

good night, and good luck.



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Study Questions

1. What do you learn from the opening scene about the era when this movie takes place? What are your clues?
2. What can you tell from the beginning about the relationship between these characters? What is their mood? What do you think they're doing?
3. In the opening and again throughout the movie, what part does the music play?
4. What do you know about Edward R. Murrow before he even says a word?
5. One of the lines in his speech is, "Our history will be what we make it." How does this relate to the people to whom he is speaking?
6. What is the mood in the country Oct. 14, 1953 when the next scene begins? How has Senator Joseph McCarthy played a role in this?
7. What do you think it was like to work in the news department of CBS in the 1950s? What are some of the scenes that show this?
8. The first time you meet Joe and Shirley, how do you know they are more than just business colleagues? Later, how do you learn about their relationship?
9. What are some clues that Murrow and his producer, Fred Friendly, agree about coverage of the McCarthy situation?
10. Who is Milo Radulovich? Why did Murrow and Friendly think it was important to cover his story?
11. What are some early signs that some at CBS don't totally agree with what Murrow and Friendly are doing?
12. How does the movie point out the contrast between Murrow's "See It Now" and his other program "Person to Person"? What does his boss mean when he says Murrow will have to do a lot of "Person to Persons" to make up for this?
13. What is CBS boss William Paley's first reason Murrow and Friendly shouldn't air the Milo Radulovich story?
14. What do others who work with them think about the controversial programs Murrow and Friendly are doing? How can you tell this?
15. What is the importance of the Don Hollenbeck subplot in the movie? What is Murrow's relationship to him? Why is the report of his death significant?
16. How can you tell Murrow, Friendly and their crew are somewhat nervous about airing the McCarthy program?
17. What are Paley's reasons for changing the program?
18. What is the effect of using the actual film footage of McCarthy, Radulovich, Annie Lee Moss and others?
19. Why do you think cigarettes and smoke seem to play such a major part in the movie? Why do you think the movie is in black and white?
20. Some critics say the movie ends too abruptly. Do you see any indication of what will happen in the future?

we will not walk in fear of one another

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Study Questions

1. What do you learn from the opening scene about the era when this movie takes place? What are your clues?
Possible answers could include hairstyles, clothing and eyeglass styles, prevalence of smoke and people smoking, the camera they use (a twin-lens reflex), the music.
2. What can you tell from the beginning about the relationship between these characters? What is their mood? What do you think they're doing?
You know this is an important/fancy event; they are laughing but at times serious; some of them are friends and have a photo taken together.
3. In the opening and again throughout the movie, what part does the music play?
The blues that Dianne Reeves sings sets the dark and smoky mood of the era and has sometimes significant lyrics ("Somewhere there's music" during the revelation of the Hollenbeck suicide, "I've Got My Eyes on You" right after the McCarthy program, etc.).
4. What do you know about Edward R. Murrow before he even says a word?
You see him smoking and looking intense. This is a contrast to the people in the audience who have been chatting and laughing. He is taking this seriously.

Just because your voice reaches halfway around the world...

5. One of the lines in his speech is, "Our history will be what we make it." How does this relate to the people to whom he is speaking?
The people in the audience are members of the Radio and Television News Directors Association, journalists in charge of news coverage at local stations. (Today RTNDA is open to all journalists in electronic media—www.rtna.org) Murrow says, "If there are any historians about 150 years from now [they will find on television] evidence of decadence, escapism and insulation from the realities of the world...." He is critical of what is happening then and challenging them to make a difference.
6. What is the mood in the country Oct. 14, 1953 when the next scene begins? How has Senator Joseph McCarthy played a role in this?
McCarthy blamed problems in the U.S. with infiltration of "200 card-carrying Communists" and his Senate committee conducted a series of investigations that had citizens afraid of what he would say. Murrow says this is dealing in "hearsay, rumor, gossip and slander" instead of "hard, ascertainable facts that could be backed with credible witnesses."
7. What do you think it's like to work in the news department of CBS in the 1950s? What are some of the scenes that show this?
The first scene shows the secretaries/assistants arriving and having work to do before they even take off their coats; sessions with Murrow, Friendly and their crew in the screening room and studio are intense and fast-paced as they watch film footage and discuss coverage; Murrow spends what appears to be late nights at his typewriter, at one point with Friendly asleep on the couch in his office; when things go well, they celebrate—applaud in the control booth after a good show, go out for a scotch and wait for the reviews afterward.
8. The first time you meet Joe and Shirley, how do you know they are more than just business colleagues? Later, how do you learn about their relationship?
Whispering about the loyalty oath CBS is requiring, kissing; other staffer says, "rules are made to be broken" (hint to the ban on marriage between employees); later scenes of them at home, getting ready, and Shirley reminds him not to wear his ring; still later they are in bed, discussing "What if we're wrong?" and deciding they are not wrong.
9. What are some clues that Murrow and his producer, Fred Friendly, agree about coverage of the McCarthy situation?
Murrow says with confidence he and Fred will pay for the ads when Mickelson says the advertiser will not; they know each other's traits ("Funny thing, Freddie, whenever you offer me a cigarette, I know you're lying."); there are additional comments like, "You know, it occurs to me we might not get away with this one." Although the close proximity during the actual program—Friendly at Murrow's right knee—may be necessary for prompting, etc., it is still a more physical connection than you might expect.
10. Who is Milo Radulovich? Why did Murrow and Friendly think it was important to cover his story?
He is an Air Force reservist in Michigan who was called a poor security risk because his father, who immigrated from Serbia and reads Serbian newspapers, and sister were said to be left-wing sympathizers. Radulovich is dismissed from the reserves. All this information was in a sealed envelope that no one saw, even though he was only "guilty by association." Murrow and Friendly see this as the "little picture" they can use to show the impact of McCarthy's scare tactics.
11. What are some early signs that some at CBS don't totally agree with what Murrow and Friendly are doing? Sig Mickelson tells Murrow he doesn't like the position he has put them in. They argue about balance and editorializing. Later he is standing in the doorway of the studio when Murrow says he has given the military a chance to present its side. Paley warns him about Alcoa not wanting to advertise the show. Although indirectly related, the corporation is also requiring employees to sign a loyalty oath to, as Joe Wershba puts it, "to CBS and to America." He says he will be fired if he doesn't sign it.
12. How does the movie point out the contrast between Murrow's "See It Now" and his other program "Person to Person"? What does his boss mean when he says Murrow will have to do a lot of "Person to Persons" to make up for this?
Murrow does not seem as engaged in his interview with Liberace, asking what he is doing and replying to some responses, "Uh huh" and "very pleasant." His interviewees appear to be "fluffy"—Liberace and Mickey Rooney and his bride. Mickelson tells him, after the Radulovich piece, he will have to interview Rin Tin Tin. (Although the movie does not indicate

...doesn't mean you are wiser than when it reached...

this, some of Murrow's interviews were with such people as Harry Truman and Robert F. Kennedy.) Afterwards, when Hollenbeck says, "Good show," he replies, "It pays the bills."

13. What is CBS boss William Paley's first reason Murrow and Friendly shouldn't air the Milo Radulovich story? At first, his concern is about the sponsor—Alcoa Aluminum had military contracts, and he says Alcoa won't pay for ads.
14. What do others who work with them think about the controversial programs Murrow and Friendly are doing? How can you tell this? Those in the booth applaud after programs; when Paley wants them to "clean house" to be sure no one who could be labeled Communist is on the crew, one reporter is willing to leave, although it is his ex-wife who might have had ties; Joe won't believe the contents of an envelope he receives from McCarthy aide Don Surine that allegedly has proof Murrow is a Communist; Hollenbeck even makes an on-air statement of support.
15. What is the importance of the Don Hollenbeck subplot in the movie? What is Murrow's relationship to him? Why is the report of his death significant? Hollenbeck has been accused already of being "pink" and having Communist sympathies, and Jack O'Brian of the New York Journal American has criticized him in his columns. Hollenbeck is concerned Paley will read this and fire him. He's especially vulnerable because his wife has left him (indicated in a conversation with Murrow - says he takes things "day to day"). He seeks out Murrow for reassurance and tries to joke about it ("I'm a pinko. I slant the news."), and Murrow tells him his wife should "see how good" he is now. After the March 9 show, he says he "wants to associate myself with this program and with what Ed Murrow has just said." At the bar later, he is worried about the reviews, and Shirley even tries to avoid reading one that criticizes him. In his on-air acknowledgement of Hollenbeck's death, Murrow says he was honest, "has been sick lately" and committed suicide. "That's not much of an obituary, but at least we got our facts straight, and it was brief. And that's all Don Hollenbeck would have asked."

16. How can you tell Murrow, Friendly and their crew are somewhat nervous about airing the McCarthy program? In the sound booth, someone says to be quiet, turn off the phones. Secretary's eyes show tension. Murrow's foot is tapping slightly. Friendly appears tense.
17. What are Paley's reasons for changing the program? He says "See It Now" is a costly program (reporters, cameramen, travel to other places, etc.), much more costly than the "\$64,000 Question" (ironic because of the game show scandals CBS faced later). He says he has to fight to keep a license with the same politicians Murrow criticizes on the show. He says viewers "want to enjoy themselves" and not view controversial shows.
18. What is the effect of using the actual film footage of McCarthy, Radulovich, Annie Lee Moss and others? From the movie creators' standpoint, it adds authenticity and does not require them to try to find actors who look and speak like McCarthy. Also, like Murrow and Friendly's reason for using footage on the program, it lessens the likelihood of slanting what occurred. From the viewers' standpoint, it brings history to the movie as well.
19. Why do you think cigarettes and smoke seem to play such a major part in the movie? Why do you think the movie is in black and white? This shows some of the reality of the era—people, especially in intense jobs, did smoke a lot—and Murrow, who eventually died of lung cancer, smoked constantly. The black and white plus the smoky scenes set a mood and emphasize this is another time in history. It adds a sense of mystery to what is happening. Television was also largely in black and white then.
20. Some critics say the movie ends too abruptly. Do you see any indication of what will happen in the future? The "story within the story" about McCarthy ends with Radulovich being reinstated into the reserves. Murrow and Friendly react to Paley's message that "See It Now" will no longer be prime time and will be an hour long but not every week by saying they will "go down swinging." Friendly suggests their first show in the new format be about the downfall of television. Murrow's speech ends by encouraging his audience to make television more than "merely wires and lights and a box." He adds with his trademark show ending, as if knowing this won't be easy: "Good night, and good luck."