Bertie confides to Lionel that he is not pleased with his brother David’s choice of bride, the divorced Wallis Simpson. British law dictates that a monarch cannot marry a divorced woman, but David insists that he will marry Wallis. Lionel and Bertie argue, thus stopping the speech lessons. As David abdicates and Bertie ascends to the throne, Bertie realizes how much he needs Lionel to help him with his speeches. They mend their friendship and start anew. At his coronation, Bertie discovers that Lionel is not a doctor, nor does he have any certificate, though he has a lot of experience. Bertie and Lionel learn to trust each other once again. War on Germany is declared and the tension of the film culminates in George VI’s famous radio broadcast. *The King’s Speech* is an inspiring film about friendship, determination, and overcoming disabilities.

**LIFE THEME: OVERCOMING DISABILITY FOR THE SAKE OF THE NATION**

The Duke of York has a speech problem. In a normal family, Bertie’s stammer could go unnoticed and ignored, but in the royal family, where Bertie must make both public and radio speeches, his stammer has become more than an obstacle of communication. With the country poised for war, Bertie must decide to conquer his disability in order to save the country from scandal and from the threat of Hitler. Bertie’s heroic decision to overcome his disability and cooperate with Lionel for elocution lessons forms him into the righteous moral leader that England needs in order to combat the looming evils of a war with Germany.

Bertie stands out in his family as a symbol of morality in an immoral world. His brother David, the Prince of Wales, is romantically involved with a divorced woman, Mrs. Wallis Simpson. Even though the Prince of Wales knows that he cannot possibly marry Wallis and still become king of England, he continues with their affair, causing his family great pain and grief with his immoral lifestyle. David abdicates, leaving the kingdom to Bertie. With his stammer, Bertie does not want to become king, but he begins to realize that someone in the world has to stand up against the evils of Hitler and lead the country to victory in the inevitable war. The Prince of Wales is incapable of being the moral compass for the nation because of his sinful life. Thus, in order to save the country, Bertie needs to cure his disability, not for himself or his family, but for the sake of the nation.

Bertie’s disability helps form him into a stronger man and enables him to keep his country united during this terrible and terrifying time in history. At the end of the film, Bertie does not see himself as working alone. He ends his radio speech with the words: “With God’s help, we shall prevail,” showing that even as king of England, Bertie does not act on his own power, but rather by the power and law of God. Bertie recognizes his own human frailties and places himself and his country in the hands of God. With the help of God, England did prevail against Hitler’s regime, and King George VI became a stabilizing symbol for his country through his frequent radio broadcasts, which were all completed with the unfailing encouragement of Lionel Logue, his friend.

**HOW CAN I APPLY THIS TO MY LIFE?**

Overcoming disabilities is not easy. Some people will never overcome their disability, but instead have to work hard to accept it. This applies not only to the one with the disability but also to the family of the person who is disabled. Think of people who were born with a disability as well as people who have developed a disability throughout their lives, like injured soldiers who have to struggle to walk again, or a student who, upon reaching school age, is found to have a learning disability.
Like other people who have overcome their disabilities, Bertie had to die to his own desires in order to save his country. How can we overcome our limitations to do great things for God? God might be asking us to carry a heavy physical cross. Yet not all disabilities are visible. Some of us might suffer with a learning disability, shyness, or we might simply lack the moral courage to stand up for our beliefs when no one will stand with us. Whatever our disabilities, we can’t overcome them on our own. We need to ask God for the help and strength to conquer our limitations. Instead of dwelling on our limitations, we should be asking ourselves, “How can I use my disability for the glory of God?”

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. **How is family portrayed in the film?**
   Families are important to, and valued by, the main characters. After his father’s Christmas speech, Bertie argues that the royal family isn’t a family but a corporation. Both Lionel and Bertie understand the need to be strong father figures for their children. Bertie is very busy with state affairs, but he still makes time to be with his children and family. Lionel is also very occupied with patients, but he makes time to see his children during slow parts of his day. Both Bertie and Lionel tell stories to their children. Bertie prefers to make up stories for his daughters, while Lionel performs Shakespeare for his boys as they construct model airplanes.

   **How are Bertie’s and Lionel’s families different? How are they similar?**
   Lionel’s father was a brewer in Australia and let Lionel pursue his passions and interests, whether or not those interests made him successful. Bertie’s father, on the other hand, decided what his sons were interested in and only let them collect stamps instead of doing things like constructing model airplanes.

   Bertie’s family teased him about his speech defect, with encouragement from the king. Bertie’s life was quite hard as he suffered from abusive nannies, crooked legs, distant parents, and teasing siblings. Despite all of Bertie’s defects, King George V’s last words were how Bertie had more “guts” than all of his brothers put together—even though the king could not bring himself to say that to Bertie’s face.

2. **Toward the middle of the film, Bertie confides to Lionel that he wouldn’t know what friends are for, presumably because he does not have friends, only relatives and advisors. How must Bertie change in order to become friends with Lionel?**
   Lionel is the first common man (Australian) that Bertie has spoken to. As he sees common people in the streets, Bertie is struck by how little he knows of their lives, and how little they know of his life. In order to become friends with Lionel, Bertie must set aside the pride that comes with being of royal birth and learn to care about Lionel and his daily life.

   **As the friendship develops, what does Lionel show Bertie about himself?**
   Lionel shows Bertie a talent that he thought was impossible for him to have. Lionel’s support for his friend helped Bertie to ascend the throne of England with confidence and lead his people to victory in World War II.

   **How does their friendship in the end of the film exhibit the qualities of true friendship?**
   Lionel and Bertie learn to communicate and trust each other. Their friendship has become stronger because of their differences of opinion. True friends help each other when in need and encourage each other to persevere through difficult tasks.

3. **How is the radio referenced in the film?**
   In *The King’s Speech* the radio is constantly referred to as something to be feared, a “Pandora’s box.” Bertie discovers that, in order to compete with the changing world, the king must also change and become
more vocal than ever through the use of the radio. The film later notes that King George VI became a symbol of hope for the British people during the war because of his many radio speeches.

**What media today is considered to be a “Pandora’s box”? Why?**

Answers will vary. The Internet has definitely opened a new world of communication with a flood of information. However, the Internet is filled with both reliable and unreliable content, and social media challenges the way people form friendships and relationships.

**How does media today impact society’s opinions and beliefs?**

Think of some ways that the Internet has changed your life. Do you use it for school? To make friends? To watch movies? To buy things? To listen to music? To write to other people? To read articles and stories? What would your life be like without the Internet? For families who have very limited Internet usage, think of another form of media in your household.

4. **How did the Prince of Wales see the job of king?**

David refers to his job as “king-ing.” He holds parties and makes sure that Mrs. Simpson only drinks the best wine available. He is more concerned with his romantic interest in Mrs. Simpson than the affairs of the country or the alarming presence of Hitler in Europe. He claims that Hitler will “sort out” Europe’s problems.

**How did Bertie see the duty of king?**

Bertie understands that the forthcoming war with Hitler will place England in grave danger. It’s the king’s duty to watch what is happening in the world and to do something about it.

**How do other people understand the position of king of England?**

The prime minister remarks to Bertie: “Does the king do what he wants? Or does he do what the people expect him to do?” In other words, it is the king’s job to serve the people, not to do whatever he wants. Britain needs a king its people can stand behind as Hitler’s threats increase, not only for British soil, but also for moral justice. Hitler is a leader who lacks moral fiber and will throw the world into a terrible war. Britain is unable to stand behind the Prince of Wales because of his immoral approach to life.

**How does the threat of war change perceptions of what it means to be king?**

The war is referred to as Bertie’s greatest test. World War II was very different from World War I in that the Allies saw their job as protecting the rest of the world from the evils of Hitler. It was just as much a war of morality as a war to save countries from being invaded.

5. **What was so important about the king’s speech for the British people?**

The British colonies were now not only connected by government, but also through technology. The radio speech by George VI helped the British people to be unified in their efforts to stop the war. The king addressed his people frankly, in their own homes via the radio, and without pomp and ceremony. Everyone stopped what they were doing to listen to his speech. The king also reminded his people to not sit idly by, and to call upon God to help them in their time of need. Poignantly, the king ends his speech: “With God’s help, we shall prevail.”

**CATHOLIC CONNECTIONS**

Read Exodus 4:1-17.

**What does Moses complain about to the Lord?**

When God asks Moses to go to Egypt and speak to the pharaoh, Moses complains that no one will listen to him because he is slow of speech.
How does God respond?
God gives Moses three signs to show that Moses is on a mission from Him. God responds to Moses’ complaint about his disability by reminding Moses that God Himself made human speech. He understands Moses’ disability and will give Moses the strength he needs to speak to the pharaoh.

What does God do to assist Moses in carrying out His will?
When Moses asks God to send someone else who is more capable of speaking to the pharaoh, God promises not only to assist him in speaking, but also to give Aaron to support Moses.

Think of other people in the Bible who suffered from a disability. How did they overcome their disabilities? What great things were they able to accomplish despite their disabilities?
Answers will vary.