

A New Angle Into an Old Story

[Scott Myers](#)

Looking for your next spec script subject? It just might be waiting for you in a history book.



Benedict Cumberbatch ("The Imitation Game") and the real Alan Turing

Hollywood has always had a thing for making movies from preexisting content and intellectual properties. It seems as though during the last decade, that interest and evolved into an obsession. Hollywood screenwriters have taken note of this with several movies using a similar approach to historical figures or events: Find a new way into an old story.

Here is a partial list of movies from the last decade or so with their plot summaries:

12 Years a Slave (2013): In the antebellum United States, Solomon Northup, a free black man from upstate New York, is abducted and sold into slavery.

1917 (2019): April 6th, 1917. As a regiment assembles to wage war deep in enemy territory, two soldiers are assigned to race against time and deliver a message that will stop 1,600 men from walking straight into a deadly trap.

The King's Speech (2010): The story of King George VI, his impromptu ascension to the throne of the British Empire in 1936, and the speech therapist who helped the unsure monarch overcome his stammer.

Lincoln (2012): As the American Civil War continues to rage, America's president struggles with continuing carnage on the battlefield as he fights with many inside his own cabinet on the decision to emancipate the slaves.

The Imitation Game (2014): During World War II, the English mathematical genius Alan Turing tries to crack the German Enigma code with help from fellow mathematicians while attempting to come to terms with his troubled private life.

Selma (2014): chronicle of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s campaign to secure equal voting rights via an epic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965.

Bridge of Spies (2015): During the Cold War, an American lawyer is recruited to defend an arrested Soviet spy in court,

and then help the CIA facilitate an exchange of the spy for the Soviet captured American U2 spy plane pilot, Francis Gary Powers.

Hidden Figures (2016): The story of a team of female African-American mathematicians who served a vital role in NASA during the early years of the U.S. space program.

The Post (2017): A cover-up spanning four U.S. Presidents pushes the country's first female newspaper publisher and her editor to join an unprecedented battle between press and government.

Jackie (2016): Following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy fights through grief and trauma to regain her faith, console her children, and define her husband's historic legacy.

Each of these explores a subject which is more or less known to the general public. From a marketing standpoint, that is helpful because there is a pre-awareness which can translate into a potential audience. But it's the hook which provides a new way into an old story:

World War I told through the perspective of two young soldiers...

King George's struggles with a stutter told through the perspective of his therapist...

The saga of Francis Gary Powers told through the

perspective of the American lawyer who negotiated his release...

The early years of NASA told through the perspective of three Black women...

The Pentagon Papers told through the perspective of the female owner of the Washington Post...

The assassination of John F. Kennedy told through the perspective of his wife Jackie.

The common thread: Find a unique perspective through which to tell the story. That's the hook, that's the angle which makes an old story new.

Thus, it's no surprise that this was announced yesterday: [Keira Knightley To Star In 20th Century Studios' 'Boston Strangler'](#).

Based on the infamous Boston Strangler murders, this is the true story of Loretta McLaughlin, the first reporter to connect the murders and break the story of the Strangler. She and fellow reporter Jean Cole challenged the sexism of the early 1960s to report on the city's most notorious serial killer and worked tirelessly to keep women informed. Loretta pursued the story at great personal risk and uncovered corruption that cast doubt on the true identity of the Boston Strangler.

How did this project originate? With its screenwriter Matt Ruskin.

Boston-native Ruskin researched McLaughlin and Cole by tracking down their families and their actual research from the early '60s.

Old story: The Boston Strangler. New angle: The story is told through the perspective of two female reporters in the 1960s.

Screenwriters are mining this approach to historical figures and events. You can, too. What new angle could you bring to an old story to create something which will hook a buyer's interest?