

A Fish Called Samuel

1. Read through the text to find out how these names and numbers relate to Goldwyn's life.

Lasky	35	27	Leo	Warsaw	Oscar	11	Selwyn	Gelbfisz	1914	5
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Someone once said "Hollywood is a place where you spend more than you make, on things you don't need, to impress people you don't like." A fairly cynical observation of life in California's 'tinseltown', but who was responsible for starting it all? One of the pioneers of the film industry at the turn of the 20th century was a man called Goldfish.

Shmuel Gelbfisz was born in Warsaw, Poland, on August 27th, 1882. At the age of eleven, he ran away from his home and went to England. While living with relatives in England and working as an apprentice to a blacksmith, he changed his name to Samuel Goldfish. In 1898, he left England for Canada, and then on to America.

Living in New York, he became one of the country's most successful glove salesmen. He married the sister of theatrical producer Jesse L. Lasky, whom he convinced to go into producing movies. Together with Cecil B. DeMille as director, they formed the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company and scored a huge success with their first movie, *The Squaw Man* (1914), one of the first feature films to be made in Hollywood. In 1916, his marriage fell apart, as did his partnership with Lasky. He set up a new business with partner Edgar Selwyn. They named the company after a mix of their own names and called their company The Goldwyn Pictures Corporation. Goldfish liked the name so much, he decided to make it his own name and thereafter was known as Samuel Goldwyn.

Five years later, Samuel Goldwyn was pushed out of the company just before it merged with Metro Pictures and Louis B. Mayer Productions to become Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The new company adopted his famous 'Leo the Lion' trademark, which it still uses today. Goldwyn started his own company, Samuel Goldwyn Inc., and remained sole proprietor for the next 35 years. He employed many of the top writers, directors and stars of the time and was responsible for producing expensive, high quality films.

Famed for his ruthless ambition, bad temper and his genius for publicity, Goldwyn became Hollywood's leading independent producer. Although he had many Academy Award nominations, he only ever won one Oscar, for the film *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). During his rise, he also became (in)famous for his idiosyncratic use of the English language, and many of his 'Goldwynisms' have passed into legend. In a meeting, he once rose to his feet and said "Gentlemen, include me out", while he probably meant "Count me out" (exclude me). Goldwyn used language like a child uses paints, imprecisely but with colour.

2. Work in small groups. Discuss what is amusing about these 'Goldwynisms'.

1. A bachelor's life is no life for a single man.
2. An oral contract isn't worth the paper it's written on.
3. Anyone who goes to a psychiatrist ought to have his head examined.
4. I don't think anyone should write their autobiography until after they're dead.
5. Let's have some new clichés.
6. Our comedies are not to be laughed at.
7. That's the trouble with directors. Always biting the hand that lays the golden egg.
8. When I want your opinion, I'll give it to you.
9. You've got to take the bull between the teeth.
10. If I look confused it's because I'm thinking.