Mr. Smith Goes to Washington is an 1939 comedy/drama film starring James Stewart, about one man's effect on American politics. It was directed by Frank Capra, who would soon be more famous for the Christmas favorite “It’s a Wonderful Life” (also starring Stewart). Mr. Smith Goes to Washington was controversial when it was released for its depiction of corruption in American government, but also successful at the box office, and made Stewart a major movie star. Mr. Smith Goes to Washington was nominated for 11 Academy Awards, winning for Best Screenplay.

Plot Overview
The governor of an unnamed state, Hubert "Happy" Hopper has to pick a replacement for deceased U.S. Senator Sam Foley. Pulling Hopper’s strings is the crooked political “boss” of the state, Jim Taylor. Based on a coin toss, Hopper picks Jefferson Smith, the head of the Boy Rangers, to head to the US Senate. Smith is taken under the wing of the publicly esteemed, but secretly crooked, Senator Joseph Paine who was Smith's late father's oldest and best friend. The unforgiving Washington press quickly labels Smith a bumpkin, with no business being a senator. Paine, to keep Smith busy, suggests he propose a bill.

Smith comes up with legislation that would authorize the federal government to create a national boys' camp. However, the proposed campsite is already part of a dam-building scheme included in a Public Works bill framed by the Taylor political machine and supported by Senator Paine. This sets up the movie’s central conflict—honest, patriotic, and naïve Jefferson Smith versus the corrupt and cynical Taylor and Paine. Taylor and Paine try to discredit and humiliate Smith, but Smith fights back on the floor of the US Senate. Who will win when “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington”?

Cast of Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Role Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson Smith</td>
<td>Main character, goes to Washington as Senator of his state</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Joseph Paine</td>
<td>The other Senator from “the state”, corrupt.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governor Hubert &quot;Happy&quot; Hopper</td>
<td>Corrupt governor of “the state”—controlled by Jim Taylor’s political machine. Sends Mr. Smith to Washington</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chick McGann</td>
<td>Reporter—represents the press’ attitudes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Paine</td>
<td>Paine’s daughter, potential love interest.</td>
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<td>Clarissa Saunders</td>
<td>Smith’s cynical aide and secretary who comes to believe in Smith—potential love interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim Taylor</td>
<td>Powerful and wealthy political “boss”—runs “the state” behind the scenes. Corrupt.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diz Moore</td>
<td>Smith’s Press Secretary; friend to Clarissa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ma Smith</td>
<td>Smith’s ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President of the Senate</td>
<td>Presides over the Senate and comes to believe in Smith’s efforts</td>
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Mr. Smith Goes to Washington Questions

1. Who died at the start of the movie?

2. Who is Joseph Paine?

3. Who is Jim Taylor?

4. Who is the initial choice for senator? How does the press respond?

5. How does the governor decide who will be senator?

6. What is the relationship between Jefferson Smith and Senator Paine?

7. How does Mr. Smith react to Washington?

8. Contrast the reaction of Mr. Smith to seeing the capital with the reaction of those with him.

9. Why is Mr. Smith REALLY in Washington? What is he SUPPOSED to do?

10. How does Saunders feel about Mr. Smith initially? Predict what will happen later.

11. Why does Mr. Smith go around punching reporters in the mouth?

12. What do reporters tell him at the press club?

13. How did Mr. Smith feel about his position at the start of the movie? How does he feel about it after the press club?

14. How does Washington “look” now?

15. How long does Mr. Smith’s filibuster last?
16. What media is used in the movie to tell people what is going on?

17. What is the “Jim Taylor Machine?”

18. At the end, why does Senator Paine confess?

19. Contrast Mr. Smith view of democracy at the beginning of the movie with the reality of democracy toward the end.

Thought Questions—answer these questions completely—complete sentences, complete thoughts.
20. List and explain three (3) ways society and politics in 1939, as depicted in this film, are different from society and politics today. Be specific.

21. List and explain three (3) ways society and politics today are similar to that in 1939, as depicted in the film. Be specific.

22. Describe the overall message about politics and government this film left you with. Explain why you formed this impression.