Inspired by a true story, The Great Debaters chronicles the journey of Professor Melvin B. Tolson (Denzel Washington), a brilliant but volatile debate team coach who uses the power of words to shape a group of underdog students from Wiley College, a small African American college in the 1935 Texas into a historically elite debate team. A controversial figure, Professor Tolson challenged the social mores of the time and was under constant fire for his unconventional and ferocious teaching methods as well as his radical political views. In their pursuit for excellence, Tolson’s debate team receives a groundbreaking invitation to debate Harvard University’s championship team. They become the first black debate team to challenge Harvard’s prestigious debate champions.

Task 2: Listening

Watch the below clip from The Great Debaters.
- The Great Debaters DVD at Language Learning Oasis (OEM707): 25’08” – 27’58”
or
- YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eE4eU1w1ZFo

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the clip.

_Students_: Because he is a mute dissenting voice of the truth I speak!
_Tolson_: Speak the truth!
_Student_: Speak the _1. truth_!
_Hamilton_: Yes, sir. I do like to talk.
_Tolson_: Is that a _2. virtue_ or a vice?
_Hamilton_: Well, I have to admit I’ve always wanted to be the quiet, _3. mysterious_ type, only I couldn’t keep my mouth shut long enough.
_Tolson_: Would you punch yourself in a street fight, Mr. Burgess?
_Hamilton_: No, sir.
_Tolson_: Then don’t punch yourself in a _4. word_ fight. You don’t have to make fun of yourself. Use your _5. humor_ against your opponent.
_Tolson_: Mr. Farmer.
_James_: Yes sir.
_Tolson_: Happy Mr. Farmer. Tell us one thing we don’t know about your father.
_James_: He is the first Negro PhD.
_Tolson_: One thing we don’t know about your father, Mr. Farmer.
_James_: He walked from Florida to Massachusetts to go to College at Boston University. He graduated _magna cum laude_.
_Tolson_: Mr. Lowe! Tell us about your father.
Henry: Why don't you tell us something about your father?
Tolson: We're trying to get to know each other, Mr. Lowe.
Henry: I was just trying to get to know you, Mr. Tolson.
Tolson: I'm not the one on the debate team.
Henry: Are we not engaged in the debate right now?
Tolson: All right. I'll take the affirmative.
Tolson: Take the meanest, most restless nigger. Strip him of his clothes in front of the remaining male niggers, female niggers and niggers infants. Tar and feather him. Tie each leg to a horse facing an opposite direction, set him on fire, and beat both horses until they tear him apart, in front of the male, female and nigger infants. Bullwhip and beat the remaining nigger males within an inch of their life. Do not kill them, but put the fear of God in them, for they can be useful for future breeding. Anybody know who Willie Lynch was? Anybody? Raise your hand? No one? He was a vicious slave-owner in the West Indies. The slave-masters in the colony of Virginia were having trouble "controlling" their slaves, so they sent for Mr. Lynch to teach them his methods. The word "lynching" came from his last name. His methods were very simple, but they were diabolical. Keep the slave physically strong, but psychologically weak and dependent on the slave master. Keep the body, take the mind.
Tolson: I...and every other professor on this campus...are here to help you...to find, take back and keep...your righteous mind. Because obviously you have lost it.

Task 3: Vocabulary In Use
Learn at least 5 words/phrases from the Glossary.
Go to online dictionaries (e.g. http://www.oxforddictionaries.com; http://dictionary.cambridge.org; http://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary) to see example sentences. Then, write your own sentences below.
You can make an appointment with our Teaching Assistant at the Language Learning Oasis (OEM707) to check your work.
1. ______________________________________________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________________________________________________

Now, go to Language Learning Oasis at OEM 707 to watch the whole film.
Enjoy!
Glossary:

1. **elite**: (n) a select group that is superior in terms of ability or qualities to the rest of a group or society
2. **ferocious**: (adj) savagely fierce, cruel, or violent
3. **groundbreaking**: (adj) innovative; pioneering
4. **mores**: (n) the essential or characteristic customs and conventions of a society or community
5. **prestigious**: (adj) inspiring respect and admiration; having high status
6. **underdog**: (n) a competitor thought to have little chance of winning a fight or contest
7. **volatile**: (adj) liable to change rapidly and unpredictably, especially for the worse
8. **chronicles**: (v) records (a series of events) in a factual and detailed way
9. **radical**: (adj) (especially of change or action) relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching or thorough
10. **magna cum laude**: (adv & adj) at the second highest level of the special levels of achievement in a person's studies at a US college or university. The expression comes from Latin, meaning ‘with great praise’
11. **tar and feather sb**: (idiom) to cover someone in tar and feathers as a punishment
12. **set sth/ sb on fire**: (idiom) to cause something or someone to start burning
13. **bullwhip**: (v) strike or thrash with a whip that with a long heavy lash
14. **vicious**: (adj) deliberately cruel or violent
15. **diabolical**: (adj) disgracefully bad or unpleasant, Characteristic of the Devil, or so evil as to recall the Devil

Sources:
- [http://www.thegreatdebatersmovie.com/site.html](http://www.thegreatdebatersmovie.com/site.html)
- [http://www.google.com](http://www.google.com)
- [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/)