



How Elvis and Nixon Made Photographic History

Discussion > Advanced 9



Exercise 1 – Vocabulary

deck out	To decorate, to dress up.
[phrasal verb]	<i>Ex: The students were decked out in their best clothes at the prom.</i>

chronicle	To record events in the order in which they happened.
[verb]	<i>Ex: There are many sites around the world that chronicle this war.</i>

catch the eye	To attract (someone's) attention.
[phrase]	<i>Ex: That red car has really caught my eye!</i>



sit-down	A formal meeting.
[noun]	<i>Ex: The Prime-minister agreed to a sit-down with the President on Friday.</i>

undeterred	If somebody is undeterred by something, they do not allow it to stop them from doing something.
[adjective]	<i>Ex: She was undeterred by the difficulty of the trail and hiked all the way to the top of the mountain.</i>

hatch	To create a plan or an idea, especially in secret.
[verb]	<i>Ex: Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington.</i>



Exercise 2 – Reading

Read the text aloud with your tutor and discuss the key points.

How Elvis and Nixon Made Photographic History

It is undeniably one of the most famous images of the 20th century: Elvis Presley, “the King of Rock ‘n’ Roll,” shaking the hand of President Richard Nixon in the Oval Office of the White House.

Looking at the decked-out-in-gold rock star next to the conservative U.S. president makes us wonder: How did these two men get together?

The picture, part of a collection chronicling the unlikely Presley-Nixon meeting 46 years ago, has long been the most popular snapshot in the U.S. National Archives.

It is the one that most viewers choose to look at, ponder on, and purchase copies of — as opposed to other timeless shots, such as the famous kiss between a sailor and a nurse at Times Square that celebrated the end of WWII, or astronaut Neil Armstrong planting the American flag on the moon.



Almost half a century later, the shot caught the eye and captured the imagination of filmmaker Liza Johnson, who re-created the bizarre encounter in her new insightful comedy, *Elvis & Nixon*.

“It is not a jokey comedy, but nevertheless, it is without question an absurd situation,” she said. “You know, the coolest rock ‘n’ roll guy and, arguably, our least cool president that we’ve had — that their spheres would come together, there is just no way around the kind of absurdity around that.”

On a December morning in 1970, the King of Rock ‘n’ Roll flew to Washington, D.C., with his buddy Jerry Schilling, intending to meet the president of the United States. During the flight, Presley wrote a six-page letter explaining to Nixon that he wanted, for the sake of American youth, to help in the war against drugs.

What makes the story so intriguing, Johnson says, is looking at it through the lens of popular culture 46 years ago, and realizing how uncommon it was to mix politics with entertainment.

After Presley hand-delivered the letter to Nixon’s guards, White House staffers convinced the president that a sit-down with Presley during an election year could generate good PR, but Nixon was in no mood to humor the legendary rocker.



“He [Nixon] didn’t even understand why he should meet Elvis,” the filmmaker said.

Undeterred, Schilling and Nixon’s staffers regrouped to hatch a deal: Presley would sign a personal autograph for the president’s daughter Julie in exchange for face time with Nixon.

“And for me,” said Johnson, “sitting here in the present, to think about how much it has changed, the relationship between entertainment, culture, and political culture, between then and now, it’s huge!”

Elvis & Nixon encapsulates that defining moment when the love affair between politicians and entertainers started in American history.



Exercise 3 – Discussion

Discuss the following questions with your tutor.

1. What do you think about Elvis Presley's idea to help in the war against drugs?
2. Does the entertainment industry have a link to politics in your country? If so, please explain.
3. Do you think that entertainers have a more direct link to the people than politicians? Why or why not?
4. In what ways is the experience of watching a movie in a cinema different from watching a movie at home?
5. What kind of movies do you prefer (comedies, thrillers, action movies, horror movies, etc.)?
6. In what ways has the entertainment business changed in the last 50 years?
7. How do you think the entertainment business will evolve in the next 50 years?
8. If you could, would you ever be an entertainer? Why? Why not?