2017: Stephen Frears' movie "Victoria & Abdul" was released (UK)

Rudolf Swoboda, *Portrait of Abdul Karim*, 1888, oil on canvas, Royal Collection

Abdul Karim

The relationship between Queen Victoria and her Indian Muslim attendant Mohammed Abdul Karim was so controversial that for a long time, his existence was completely erased from the history of the Royal Family. Shrabani Basu, an English journalist, was the first to spot his portrait while she was on vacation on the Isle of Wight. She was surprised to see that Karim was dressed as an Indian nobleman – something very unusual for a servant.

After Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, Karim was one of the two Indian servants that the Queen requested. Victoria's husband, Albert, had died 25 years earlier. Victoria's previous private secretary, John Brown, had also died, and Karim became her new close attendant and private secretary. However, according to historian Carolly Erickson in *Her Little Majesty*, "For a dark-skinned Indian to be put very nearly on a level with the queen's white servants was all but intolerable, for him to eat at the same table with them, to share in their daily lives was viewed as an outrage." Victoria is said to have been fascinated by Karim and even started to learn Urdu and Hindustani with him. It is also said that she regularly asked for Indian meals. She wrote in her diary, "I am so very fond of him. He is so good and gentle and understanding… and is a real comfort to me." She gave him the title of Munshi – meaning "the teacher," provided him and his family with land in India and made sure he would be given a pension after her death. Victoria died in 1901. Karim then went back to India, where he died in 1909.

Teaching ideas

⭐⭐⭐ **LYCÉE – Espace public, espace privé/Art et pouvoir –** In order to celebrate the anniversary of the film's release, ask your pupils to enter a contest for the best recap in catalogues (Netflix, Prime…) or websites. You can also ask them to write a speech to convince the Netflix or Prime management to include the movie in their catalogue.