

## IMITATION GAME

After having watched the movie, let's deal with it in class!

### 1. First, you should be able to tell about...

- ☛ Turing's task
- ☛ the different time periods in the movie
- ☛ the race against the clock
- ☛ Turing's qualities
- ☛ Today's world without Turing's genius?

2. Now work in groups and draw the portraits of the following major characters: Commander Alistair Denniston, John Cairncross, Alan Turing, and Joan Clarke. Focus on their qualities and defects, and their roles in the unfolding of the plot. Get ready to report to the class.

3. Read these articles. List or highlight the words or expressions that help you define the points of view of both journalists. Do they share the same opinion about the film?

4.  You're a journalist working for IMDB ( a movie website). Imitation Game has just come out. Write down your article. You must either entice the public into going out and seeing this movie if you think it's worthy, or avoiding it, owing to many downsides.

5.  Work in groups of 3. Act up a dialogue between Morten Tyldum, the film director, a historian who is a leading expert on the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, and a journalist. Imagine the conversation is broadcast on TV just a few days before the Oscar ceremony.

The imitation Game :

- Trailer : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5CjKEFb-sM>
- Website : <http://theimitationgamemovie.com/>
- Film review : <http://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-imitation-game>



## Portrayal of *Imitation Game* 'baddy' is inaccurate, says family

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The relatives of Alastair Denniston, the commander at Bletchley Park where Alan Turing cracked the Enigma code, say that the biopic film makes an 'unwarranted sideswipe' at him

The family of Alastair Denniston, the commander at Bletchley Park who oversaw Alan Turing, have complained that the portrayal of him in biopic *The Imitation Game* is inaccurate and overly harsh, and that they are "deeply offended" by it.

The film follows Turing's work as he attempted to decipher the Germans' Enigma codes - as well as the friction between him and his superiors like Denniston. In a letter written to the *Daily Telegraph*, Denniston's grandchildren and god-daughter write: "While the much-acclaimed film *The Imitation Game* rightly acknowledges Alan Turing's vital role in the war effort, it is sad that it does so by taking an unwarranted sideswipe at Cdr Alastair Denniston, portraying him as a hectoring character who merely hindered Turing's work."

Granddaughter Judith Finch further asserted that Denniston "is completely misrepresented. They needed a baddy and they've put him in there without researching the truth about the contribution he made." [...]

In a response to the *Telegraph*, the film's writer Graham Moore argued that *The Imitation Game* merely shows the "natural conflict of people working extremely hard under unimaginable pressure"; he paid tribute to Denniston as being "one of the great heroes of Bletchley Park".

The film has been under fire for other inaccuracies. Historian Alex von Tunzelman, writing for the *Guardian*, accused the film of inventing a "wholly imaginary and deeply offensive" sequence in which Turing is blackmailed by Soviet spy John Cairncross.

Turing's biographer Andrew Hodges has meanwhile said he was "alarmed by the inaccuracies" in the film, saying that the Cairncross scenes are "ludicrous" and that Turing's relationship with codebreaker Joan Clarke, played by Keira Knightley, is overplayed.



## The Imitation Game review - an engrossing and poignant thriller



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Benedict Cumberbatch's excellent performance gives added complexity to a fine account of the life of codebreaker Alan Turing .

"Are you paying attention?" breathes Benedict Cumberbatch's Alan Turing in the opening moments of this handsomely engrossing and poignantly melancholic thriller from Norwegian director Morten Tyldum. There's little chance of doing anything else as Tyldum, who directed the tonally divergent *Headhunters*, serves up rollicking code-cracking wartime thrills laced with an astringent cyanide streak - a tale of plucky British ingenuity underpinned by an acknowledgement that Turing, as Gordon Brown put it, "deserved so much better".

Granted a posthumous royal pardon for his "gross indecency" conviction only last year, the mathematician and AI pioneer changed the course of the war only to suffer the indignities of arrest and "chemical castration", dying in 1954 having apparently taken a bite from a poisoned apple.

Yet *The Imitation Game* is not a tragedy - rather, it is a celebration of Turing's extraordinary achievements, a populist yarn that makes an admirably firm fist of establishing its spiky subject as a heroic outsider. As the mantra from Graham Moore's catchy script puts it: "Sometimes it is the people whom no one imagines anything of who do the things that no one can imagine."

Reluctantly recruited by Commander Alastair Denniston (a witheringly supercilious Charles Dance) to join the country's top minds at Bletchley Park in 1939, Cumberbatch's appropriately indecipherable "odd duck" bumbles his way into Churchill's confidence, securing  funding to build a proto-computer (or "Bombe") to crack the Germans' daily changing Enigma code.

Meanwhile, plucky Cambridge maths grad Joan Clarke (Keira Knightley) uses her crossword-solving skills to earn a place on Turing's team and (unusually) in his affections. Turing struggles impotently to decode the signals of human interaction, the secret of his sexuality and the spectre of a lost childhood friend becoming talismanic ghosts in the machine.

Expanding upon the temporal shifts structure of Hugh Whitmore's 1986 play *Breaking the Code* (adapted by the BBC in 1996, with Derek Jacobi reprising his starring role as Turing), Graham Moore's dextrous screenplay skips between three distinct periods: Turing's schooldays, wherein he tells close friend Christopher that people are like cryptographic puzzles; his time at Bletchley park, and the nail-biting adventures of the celebrated "Hut 8"; and the aftermath of the 1952 break-in at Turing's Manchester home, which alerted the police to his homosexuality, with appalling consequences.

Historical liberties taken in the pursuit of drama range from the inevitable to the controversial (biographer Andrew Hodges, on whose book this is based, has complained that "they have built up the

relationship with Joan", suggesting a coyness about Turing's true sexuality), with occasional false steps of all too convenient overstatement (placing the brother of a key code-breaker on board a doomed ship).

Yet for the most part, truth is sacrificed for the greater good of engaging cinema; Turing's real-life "Bombe" may have been encased in a neat Bakelite box, but the audience needs to see its wires spreading out like entrails, mapping the complexities of its creator's mind.

Crucially, Tyldum does not underplay the romance that blossoms between Alan and his machine, whose lovelorn nickname suggests that it has somehow become his bride of Frankenstein ("You are a monster!" Joan tells him when angry). The film's very title refers to a game posited by Turing to deduce whether one was speaking to a man, woman or machine - a forerunner of the Voight-Kampff test from *Blade Runner* to which this owes a greater debt than such apparently comparable fare as 2001's *Enigma*.

Just as Deckard fell for the android Rachael, so Turing is enraptured not by people but by an artificial intelligence. Both he and his machine are struggling to understand coded communications for which they have no instinctive key, strangers in a strange land, searching for a common language.

With such an alienated antihero it would be easy for *The Imitation Game* to fall into either arch chilliness or mechanical contrivance. Plaudits, then, to Cumberbatch for making his protagonist complex rather than just complicated. While the lines of the film are bold, clear and concise, Cumberbatch keeps Turing's true motives and emotions so enigmatically concealed that at one point you wonder whether he really *is* a Soviet spy. Top marks, too, to rising star Alex Lawther, who is quite brilliant as the young Alan, perfectly paving the way for the tortured insularity of Cumberbatch's performance.

While Turing remains enticingly unreadable, his coterie of friends and colleagues is rendered in immediately identifiable vignettes, precisely cast, efficiently played. The mercurial Mark Strong is terrific as Major General Stewart Menzies, the *éminence grise* who intertwines menace and magnanimity with mesmerising ease. Matthew Goode is on home ground as "bit of a cad" Hugh Alexander, with whom everyone is understandably infatuated.

As for Knightley, while her role may tend somewhat toward brainy posh-girl caricature (the exclamation "Oh!" becomes "Ay-o!"), she manages to breathe warmth and humanity into the character of Joan, a likable foil to the impenetrable Turing, her affectionate gaze mediating our response to his perpetually unbreakable enigma.