

Exploring the History, Culture,
and Story of Forrest Gump



A Journey Through 20th Century America

An English
Cultural
Study Guide

Chance & Drifting

Are we just floating on the breeze?
This represents randomness and accidents in life.



Destiny & Choice

Is life already planned out?
This represents fate and the choices we make.

Mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get.



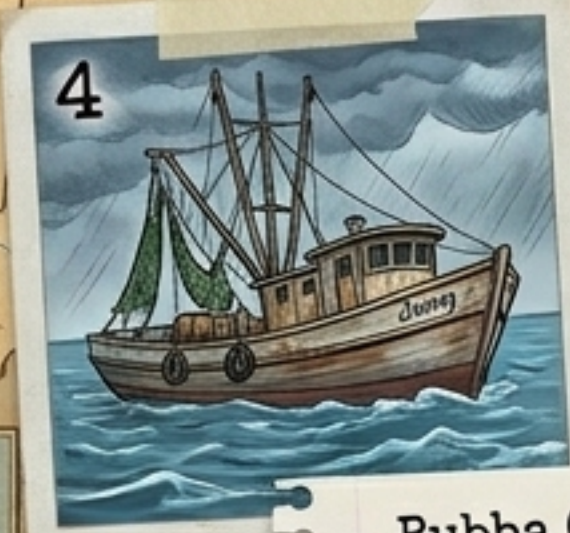
1 Childhood & College:
Forrest overcomes physical challenges and becomes a university football star.



3 Protests & Medals:
Forrest receives the Medal of Honor and accidentally speaks at an anti-war rally.



2 The War (1967):
Forrest saves his platoon leader, Lt. Dan, but loses his best friend, Bubba.



4 Bubba Gump Shrimp:
Forrest fulfills his promise to Bubba, surviving Hurricane Carmen to become a millionaire.



5 The Long Run:
Heartbroken, Forrest runs across America for over three years.

Forrest Gump



Personality: Simple, loyal, follows the rules.

Cultural Symbol: Represents the traditional, conservative values of the 1950s American Dream.

They take completely different paths, but their lives always intersect.

Jenny Curran



Personality: Independent, rebellious, a survivor of abuse.

Cultural Symbol: Represents the 1960s/70s counterculture, hippies, and anti-war movements.

Vocabulary Study Guide

Desegregation



Ending the separation of people by race, allowing everyone to attend the same schools.

Counterculture



A movement of young people who opposed normal societal rules and protested against war.

Diplomacy



The profession or skill of managing relationships between different countries.

Whistleblower



A person who exposes secret, illegal, or unethical activity within an organization.

History vs. Hollywood: The 1950s & 60s

The Hollywood Movie	Real History
The Birth of Rock & Roll (1950s)	
Forrest's leg braces inspire a young musician staying at his house to invent a famous dance.	Elvis Presley actually started his famous hip-swinging dance in 1954 to cover up his nervous shaking on stage.
University Desegregation (1963)	
Forrest is present when the University of Alabama opens to Black students. He picks up a dropped notebook for a student named Vivian Malone.	This was a real, tense civil rights event. However, Vivian Malone did not drop her notebook—Forrest was added into archival footage using CGI!

History vs. Hollywood: The 1970s

The Hollywood Movie	Real History
Ping-Pong Diplomacy (1971)	
Forrest becomes a table tennis celebrity and is sent by the President to play in China.	An American player named Glenn Cowan befriended a Chinese player, helping open peaceful relations between the two rival countries.
The Watergate Scandal (1972)	
Forrest stays at the Watergate Hotel and calls security because men with flashlights are keeping him awake.	The real break-in at the Watergate complex was exposed by real journalists and whistleblowers, leading to President Nixon's resignation.





The 1970s & 80s

The 1960s

The 1950s

The 1950s

Elvis Presley & Early Rock
Vibe: Innocent and energetic.

The 1970s & 80s

Lynyrd Skynyrd & Fleetwood Mac
Vibe: Classic rock during the
shrinking years and long
cross-country run.

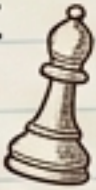
Listen Closely!
The music tells the
audience what year it
is without needing to
use words.



The 1986 Novel (Winston Groom)

Tone: Cynical, dark, and highly satirical.

Forrest's Character: A savant who fails gym class but is a genius at advanced physics and chess.



$$E = \sqrt{\frac{n^2 - n^2}{2n}} = \pi^2$$

Wild Events: Forrest becomes an astronaut, goes to space with a monkey, and saves Mao Zedong from drowning.

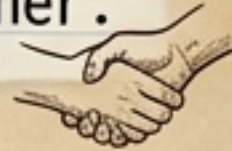


Hollywood smoothed out the rough edges of the book to create a story about pure human dignity.

The 1994 Film (Robert Zemeckis)

Tone: Optimistic, sweet, and heartwarming.

Forrest's Character: Simple, entirely decent, and fiercely loyal to Jenny and his mother.



Grounded Events: Focuses heavily on the love story, the Vietnam War, and the Bubba Gump Shrimp Company.





Box Office Smash

The #2 highest-grossing film of 1994, earning \$678 million worldwide (just behind *The Lion King*).



Award Winner

Won 6 Academy Awards

including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actor.

National Treasure

Selected for preservation in the U.S. National Film Registry for being culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.



Fun Fact:

Dan invested their shrimping money in a 'fruit company' in 1976—it was **Apple** was **Apple Computers!** The characters became fictional billionaires.

Pop Quiz: Part 1

True or False?

Question 1: Forrest Gump actually met President John F. Kennedy in real life. (T / F)

Question 2: The Hollywood movie has the exact same tone and events as the original 1986 novel. (T / F)

Question 3: Ping-Pong Diplomacy was a real historical event that helped relations between the US and China. (T / F)

Question 4: In the story, Jenny represents the traditional, rule-following side of the 1950s. (T / F)

Short Answer & Discussion

Question 1: Look back at the balance scale. What do the floating feather and the box of chocolates symbolize in the movie?

Question 2: How did the movie change the real-life story of the Watergate break-in? Who actually exposed the real scandal?

Question 3: Choose one vocabulary word from the study guide (e.g., Counterculture or Desegregation) and explain how it appears in Forrest or Jenny's life.

TEACHER'S KEY

Part 1 Answers

- 1) False. Archival footage and CGI special effects were used to put the actor into real historical videos.
- 2) False. The book is much darker, cynical, and features wilder events (like going to space).
- 3) True. Glenn Cowan was the real US player who helped open relations.
- 4) False. Forrest is traditional; Jenny represents the rebellious counterculture.

Part 2 Guide

- 1) The feather represents chance/accidents; chocolates represent destiny/making choices.
- 2) Forrest accidentally reported it in the movie; real journalists and whistleblowers exposed it in real life.
- 3) Example: Jenny joining the hippies and protesting the war is an example of counterculture.