



BRITISH SCHOOLS FILM FESTIVAL #5

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE FILM **SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE**

UK 2008, directed by Danny Boyle

Synopsis

The film starts with a young man, Jamal Malik, being interrogated and tortured by the Mumbai police. He is accused of fraud after having reached the last round of the popular TV show “Who wants to be a millionaire?” How can an uneducated young man from the Dharavi slum in Mumbai succeed in a quiz show, when even university professors failed? “I knew the answers”, says Jamal, and no, he is not a genius. During his interrogation Jamal recounts, through flashbacks, the circumstances that led him to identifying the answers correctly. The story he tells is the story of his life.

Jamal grew up as a street kid in the Dharavi slum of Mumbai. His earliest memories are of kids playing on Mumbai’s streets and being chased by the police. Later he remembers the day when his brother Salim locked him in the outhouse while Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan was visiting Dharavi. In order to get himself out and ask the famous actor for an autograph, Jamal jumps into the stinking sewer.

When Hindi and Muslims clash violently in the Bombay riots, Jamal’s mother is killed and Jamal and his brother Salim have to flee the city. During their escape they meet the “third musketeer”, Latika, a young girl who is alone on the streets as well. The children stick together and later fall into the hands of Maman, a ruthless gangster who picks up orphans and sends them to beg in the street. To increase business he teaches them to sing, sends them begging with a baby in their arms, and even blinds them. When they realize what is going to happen to them, Jamal and Salim escape from Maman, but Latika is left behind. While Salim believes that Jamal should “move on”, Jamal can’t forget Latika.

The brothers start to make a living by pretending to be tourist guides to the Taj Mahal. Using several tricks, they play tourists for their money. At the tourist sites, Jamal also witnesses a performance of the Opera “Orphee et Eurydice”. He is reminded of his yearning to be with Latika, who is lost in another kind of underworld.

Some years later, Jamal and Salim return to Mumbai where Jamal searches everywhere for Latika. On a street corner he encounters Arvind, a boy who had been blinded by Maman. Arvind tells him that Latika is now called Cherry and is about to become a child prostitute for Maman. Jamal and Salim set out to rescue Latika. When Maman tries to stop them Salim suddenly draws a gun and kills the gangster. The three youngsters escape. While Jamal and Latika dream of a better life together, Salim aspires to become a gangster himself. He finds Javed, one of the big bosses, and offers his services. When he returns home later heavily drunk he claims Latika for himself and kicks Jamal out onto the street. Latika tells Jamal to go because she realizes that it is not in their power to resist Salim and his new gangster friends.

Time has passed. Jamal is now working in a call center making his living as a “chai wallah”. One day, when he steps in for one of the call center clerks, he manages to locate Salim. They meet on top of one of the new highrises that are built where their old slum used to be. Salim, who has become an important gangster, had hoped that Jamal would have forgotten Latika by now, but Jamal is unforgiving. Following Salim to big boss Javed’s house Jamal discovers that Latika is now Javed’s wife. Pretending to be the new cook he manages to speak to her and begs her to run away with him. He is going to wait for her at the train station each day at five o’clock.

After a failed attempt to get Latika to meet him at the station Jamal loses her yet again. He tries to contact her in the only way he can think of: by being a contestant on the quiz show he knows she likes to watch, "Who wants to be millionaire?" By pure chance he is able to answer all questions correctly, he even survives an attempt by the devious quiz show host Prem Kumar to feed him the wrong answer. After Jamal has reached the final round Prem turns him over for questioning believing that he is a fraud.

When the police interrogation comes to an end Jamal is released the film jumps back to the present. While Jamal is rushed to the studio, Salim and Latika watch the prequiz coverage on television. Salim finally decides to help Latika escape even though he knows that this will result in his own death. He hands her the keys to his car and his mobile and locks himself into the bathroom waiting for Javed to find out and kill him. While Salim meets his death and Latika drives towards the studio, the show begins. Prem poses the last question: "In Alexandre Dumas book "The Three Musketeers" what was the name of the last musketeer?" Jamal doesn't know the answer but when he uses the opportunity to "phone a friend" and dials Salim's number he reaches his beloved Latika. She doesn't know the answer either but Jamal knows now that he has reached his goal. He guesses the answer and is right.

Finale: Jamal and Latika meet at the station and walk away together.

Characters

Jamal Malik

Jamal is call center assistant in Mumbai who is suspected of cheating on the TV-show "Who wants to be a millionaire".

Salim

Jamal's older brother. He works for Javed Khan, a gangster boss.

Latika

A girl Jamal and Salim met when they were street children in the Dahravi slum. She now lives with Javed Khan.

Maman

A cruel gangster who sends children to beg on the street.

Sergeant Srinivas

The police inspector who interrogates Jamal.

Prem Kumar

The host of the popular quiz show "Who wants to be a Millionaire?".

Amitabh Bachchan

One of the most popular stars of Bollywood cinema.

Javed Khan

A gangster boss.

Fate or coincidence

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE starts with a black screen. A question in the quiz show style appears: "Jamal Malik is one question away from winning 20 million rupees. How did he do it?"

- A. He cheated
- B. He's lucky
- C. He's a genius
- D. It is written".

At the end of the film the question is answered. The picture freezes over the final kiss between Jamal and Latika and a black screen similar to the one in the beginning appears with nothing but the answer: "D. It is written". Throughout the film there are also many instances in which when the characters refer to fate or destiny. "I knew I'd find you in the end. It's our destiny", Jamal says to Latika after having freed her from Maman. When Salim asks Jamal why he can't let go of Latika, Jamal answers "She is my destiny" and in the last scene when Jamal and Latika are reunited he affirms: "This is our destiny". Another instance when destiny is invoked is the scene in which Prem Kumar tries to trick Jamal into giving the wrong answer by writing the wrong number at the bathroom mirror and telling him "Maybe it is written".

In spite of the answer given at the end, the film shows that the other answers to the question "How did he do it?" could be considered valid, too. Jamal has a lot of luck, and he knows most of the answers in "Who wants to be a millionaire?" mainly due to because of a string of coincidences. He knew that Amitabh Bachchan was the star of a 1973 film, because he struggled so hard to get his autograph. He knew that "Surdas" wrote the poem "Darshan Do Ghanshyam", because those were the lyrics to Maman's favourite song. He remembers whose portrait is on the backside of a 100 dollar bill by way of through a touching conversation with his blinded friend Arvind. Sometimes Jamal just guesses the answer. In both cases "B. He's Lucky" would be valid.

But there are also moments when "A. He cheated" and "D. He's a genius" also come into question. Jamal is a truthful man, but he uses many kinds of tricks and cheats to get what he wants. He works as a trickster guide and thief at the Taj Mahal. He is witty and cunning. He lies his way into the Javed Khan's house, by claiming he is a cook first and then a dishwasher. He tricks his way into the TV-show, because he knows that the telephone lines for candidates open when Prem Kumar says the word "if". Jamal also shows signs of real ingenuity. The psychological calculation that leads him to the right answer, when Prem Kumar gives him the wrong one, is very clever and smart. His wit and intellect also helps him when the police interrogate him he is interrogated by the police. When Jamal speaks about knowledge to the police inspector, he shows real signs of genius. His story about the things that everybody in the Dharavi slum knows is a clever parable of knowledge and learning, and a witty way to get the police officer on his side. Jamal also knows how to use a computer in the call-center for his purposes, although he never officially learned to do it. He may claim: "You don't need to be a genius", but in a way, he is.

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE appears to insist on having faith in one's destiny as the key to reaching one's goals, but it also shows that there is a lot more to Jamal's success than just that.

Question:

The film begins with a quiz question. "Jamal Malik is one question away from winning 20 Million rupees? How did he do it? A. He cheated. B. He's lucky. C. He's a genius. D. It is written. At the end of the film "D. It is written" is revealed as the correct answer.

What would your answer have been? Could other answers be valid as well?

A Tale of Two Brothers

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE is a love story of two young people who never lose faith and surmount immense obstacles in order to be together. It is also a story of two brothers who couldn't be more different.

The different character of each of the brothers is reflected in their attitudes towards money. While Jamal gives everything to reach his idealistic goals, Salim sees things and people in terms of their monetary value. These character traits are apparent from the very start. When Jamal jumps into the sewer to get an autograph of his idol Amitabh Bacchan there is literally no shit too deep to stop him from attaining his goals. The next scene shows Salim selling the hard won autograph to the projectionist at the nearby cinema.

From selling the autograph, to his breakup with Jamal, most of Salim's decisions are based on how to get enough money to leave poverty behind. He is more than willing to be Maman's "dog" and push the other beggar children around to earn more on the streets. He cruelly threatens to drop a baby to the ground and tells Latika to keep it crying, so she will earn more money. After Jamal has dragged him back to Mumbai to look for Latika, Salim complains that the brothers have to work as dishwashers. After they rescued Latika from Maman, Salim seizes the opportunity to join Javed's gang on his own accord and presumably even sells Latika to his new boss. Years later when he meets Jamal on top of the highrises overlooking Mumbai, the city reflected in his stylish sunglasses, Salim seems to have reached his goal.

But there is more to Salim than his desire for money and power. He also loves his little brother who he tries to protect at all times. After letting him watch how he blinds Arvind, Maman tells Salim that he has to either become a "gunfighter" or remain a "slumdog" and then orders him to fetch his brother. Even though Salim longs to become a "gunfighter" he chooses his brother and runs away with him. Later he gives up a promising business at the Taj Mahal to follow Jamal back to Mumbai. And eventually he even sacrifices his life so that Jamal and Latika can be together.

Jamal on the other hand does not care for money or power. He is the dreamy and idealistic one of the two. "It's funny, you don't seem to have an interest in money", the police inspector says to Jamal during the interrogation. After the boys are forced to leave Latika behind, Jamal's only ambition is to find her and rescue her from Maman. To achieve this goal he is willing to leave the good life at the Taj Mahal and work as a dishwasher. When he meets the blind Arvind he gives him his 100\$ bill in exchange for information about Latika's whereabouts. And finally he joins the famous game show "Who Wants to be Millionaire?" just to send Latika a message. When she answers Jamal has won the game regardless of winning the million or not.

Questions:

How would you describe the differences in character between Jamal and Salim?

What are their different goals in life? How do these goals influence the decisions they make?

Jamal and Salim have very different attitudes towards money. What does money mean to each of them?

When Jamal confronts Salim about joining Javed's gang, Salim replies that he had to do it to protect them both from being killed by Maman's men. Do you believe him? Does Jamal?

Why does Salim in the end help his brother and Latika? Why does he choose to meet his death in a bathtub full of money?

A City of Contrasts

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE takes place mostly in Mumbai in the Indian state of Maharashtra. Mumbai (or Bombay as it was called until 1996) is the most populous city in India and the fourth largest agglomeration in the world after Tokyo, Mexico City and New York. The population of the greater metropolitan area is approximately 18.3 million with migration to the city of Mumbai growing at exponential rates each year. As a result, Mumbai has one of the world's largest slum populations: more than 5 million of the city's residents are "slumdogs", living without direct access to water or sanitation. At the same time Mumbai is one of India's leading commercial and cultural centres, home to the country's hugely successful film industry and a booming stock exchange. The city alone pays almost 40 per cent of the nation's taxes. (Figures: UNHabitat.org)

In their film, Danny Boyle and photographer Anthony Dod Mantle set the city of Mumbai a portrait. Many scenes are set outside and filmed on location in the streets of the city, which is unusual as Bollywood Films are mostly studio productions. Other locations figure the Taj Mahal in the neighbouring province, the district of Juhu and also Dharavi, the largest slum in Mumbai, housing between 600.000 and 1 million inhabitants. Although focusing on its three main characters SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE captures a lot of the diversity that is the hallmark of Mumbai. It shows the ordinary life of slum dwellers with its narrow streets, public toilets, outdoor washing and crowded public schools. It talks about the dire conditions in which street kids have to survive by begging, stealing or searching garbage dumps. But it also presents us the India of tourists, of international business, of entertainment, of gang violence, and random police power and of the very rich.

In at least two instances SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE also refers to historical events in the city's history. In one scene Jamal and Salim meet on the skyscraper building overlooking the new district which is built on the site of their former slum. The scene probably refers to the 2004 slum demolition drive by the Maharashtra government. The campaign that was aimed at removing slums and shanty towns in the city to enhance Mumbai's image and transform it into a "world-class-city" produced a public outcry and had to be halted the following year due to public opposition. SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE also mentions the Bombay riots that took place 1993. When Hindi and Muslim populations clashed in the streets of Mumbai, Jamal's mother is killed and the boys have to flee the city.

Questions:

At the beginning of the film Jamal, Salim and Latika live in one of Mumbai's slums, later they become street kids. What does the film tell us about the life of a "slumdog"?

What other groups of people does the film portray? What do you know about them?

Think of all the different jobs the Jamal, Salim and Latika take on to make a living. What possibilities do the three have to overcome their poverty? Which do they choose and why?

Think about the scene in which Jamal and Salim try to steal food from rich train passengers. Would you rather join the boys on top of the train or the kid inside? Why?

The title of the film "Slumdog Millionaire" combines two opposites. Why do you think Danny Boyle choose this title?

The Narrative Structure of Slumdog Millionaire

Danny Boyle uses a complex structure of flashbacks to tell his story. The narrative present is set by the intertitle in the very first seconds of the film: "Mumbai 2006. Jamal Malik is one question away from winning 20.000.000 rupees. How did he do it?" This is followed by Jamal being interrogated by the police. In the process of this interrogation the young man remembers the events of his life that led him to the quiz show answers. There are flashbacks to his childhood and youth, but also flashbacks to the quiz show sessions that happened previous to the police investigation.

Danny Boyle uses a number of ways to distinguish the different time zones of his narrative and at the same time smoothly link them to a homogenous whole. One way by which he separates the present from the different pasts is his use of colour and movement. Both interrogation situations are filmed in muted colours, dominated by blue in the case of the quiz show and by khaki and white in the case of the police station. Jamal's childhood memories on the other hand are presented in warm and bright colours becoming colder as the events of his life approach the narrative present. Also both interrogation situations are more or less static and remain the same throughout the movie. Jamal and the officer/quiz show host hardly move as they face each other in the police station/game show studio. Jamal's past on the other hand is a continuous stream of movement starting with little Jamal running to catch a ball and ending with him struggling to follow Latika. In between he and his brother are escaping gangsters, jumping trains, struggling to make a living, fighting, laughing and forever running from the police.

Sound is also used to distinguish different narrative straits: the quiz show is the most easily distinguishable by its signature music, the police station is marked by ambient sound, i.e., the sound of the 'real' surroundings, and the childhood memories are often underscored by a vibrant mix of Indian pop music.

At the same time Boyle uses sound, colour, editing, and movement to closely connect the different scenes to each other. Thus the sound of the quiz show often carries over into Jamals memories and vice versa. For example in a scene we

might see the last images of a childhood flashback while already hearing the quiz show host begin to talk. Danny Boyle also uses careful editing to closely interlace the different narratives of his film. Instead of the slow fades or zooms that are often used to introduce flashbacks, Boyle prefers hard and fast cuts. Very often he cuts from a close up of Jamal's face into a memory which is a very common way to introduce a flashback. First you show a person remembering something then you show what they are remembering. But Boyle also uses this technique the other way round. Several times he ends a memory with the younger Jamal looking at the camera as if he would look into the future.

The effect is one of immediacy. The past is not something bygone and far removed from the present but something that is deeply relevant and defining the present. As the film constantly jumps back and forth from one to the other there is hardly any distance between past and present. Indeed when Jamal thinks back to the most painful moment in his life, the death of his mother, there is no distance at all. When the flashback ends the camera slowly pans to the left. While we can still see Jamal's childhood on the right hand side of the screen the quiz show studio begins to appear on the left. Not only do we see both past and present in one single image but we also see them in reverse order as you would usually expect the future to be on the right hand side on any timescale.

For Danny Boyle past and future are so closely linked that they can almost be said to be happening at the same time. Also, in "Slumdog Millionaire" all different time levels are suffused with a similar urgency. There is no place in his life where Jamal can sit back and relax. In the interrogation room he is under threat from the police, in the quiz show he stands to win or lose 20.000.000 rupees and in his private life he is desperately waiting for a message from Latika. Danny Boyle expertly choreographs all these story lines to cumulate in one moment, the answering of the last question. As the story approaches the present, its different strands align themselves and begin to happen at the same time. While the TV coverage of the national event begins, Jamal's interview with the police is approaching its end and Latika escapes from Javed. In a prime example of parallel editing, Danny Boyle now jumps rapidly from one scene to the next. Rushing towards the finale, the cuts become faster and faster and the music underscoring Jamal's and Latika's scenes becomes the same, already anticipating their reunion.

Not only are Jamal and Latika approaching their destiny, it seems all of India is too, as Boyle cuts to scenes of families gathering in front of their television or people settling down in front of TV shops to watch the national event. All are included in the great motion towards fate. When the quiz show host finally says "You are really on your own now" he couldn't be further from the truth.

Questions:

What is a flashback in a film? Name some examples of films using a flashback structure.

How many levels of time does Slumdog Millionaire use? How can you tell them apart?

What is parallel editing? What effect does it have?

Why do you think the filmmaker chose to constantly jump backwards and forwards in time rather than telling his story chronologically?

Glossary

It is written / It was written: (arab.: maktoob) The phrase refers to the belief that everything that is happening has been prescribed by Allah in the "Book of Decrees". (Quran 57:22: "No calamity befalls on the earth or in yourselves but is inscribed in the Book of Decrees (Al-Lauh Al-Mahfûth), before We bring it into existence. Verily, that is easy for Allâh.") People use the phrase to imply that they were predestined to have something happen to them.

Chai wallah: wallah is a term for someone who performs a specific task. For example a rickshaw wallah drives the rickshaw, a dhobi wallah washes clothes and chai wallahs makes chai (tea).

Amitabh Bachchan: Amitabh Bachchan (* 1942) is one of India's most famous actors. In 1999, Bachchan was voted the „greatest star of stage or screen“ in a BBC Your Millenium online poll

Rama: Rama is one of the most widely worshipped Hindu deities, the embodiment of chivalry and virtue. The name is specifically associated with Ramacandra, the seventh incarnation (avatara) of the supreme hinduist deity Lord Vishnu. It is possible that Rama was an actual historical figure, a tribal hero of ancient India who was later deified. His story is told briefly in the Mahabharata ("Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty") and at great length in the Ramayana ("Romance of Rama"). (Encyclopedia Britannica)

Mahatma Gandhi: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, byname Mahatma ("Great-Souled") Gandhi (born October 2, 1869, Porbandar, India—died January 30, 1948, Delhi), leader of the Indian nationalist movement against British rule, considered to be the father of his country. He is internationally esteemed for his doctrine of nonviolent protest to achieve political and social progress. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

Benjamin Franklin: Benjamin Franklin (17. Januar 1706 – 17. April 1790) American printer and publisher, author, inventor and scientist, and diplomat. One of the foremost of the Founding Fathers, Franklin helped draft the Declaration of Independence and was one of its signers, represented the United States in France during the American Revolution, and was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He made important contributions to science, especially in the understanding of electricity, and is remembered for the wit, wisdom, and elegance of his writing. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

First class century: A term in cricket. First class' cricket is usually defined as a match in which both teams have the possibility of having two innings each. Therefore a ,first class century', is 100 runs scored by a single batsman in a single innings of first class cricket.

Useful Vocabulary:

contestant – Teilnehmer an einem Wettbewerb
phone basher – derog. für Callcenter-Mitarbeiter
slumdog – derog. für einen Bewohner der Slums
autograph – Autogramm
fate, destiny – Schicksal
bill – Banknote oder Rechnung
to owe – jemandem etwas schulden
to cheat - betrügen
to bark – bellen
to admit – zugeben
We are on a tight schedule. – Wir haben einen engen Zeitplan.

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE

UK 2008, 120 minutes

Director: Danny Boyle

FSK: 12, recommended age: 14+

English with German subtitles

Themes: Love, Friendship, Family, India, Poverty, Life in a Metropolis, Violence, The Media

Study Guide by Hendrike Bake, Thomas Dorow, 2012

WAS IST BRITFILMS?

BRITFILMS ist eine Schulfilmreihe der AG Kino-Gilde, Verband der Programmkinos und Filmkunsttheater in Deutschland. Sechs englischsprachige Filme touren 16 Monate lang durch die deutschen Kinos und werden von den Kinobetreibern in Schulvorführungen für Kinder im Alter von 8-18 Jahren eingesetzt. Die Vorführungen können direkt in den teilnehmenden Kinos gebucht werden. Begleitend werden Fortbildungen/ Filmreviews für Englischlehrer und -lehrerinnen angeboten. Ebenso gibt es als pädagogisches Begleitmaterial englischsprachige Study Guides zu allen Filmen als Download. Das Ziel von BRITFILMS ist der Aufbau eines Netzwerks aus Filmtheatern, Verbänden und Schulen, das sich kontinuierlich für die Vermittlung von englischer Filmkultur in Deutschland einsetzt. Informationen zu allen Filmen, Termine der Fortbildungsveranstaltungen, englischsprachige Study Guides und Tournéedaten unter: www.britfilms.de



BRITISH SCHOOLS FILM FESTIVAL #5

WORKSHEET FOR THE FILM **SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE** BY DANNY BOYLE

The characters of SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE:

Who are the main characters in SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE? Describe them.

Make a list of scenes and situations featuring the two brothers Jamal and Salim. Then add a column for Jamal and one for Salim and describe how each of them behaves in this scene.

What does this tell us about their characters? How would you describe their relationship?

What do you know about Latika? Do you know as much about her as about the two boys?

Why does Prem, the showmaster, give the wrong answer to Jamal? How would you describe the relationship between Prem and Jamal?

If you had to choose a character in SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE, who would you choose? Explain.

Fate or Coincidence:

The film begins with a quiz question. "Jamal Malik is one question away from winning 20 Million rupees? How did he do it? A. He cheated. B. He's lucky. C. He's a genius. D. It is written.

What would your answer have been? Discuss in class.

Who wants to be a millionaire?

The TV-show "Who wants to be a millionaire?" is one of the most successful formats worldwide. What do you think is the reason for its worldwide success? Would you like to be a contestant yourself?

Recurring symbols:

There are quite a number of scenes in SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE showing trains. The train station, too, is of great importance as it is the place where Latika and Jamal try to meet. What do you think the train and the train station symbolize? Do they mean different things in different circumstances? When Latika and Jamal finally meet at the station they do not take a train into their future as you would expect but remain at the station while the trains are leaving. Why do you think this is?

Can you think of other objects, places, or colours in SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE that might have symbolic meaning?

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE poses a number of ethical questions. Pick one and discuss:

When Salim is confronted by Jamal he claims that he had to act "bad" to protect them from being killed. Do you think this is true? Is ethical decision making possible when one must make choices based on survival? Do seemingly "bad" choices make a person bad?

Jamal does not know that India's motto is "The truth alone triumphs". Why doesn't he know the answer? What does this motto mean to Jamal? What does it mean to the other characters in the film, such as Salim, or Prem Kumar?

The title of the film SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE combines two opposites. Why do you think Danny Boyle choose this title? What does being rich mean for you?