



**A** Warm up

What's happening in each of the photos? How would you survive or escape in each situation?



## B Vocabulary

1. Match the words from the Academic Word List with their definitions.

- a) chaos                    \_\_\_ a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention
- b) destruction           \_\_\_ an occurrence of wild and usually destructive behavior
- c) crisis                    \_\_\_ well-known for being bad
- d) dwell on                \_\_\_ to use (something, such as an event or situation) in a way to make money
- e) infamous                \_\_\_ complete confusion and disorder
- f) capitalize on           \_\_\_ something that is so commonly used in books, stories, etc., that it is no longer effective
- g) cliché                    \_\_\_ the act or process of destroying something
- h) rampage                \_\_\_ to think or talk about (something) for a long time

## C Check your understanding

After reading the article, answer the following questions:

1. When did disaster films first become popular?
2. What are some conventions of disaster films?
3. Besides the disaster itself, what do disaster movies focus on?
4. What kind of disasters are usually portrayed in disaster movies (7 types):
5. What are the problems with some newer disaster films?

*Disaster flick conventions:*

- large casts, many characters
- a regular guy becomes a hero to lead other characters to safety
- special effects are important
- an evil or selfish character is an early victim
- not only the disaster, but the effects of the disaster of characters is shown

*Disaster types*

- natural disasters
- big accidents
- apocalyptic events
- epidemics
- rampaging creatures
- nuclear war
- alien invasions

# Disaster Flicks

The 1998 blockbuster *Titanic* broke box office records with its story of love and loss. But this wasn't just a romance film; Jack and Rose's love story was told along with the true story of the most \_\_\_\_\_ ocean accident of all time.

Disaster films, a sub-genre of adventure films, first became popular in the 1970s. *Airport* (1970), *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and *Earthquake* (1974) were all big hits from this decade. These movies had big budgets and all-star casts, and were noted for their visual and special effects.

Large-scale special effects continue to be an important part of modern disaster films. But now, thanks to computer generated effects, audiences are often shown the \_\_\_\_\_ of famous cities or landmarks. Other conventions of the sub-genre include huge casts of stars, a hero to lead the struggle to survive, and many plot-lines affecting multiple characters. In many cases, an 'evil' or 'selfish' individual is one of the first victims of the disaster.

These movies usually start with a \_\_\_\_\_ that may or may not develop into a complete disaster. These disasters can take on many different forms - either man-made or natural, and they can exist locally or globally. The most common types of disasters in films include:

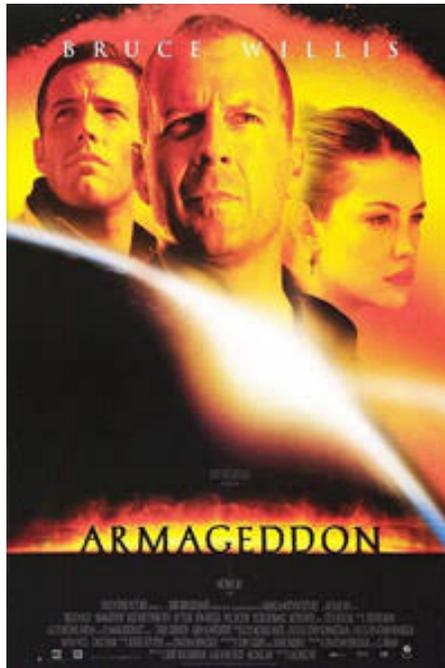
- **natural disasters** (*Twister* 1996),
- **accidents** (*Titanic* 1998)
- **apocalyptic** (*Armageddon* 1998),
- **epidemics** (*The Andromeda Strain* 1971, *Outbreak* 1995)

- **creatures on a \_\_\_\_\_** (*The Birds* 1963, *Arachnophobia* 1990)
- **nuclear war** (*The Day After* 1983)
- **alien invasions** (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 1951, *Independence Day* 1996)

Along with showing the disaster, these films also focus on the \_\_\_\_\_ surrounding the disaster, including efforts for survival and the effects of the disaster upon the main characters and their families. But these movies rarely \_\_\_\_\_ the dozens, hundreds or thousands of other victims who die in the disaster.

These nameless victims are similar to the minions in action films - the audience isn't supposed to care very much about them, but instead cheer for the main heroes to survive the disaster.

Recently, many studios are trying to \_\_\_\_\_ the disaster film trend. This has led to many bad disaster movies with weak plots, impossible circumstances (and bad science), and poor acting from actors playing \_\_\_\_\_ characters. Examples of these "so-bad-they're-good" movies include *Snakes on a Plane* (2006) and *Sharknado* (2013).



## D Iconic Scene

### 1. Watch the following scene from the disaster flick *The Towering Inferno* (1974).

In this scene, a fire has just started in a brand new skyscraper - the tallest in the world. The skyscraper's designer (Doug) calls the building owner (Mr. Duncan) who is hosting a party on the top floor of the building. Doug tries to warn him of the danger, but Mr. Duncan seems to be more concerned about impressing his party's guests...

**Mr. Duncan:** Yeah Doug... We were getting worried about you. Susan is here, Senator Parker... The mayor and his wife. Everyone wants to know why the worlds greatest architect isn't here.

**Doug:** Never mind about that. Will Giddings has been pretty badly burned.

**Mr. Duncan:** Will Giddings burned?

**Doug:** I've already got an ambulance coming, but you better think about getting those people up there with you and yourself down on the ground floor. What for?! We've got a fire here! Well, I think it's under control, but...

**Mr. Duncan:** Well then, why the urgency?

**Doug:** Urgency? Hey Doug, if that fire was caused by fluky wiring in this building, We could get fires breaking out everywhere.

**Mr. Duncan:** Doug, I think you're over reacting. Now I feel sorry for Will Giddings, but he will be taken care of. But I am not going to concern myself with a fire in the storage room on 81 because it can't possibly affect us up here. Not in this building. Now have someone call me when the fire department arrives. In the meantime, get in your dinner jacket and come up and join the party. Now come on.

### 2. Prediction

1. What are your impressions of the two characters in this scene? Are you more sympathetic towards one?
2. What do you think will happen to these characters?