

# FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES: Exploring the US and UK Film Industry



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## Exploring the US and UK Film Industry

*Exploring the US and UK Film Industry* has been devised as an interactive resource for Film and Media teachers and students, to assist with WJEC's AS Film Studies (FM2 Section A: British and American Film – Producers and Audiences) and A2 Media Studies (MS4: Media – Text, Industry and Audience). It has been developed jointly by Wales' film agency, Ffilm Cymru Wales, and WJEC and has been written by two practising teachers, John Fitzgerald and Steve Robson.

## Specification requirements

### AS Film Studies: FM2 Section A (British and American Film – Producers and Audiences) – specification extract

#### Section A: Producers and Audiences

For section A of this unit, candidates will study the UK and US film industry, the audiences for films produced by these industries and their interrelationship.

#### (a) The Film Industry

The study of the Film Industry requires a focus on basic aspects of the working of:

- the American film industry – specifically contemporary Hollywood, including its impact on UK audiences;
- the British film industry – specifically the contemporary industry, including issues of independence, distinctiveness and profitability.

Aspects of **finance**, **organisation**, **production**, **distribution** (including **marketing**) and **exhibition** will be studied, particularly through case studies.

#### (b) The Film Audience

The Film Audience requires a focus on:

- film demand and supply, specifically in the UK today
- the consumption of film, including cinema-going and the importance of home cinema and the internet, together with the significance of digital technologies in delivering different kinds of film experience.

A study of the importance of **genre** and **stars**, both for producers and for audiences will provide a useful bridge between this section and sections B and C.

### (c) The Interrelationship between Producers and Audiences: case studies

It is recommended that case studies are used as the basis for study in this unit. Case studies should be selected to explore the interrelationship between producers and audiences – sometimes appearing to be supply-led, sometimes demand-led. The significance of the convergence of different media (mobile phone, internet, games console, etc.) in changing the nature of the producer-audience relationship could also be explored. Contemporary case studies may cover the following areas:

- Hollywood film producers and the institutional frameworks within which they operate (for example as part of large conglomerate business corporations)
- UK film producers and the institutional frameworks within which they operate (for example in relation to support from the British Film Institute and through co-production deals)
- the importance of genre and stars for US/UK producers and for audiences
- film marketing (including specific marketing materials such as posters, DVD covers and 'official' internet sites)
- film reviews – both those produced by critics for circulation in other media and those produced by fans
- film exhibition, including multiplexes and independent cinemas, as well as other types of venue, and online exhibition, including consideration of different kinds of film viewing experience
- the availability of independent low budget films, and foreign language films in the UK, including Bollywood films
- the social practice of participation in contemporary 'film culture' which includes cinema-going, online viewing, and home cinema – as well as ways in which the film experience is amplified through media convergence
- star images – both those put into circulation by the industry and by fans.

### A2 Media Studies: MS4 (Media – Text, Industry and Audience) – specification extract

#### Introduction

This unit contributes to synoptic assessment. It is designed to develop candidates' understanding of the connections between different elements of the specification and to develop their knowledge and understanding of the relationship between media texts, their audiences and the industries which produce and distribute them. Progression from AS is demonstrated through this emphasis on the relationship between text, audience and industry and the debates surrounding the nature of that relationship. Candidates' understanding of the media will also be more informed by appropriate theoretical perspectives.

#### Content

Centres will be required to select **three different media industries**. *One of those industries is Film.*

For each industry, **three main texts** should provide the focus for candidates' study. At least **two** of the chosen texts must be contemporary and **one** must be British. Centres are advised to select contrasting texts so that candidates acquire as wide an understanding of the media industry as possible. What constitutes a 'text' will vary depending on the industry. See the Notes for Guidance for examples and guidance.

# Exploring the US and UK Film Industry

## Introduction

For each **text** selected, candidates should consider the following as appropriate:

### Text

- genre
- narrative
- representation

### Industry

- production
- distribution (and exhibition where relevant)
- marketing and promotion
- regulation issues
- global implications
- relevant historical background

### Audience

- audience/user targeting
- audience/user positioning
- audience responses and user interaction
- debates about the relationship between audiences/users and text.

## Approach to studying the US and UK Film Industries

We think that you can raise key issues about the US and UK film industries by focusing on some case studies. The US film industry can be explored through looking at a mainstream film and an independent film. In the UK, films like the *Harry Potter* franchise and a Bond film like *Skyfall* are culturally British but financed by the US industry (*Harry Potter* films by Warner Bros, *Skyfall* by Sony). So to get a view of the UK film industry, you might want to think of three kinds of films: the culturally British but US financed mainstream film (*Harry Potter* or Bond), the medium budget film which is frequently a co-production but culturally British, and the low budget film which is generally exclusively financed in the UK as well as being culturally British. It is also worthwhile uncovering the role of the BBC and Film4 in the British film industry.

In this resource, we've chosen to look at the US industry through:

- a mainstream film – *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, Warner Bros, USA/UK, 2013)
- an independent film – *Whiplash* (Damien Chazelle, Sony Pictures Classics, USA, 2014)

And we'll explore the UK industry through:

- a medium budget film – *The World's End* (Edgar Wright, Working Title, UK/USA, 2013)
- a low budget film – *The Machine* (Caradog W James, Red & Black Films, UK, 2013)

Each of these films will bring up broader issues. *Gravity* brings up the debate about 3D, as well as whether there can be a simple division between the US and UK film industries in the current global context of film production and distribution. *Gravity*, for example, was financed and distributed by Warner Bros but was filmed mainly at two UK production facilities, Pinewood and Shepperton, with UK technical crews. This enabled the film to qualify for a BAFTA award. Similarly, the British production company, Working Title, who produced *The World's End*, has a long-standing distribution partnership with Universal, who distributed the film in the US. Both independent films raise issues

# Exploring the US and UK Film Industry

## Introduction

about the significance of film festivals for the successful distribution of films, as well as the crucial role of social media in marketing and promotion. One of the films, *Whiplash*, is distributed in the US through the 'independent' distribution company of a major studio (Sony Pictures Classics, which you might compare with Fox Searchlight, who have distributed such films as *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Juno* and *Black Swan*).

## The Film Industry: getting started

Before starting on case studies, we think it's worth doing some simple activities to clarify what in simple terms is meant by the film industry: students need, in other words, to know what is meant by production, distribution and exhibition. The opening credits of all films raise these issues of course, but the following graphic lists most of the main phases:

# THE FILM INDUSTRY

## 1. PRODUCTION

### Pre-production

planning

casting

budgeting

scriptwriting

design

### Production

filming

### Post-production

editing

sound

music

## 2. DISTRIBUTION

### Publicity and Marketing

Advertising – poster, tv  
and print adverts

Publicity – trailer and  
star interviews

Promotion –  
merchandise,  
market research

Film Sales

Digital prints

## 3. EXHIBITION

### The Cinema – theatrical

Multiplexes

High street cinemas

Art house/specialist  
cinemas

Independent cinemas

### Television

Terrestrial –  
BBC/ITV/C4/C5

Satellite – Sky  
Movies/Sky Cinema/  
TCM

Subscription –  
Film 4/Bollywood  
channels

Sky Box Office

Sky Plus

### DVD/Blu-ray Rental

Shops

Online rental –  
Amazon Prime,  
blinkbox

### DVD/Blu-ray Retail

Shops – HMV/  
Supermarkets/  
WHSmiths

Online – Amazon/  
Play.com/Send it

Films watched on  
mobile devices

### Computer/Internet

Downloading – legal  
and illegal

Video on Demand –  
Netflix, Sky, iPlayer,  
Amazon Prime

# ***Exploring the US and UK Film Industry***

## ***Introduction***

The industry is only part of the story: the other part is us – audiences. What films of course represent is a balance between industry and audience needs. Films are seen by the industry as a means of making profit, and by audiences as something they enjoy. Genres are a good way of seeing that in practice: the industry likes the idea of some kind of formula which can help minimise financial risk; audiences like the familiar. However, if genre films become too formulaic, then audiences simply won't go to see the film in such great numbers and the industry will need to change its approach slightly.

What students are therefore exploring is how a film is affected by industry and audience needs. The following graphic gives an idea of that interrelationship between industry and audiences through film: stars and digital technology are, like the films themselves, an example of the bridge between the industry and audiences. Are stars carefully managed images who guarantee a way of securing audiences for films, or are they individuals that audiences build up a relationship with?



## US (Big 6)

### Media Conglomerates

Warner Brothers  
(*Time Warner*)  
20th Century Fox  
(*News Corporation*)  
Paramount  
(*Viacom*)  
Universal  
(*Comcast/NBC Universal*)  
Disney  
(*Touchstone, Buena Vista*)

### Independents

## Industry



## Production, Distribution & Exhibition

## UK Industry

US financed/culturally  
British mainstream  
productions

Medium budget

Low budget/  
independent

Role of the **BBC & Film4** in  
film production



## Stars

## Films

## Digital Technology



### Film demand and supply in the UK today

Do we get to see the films  
we want to see or the  
films the industry wants  
us to see?

Does the industry  
convince us that we want  
to see the films they  
invest most in?



## Audiences

### Different spectator and audience responses

Do different spectators and  
audiences respond in a different  
way to the same film?

### Cinema-going, home cinema and the internet

Digital technologies give  
us different kinds of film  
experience.



# ***Exploring the US and UK Film Industry***

## ***Introduction***

### **Using the resource**

*Exploring the US and UK Film Industries* is designed to be used as a whiteboard resource with accompanying handouts (which can be downloaded). For each unit, you will therefore see an icon to open the whiteboard resource and the pdf handout. All information and tasks are reproduced on the downloadable pdf handouts. Just the front of class activities appear on the whiteboard resources. Active links are available on both the whiteboard resources and on the pdf handouts to enable students to work on the handouts interactively. The whiteboard resource allows teachers to make notes using the marker icon.

We'd welcome comments on how useful you and your students found this resource. Please email [jeremy.points@wjec.co.uk](mailto:jeremy.points@wjec.co.uk) with any comments.