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In the teen-film genre, the teenage experience is often defined by the following common elements:

- fashion
- pop music
- an adult – teenager conflict
- conflict between social and ethnic groups
- an exploration of issues around sexuality and romance.

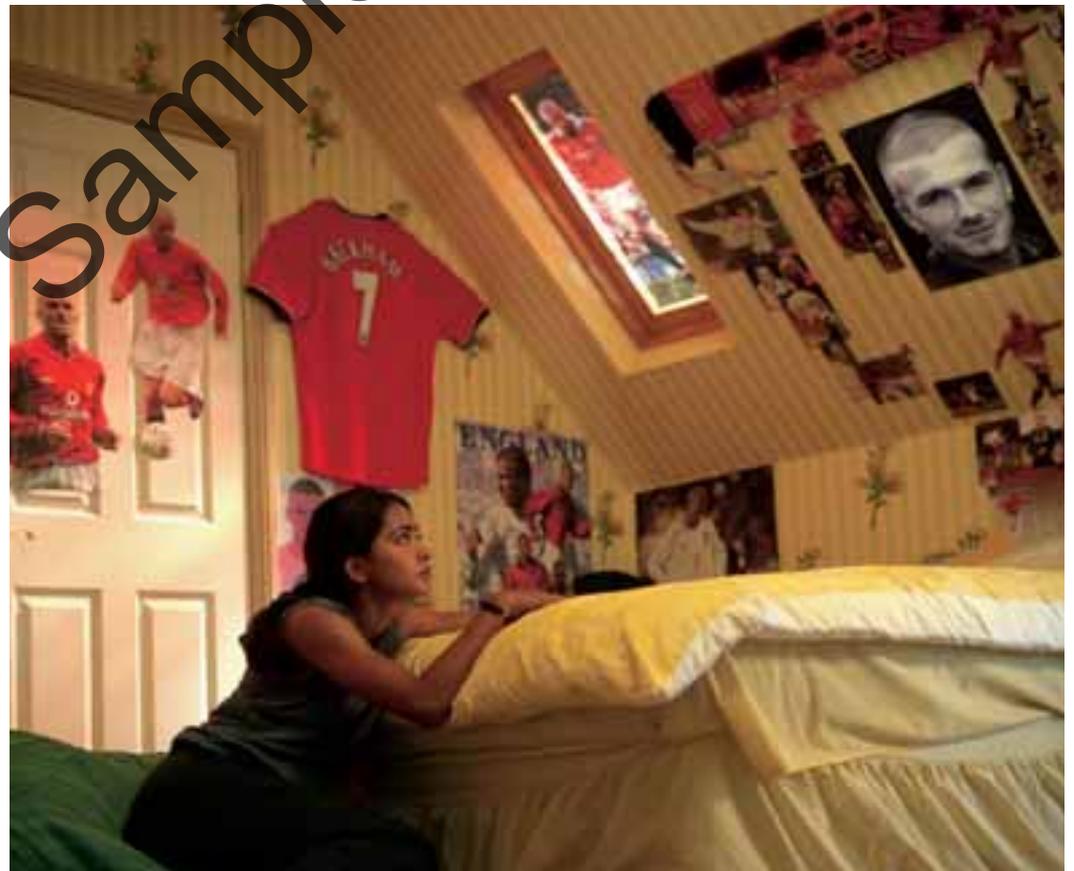
School, cars and parents are the foundations of a teenager's world in Hollywood teen films. This is transformed in *Bend It Like Beckham* so that the soccer club and family take the place of the school and cars. Jess does not find her true love at school, instead she meets him through soccer.

Recent teen films include: *Mean Girls*, *Honey*, *Save the Last Dance*, *She's All That*, *Centre Stage*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *Clueless*, *The Princess Diaries* and *Looking for Alibrandi*.

## Voice-over

Voice-overs are a common feature of teen films. The story is told from one character's perspective directly to us, the audience. This approach is the film equivalent of first person narrative in literature. The character whose voice we hear controls the story. It is their version of events that we get to see, and we understand their world and the people in it solely from this character's perspective. The voice-over device takes us into that character's confidence, as if we are their best friend. This formal technique enhances the process of identification with the character and their life.

We are introduced to Jess through her fantasies of being a professional soccer player and later we hear her thoughts through this use of voice-over as she 'prays' to her poster of David Beckham.



Jess prays to her hero, David Beckham.



### Teen films uncovered

1. Think of your favourite film from one of the film genres listed on page 4. Now describe the plot, the setting, the characters, especially the main characters, their family and friends. Name the actors and list other films they have appeared in – are they similar films? Consider the age, ethnicity and physical appearance of the main characters. What do you think the message of this film is?
2. Is there such a thing as an ‘average’ teenager? Compare the representation of teenagers in *Bend It Like Beckham* with a recent Hollywood teen film and with your real life. Divide into three groups. One group will focus on *Bend It Like Beckham*, one group will focus on a recent teen film that all group members have seen and one group will draw on their own life experience. Each group should consider the following questions:
  - What are the differences in settings?
  - Describe the main characters in terms of their age, race, friends, family members, their houses, and their interests.
  - How do they get about? Car? Bike? On foot? Public Transport?
  - What do they eat? Do they have dinner each night with their families?
  - What do they do for fun?
  - What do they wear to school? What kind of clothes do they wear outside of school?
  - What kind of music do they listen to? Where do they listen to music? In their bedrooms? At parties?
3. Choose a genre from the list on page 4. Design a poster for an imaginary film with the working title *The Romance Movie*, *The Horror Movie* etc. Think of a catchy title for the film and include in your poster as many genre elements as you can to make it the perfect genre film.



Love  
in a time of  
ZOMBIES



# Plot

In *Bend It Like Beckham* the main plot is the attainment of Jess's soccer dreams and the reconciliation of her family to these dreams. The subplots in the film include Pinky's dream to be married, Jules's dream of playing soccer professionally, Paula's suspicion that Jules is a lesbian and will never get married, the romance between Jess and Joe, the friendship between Jules and Jess, Joe's reconciliation with his father and his career choice and the fate of the Hounslow Harriers.

**plot:** all of the events of the story that are presented to us on screen. There can be multiple plot lines in one film.



Multicultural Britain is explored throughout the plot.

We are introduced to Jess daydreaming about playing for Manchester United with David Beckham. The euphoria of kicking the winning goal is quashed by her mother's strong opposition to her daughter's very 'unlady-like' career goals.

Jess's household is a flurry of activity as her family prepares for her twenty-two-year-old sister Pinky's wedding to Teetu, Pinky's long time Indian-Sikh boyfriend. Jess does not share her family's excitement about the upcoming wedding, and rather than shop for shoes and pretty clothes, Jess sneaks out to play soccer in the park with her cousin Tony and his friends.

Jules, an attractive English girl, sees Jess playing in the park and invites her to play with her team, the Hounslow Harriers. Jules tells Jess about the possibility of playing soccer professionally in the American league, and helps devise the story that Jess has a summer job so that she can sneak out and play football.

Jules is a striker like Jess, and also shares a frustrated relationship with her mother who wants Jules to be more feminine. When Mrs Bhamra scolds Jess for playing soccer in the park with boys and getting too brown, rather than performing traditional feminine domestic tasks, Jess rolls her eyes. When Paula, Jules's mother takes her shopping and tries to make her buy feminine bras or make her wear skirts instead of pants, Jules shares Jess's frustration.

Apart from their love of soccer and frustration with their mothers, Jess and Jules also share a love of their soccer coach, Joe. As their coach it is not appropriate for Joe to be romantically involved with either girl, and as Joe is not an Indian-Sikh, Jess believes her family will think it is not appropriate for her to be romantically involved with him.

Joe tries to reason with the Bhamras to allow Jess to play soccer, but scarred by his experience playing cricket when he first arrived in England, Mr Bhamra is opposed to it and declares it an unsuitable occupation for an Indian-Sikh woman. Mrs Bhamra opposes it too. After leaving the house Joe encourages Jess to play soccer no matter what.

When Teetu's mother sees Jess and Jules at the bus stop she mistakes Jules for a boy and declares that her son will not marry into a family with such shameful behaviour. When she calls the wedding off Pinky is devastated.

Jess sneaks out to play soccer in Germany and Pinky covers for her. In that trip Jess loses a match, her best friend and her parents' respect. After missing the goal in the penalty shoot-out, Jess loses the match for her team. Later that night Jules catches Joe and Jess in an intimate stance and feels betrayed by her best friend. The next day Mr Bhamra sees Jess's photo in the paper and catches her out in her lie.

Jess goes to Jules's house to apologise and explain her feelings for Joe, but Jules will not forgive her. At the semi-final Jess is given a red card for her response to racial taunts and Mr Bhamra catches Jess and Joe in an intimate embrace. This shatters any plans of being able to play soccer again and her love for Joe even horrifies Pinky. All of the Bhamras feel alone and that their dreams have been shattered.

Teetu's mother changes her mind and the wedding is on again. The wedding is re-scheduled for the day of the soccer finals when the scouts from the US will be present. Jules forgives Jess and both Jules and Joe separately plead with Jess to play in the match. Jess is torn between honouring her family and loyalty to her team and soccer dreams, and reluctantly chooses to honour her family and attend the wedding.

During the wedding Mr Bhamra is struck by the contrast in Pinky's happiness and Jess's despondency. He realises the error in his judgement and that he has to let Jess take a chance on her dream of being a professional soccer player. He tells her to play in the soccer final and then return to the wedding. Tony drives Jess to the match as she changes in the back seat.

United as best friends on the soccer field Jess and Jules play strongly together in the second half of the final. Jess scores the winning goal in a penalty shoot-out and after the match both Jess and Jules are offered soccer scholarships to US colleges.

→ Paula witnesses Jess and Jules's hug and mistakes it for a lesbian act. Distressed, she offers to drive Jules back to Pinky's wedding where she ends up making a comical and hysterical scene. In this scene all of Jess's family discover where Jess has been and what her true love really is – soccer.

To enable Jess to go to the US to study and play soccer, Tony proposes a sham marriage. At this point Jess realises that lying is not the answer and she decides to communicate with her parents with respect and as adults. In this way she is able to convince her parents that the right thing to do is to let her go.

The film ends with Jess and Jules leaving for the United States and seeing David Beckham at the airport, suggesting the fulfilment of the daydream that opened the narrative. In the following scenes, everyone has moved forward with their lives – Pinky is heavily pregnant, Joe plays cricket with Mr Bhamra, Jess is in a photo of her Santa Clara soccer team, and Paula proudly holds up a Santa Clara jumper.

## questions activities tasks

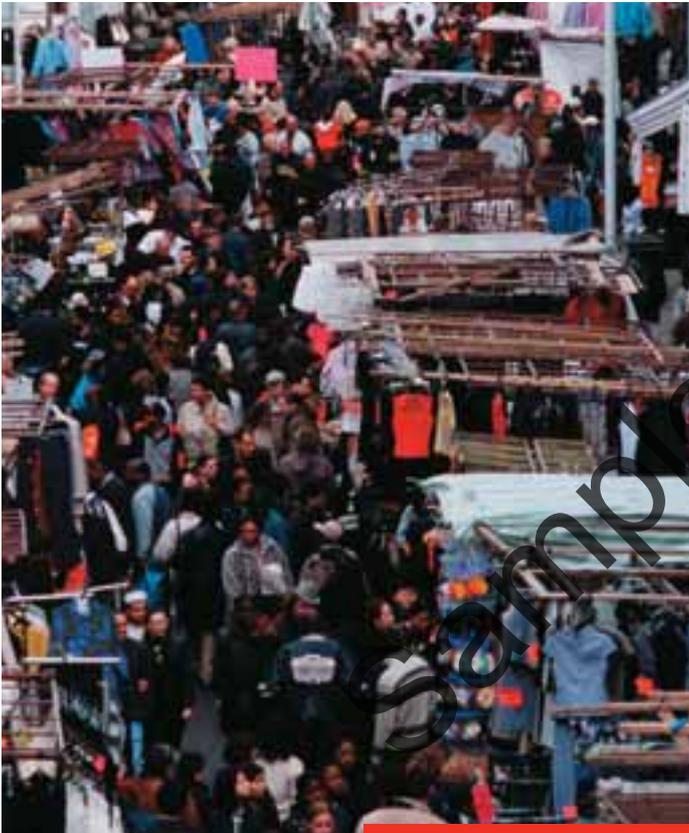
Complete this wordsearch.

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X	V	R	E	D	C	A	R	D	C	T	W	E	L	V	E	L	B	D	R	V
F	P	I	N	K	Y	S	W	E	D	D	I	N	G	X	K	Y	B	V	I	F

airport, America, chapatti, cricket, David Beckham, family, Germany, Hounslow Harriers, honour, Indian, knee, loyalty, Manchester United, Mel C, Paxton, penalty shot, Pinky's wedding, racism, red, red card, Sikh, soccer boots, Sparty Spice, team, Teetu, twelve

# Torn between two cultures

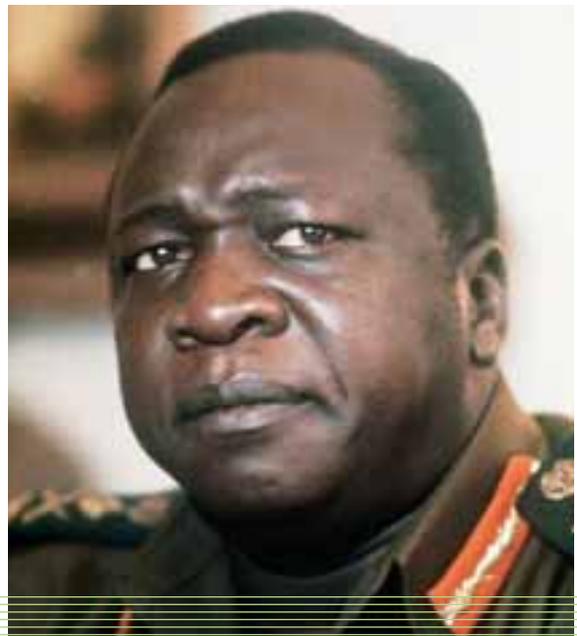
From the title of the film to the narrative focus, Gurinder Chadha sought to make, in her words, 'the most mainstream film imaginable'. She did so by capitalising on the appeal of David Beckham, a global icon, to sell the universal themes of this film – teenage rites of passage, love, friendship, honour, loyalty and the conflict between family responsibility and individual dreams.



Multicultural London, England

There are just over fifty-nine million people in the UK. Seventy percent of the UK's population at the 2002 census was identified as white and Christian. This means that thirty per cent of the UK's population – just under one third – is not white and Christian. Four per cent of the UK's population is Sikh – that's 301 000 people.

*Bend It Like Beckham* is set in Southall, England. This is an area of London with a large Sikh community, and where Gurinder Chadha grew up above her parents' shop. Like Jess's parents, Gurinder's parents are also Sikhs. Gurinder's parents were living in Kenya in the 1970s when Idi Amin, an African dictator, decreed that all Asians were to be expelled from Uganda. This decree created a wave of fear that spread from Uganda across the entire continent, so much so that Gurinder's parents feared for their lives even in neighbouring Kenya. This fear motivated the Chadhas' move to England. Gurinder's parents' experience forms the basis for Jess's parents' experience – in *Bend It Like Beckham* the Bhamras fled Nairobi to escape religious persecution. For the Bhamras and for Gurinder's parents, England is a second home, but for Jess, Pinky, Teetu, Tony and Gurinder Chadha, it is the only home they have ever known.



Idi Amin was the military dictator of Uganda from 1971–1979. On 9 August 1972, he gave Uganda's Asian community ninety days to leave the country, whether they were citizens or not. He was a brutal dictator, who ordered the deaths of many of his fellow Ugandans. Estimates vary – between 100 000 and 500 000 Ugandans died under his regime. For more information, go to [www.hi.com.au/engproj](http://www.hi.com.au/engproj) and follow the link to Idi Amin.