

Film and Society: How Movies Shape Our Worldview-

Level 2

Section 3: Case Studies – Film as a Catalyst for Social Reflection and Change

Film, as a cultural artefact, has the unique ability to both reflect and influence societal attitudes, behaviours, and norms. Through the careful deconstruction of selected case studies, we will examine how certain films have acted as catalysts for social reflection and change. Each case study will explore the context in which these films were made, the societal issues they address, the techniques used to convey their messages, and the impact they have had on their audiences and society at large.

3.1 Case Study 1: “Kes” (1969)

Directed by Ken Loach, “Kes” is a poignant portrayal of working-class life in Northern England. Set against the backdrop of a bleak industrial landscape, the film follows the story of a young boy, Billy Casper, who finds solace from his harsh surroundings and dysfunctional family life through his relationship with a kestrel that he trains.

Context and Issues: “Kes” emerged during a period of social and economic upheaval in Britain, with the decline of traditional industries leading to widespread unemployment and disaffection in working-class communities.

Techniques: The film employs a realist approach with naturalistic performances, location shooting, and a focus on the mundane details of everyday life. This aesthetic choice amplifies the authenticity of the narrative, prompting viewers to engage with the social realities of the characters.

Impact: “Kes” served as a stark reminder of the grim realities faced by many and sparked discussions around educational reform, child welfare, and the need for social support systems. Its legacy endures as a powerful commentary on the human spirit’s resilience in the face of adversity.

3.2 Case Study 2: “Pride” (2014)

“Pride” tells the true story of a group of lesbian and gay activists who raised money to support families affected by the British miners’ strike in 1984. The film explores themes of solidarity, prejudice, and community.

Context and Issues: Set during one of the most divisive periods in recent British history, “Pride” depicts the unlikely alliance between two marginalized communities – the miners and the LGBTQ+ community.

Techniques: The film utilizes humour and poignant drama to tackle serious socio-political issues, creating an accessible narrative that resonates with a broad audience. Characters are portrayed with depth and empathy, encouraging viewers to identify with their struggles despite differences in background or sexuality.

Impact: By recounting this historical event, “Pride” has raised awareness of the importance of allyship and the power of collective action. It has also contributed to ongoing dialogues about LGBTQ+ rights and the significance of community support during times of hardship.

3.3 Case Study 3: “I, Daniel Blake” (2016)

Directed by Ken Loach, “I, Daniel Blake” centres around a middle-aged carpenter who must navigate the British welfare system after suffering a heart attack. The film offers a searing critique of the bureaucracy and dehumanization inherent in the system.

Context and Issues: The film was released amidst contemporary debates about welfare reform and the treatment of the most vulnerable members of society. It directly addresses issues such as poverty, health care, and the stigmatization of benefit claimants.

Techniques: The film uses stark realism and a minimalist style to depict the struggles of the protagonist, relying on strong performances and a script that highlights the absurdities and cruelties of the welfare system.

Impact: “I, Daniel Blake” had a significant impact on public discourse about social welfare in the UK, sparking discussions in the media and among policymakers. It has been used by advocacy groups to illustrate the human cost of austerity measures and has inspired community action and support.

3.4 Case Study 4: “Suffragette” (2015)

“Suffragette” dramatizes the early feminist movement in the UK, focusing on the women who fought for the right to vote in the early 20th century. It weaves personal stories with historical events to convey the struggle for gender equality.

Context and Issues: The film was released at a time when gender equality was once again at the forefront of public consciousness, with movements such as #MeToo gaining momentum.

Techniques: “Suffragette” combines historical drama with a character-driven narrative. It uses powerful imagery, such as the force-feeding of hunger-striking women and the tragic death of Emily Davison at the Epsom Derby, to underline the sacrifices made by the suffragettes.

Impact: The film has helped to educate a new generation about the history of women’s rights in the UK and has contributed to discussions about the ongoing fight for gender equality in various spheres, including politics, the workplace, and personal relationships.

Each of these films serves as a potent reminder of cinema’s ability to engage with complex social issues and to inspire thought, conversation, and, ultimately, change. By reflecting on these case studies, we can appreciate the nuanced ways in which film interacts with societal values and the role it can play in shaping our collective consciousness.

To reinforce your understanding of the material in this section, the following optional activities are designed to engage critically with the case studies and to encourage deeper reflection on the societal impact of film. You will need to type your answers on a word processor, or use a pen and paper for these activities.

1. **Character Analysis:** Choose a character from one of the case studies, or any other film you have seen recently, and write a detailed character profile, examining how their personal story intertwines with the broader societal issues presented in the film.
2. **Comparative Study:** Select two films from different time periods or addressing different issues. Compare and contrast their approaches to social commentary, their cinematic techniques, and their respective impacts on society.
3. **Reflective Journal:** Over the course of a week, keep a journal of your thoughts and reactions after watching a film. Note any new insights or changes in your perspective regarding the issues depicted.

These activities, designed for self-guided learning, will assist in cultivating a more discerning and informed approach to understanding the complex interplay between film and society.

1. What societal issues does the film "Kes" address?

- A. The glamorization of working-class life
- B. The challenges of the British welfare system
- C. The decline of traditional industries and working-class disaffection
- D. The fight for gender equality in the early 20th century

2. Which filmmaking technique is employed by "Pride" to tackle serious socio-political issues?

- A. Stark realism
- B. Minimalist style
- C. Humour and poignant drama
- D. Historical re-enactment

3. What impact did "I, Daniel Blake" have on society?

- A. It sparked discussions around educational reform and child welfare.
- B. It contributed to dialogues about LGBTQ+ rights.
- C. It raised awareness of the importance of allyship.
- D. It sparked discussions in the media and among policymakers about social welfare.

4. Which film uses powerful imagery, like the force-feeding of hunger-striking women, to underline the sacrifices made by its characters?

- A. "Kes"
- B. "Pride"
- C. "I, Daniel Blake"
- D. "Suffragette"

5. What is the common thread amongst the films "Kes," "Pride," "I, Daniel Blake," and "Suffragette" as discussed in the case studies?

- A. They all employ a minimalist style to convey their messages.
- B. They all focus on the LGBTQ+ community and its struggles.
- C. They all reflect complex social issues and inspire change.
- D. They all critique the British welfare system.

Answers:

1. What societal issues does the film "Kes" address?

C. The decline of traditional industries and working-class disaffection

2. Which filmmaking technique is employed by "Pride" to tackle serious socio-political issues?

C. Humour and poignant drama

3. What impact did "I, Daniel Blake" have on society?

D. It sparked discussions in the media and among policymakers about social welfare.

4. Which film uses powerful imagery, like the force-feeding of hunger-striking women, to underline the sacrifices made by its characters?

D. "Suffragette"

5. What is the common thread amongst the films "Kes," "Pride," "I, Daniel Blake," and "Suffragette" as discussed in the case studies?

C. They all reflect complex social issues and inspire change.