

# Slumdog Millionaire

(2008, Boyle, UK)

## Component 2: Global Film; Narrative, Representation & Film Style

### Focus Area Narrative

#### PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

##### Sequence 1

‘Opening Sequence’ (Part 1) 0:00 – 00:3:13

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeeR0ieqQvE>

(Part 2) 00:05:47-00:08:22

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w\\_4EFVfaUig](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_4EFVfaUig)

(Danny Boyle cites this as the original opening but felt that the revised opening helped to prepare the audience for the narrative structure, introducing the narrative ‘hook’ and the flashback element)

##### Sequence 2

‘Cesspit Sequence’ (Chapter 4 on DVD)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ\\_8fsG8Q1A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_8fsG8Q1A)

#### PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

##### Cinematography (including Lighting)

- The opening sequence uses canted shots of the quiz studio, creating confusion and reflecting the feelings of the protagonist, Jamal Malik. The audience are positioned with Jamal’s perspective from the start.
- Monochromatic colour used to signify the ‘current’ strand of the narrative. A yellow tint used in police scenes to establish this thread of narrative in contrast to other scenes.
- Hand-held cameras taking the audience into the slums and adding to the frenetic pace and feel of the chase in the second part of the opening.
- Boyle changed equipment after beginning shooting. The change from bulky, traditional 35mm cameras to smaller digital cameras was partly to avoid the masses of spectators

impacting on filming and also to allow filming within the confines of the slums, making the audience feel as though they are actually there.

##### Mise-en-Scène

- The studio setting (glossy surfaces, lighting, dress) contrasts with the grimy and gritty setting within the police station and the slums.
- Use of titles to frame the link to the television quiz with an opening question.
- Subtitles add to sense of realism in regards to language (some criticism of the use of British English instead of Hindi or Marathi).

##### Editing

- Using 11 frames per second creates the slow-motion aspect to the film, for example in the opening sequence. This creates a dream-like feel at times, especially in regard to the character of Latika.
- Flash cutting is used in the opening sequence to create sense of confusion between threads of narrative. Also used to great impact in panning out from the slums, having shown the life going on within the cameras pulls away in an aerial bird’s eye view, showing the scale of the slums.
- Cross cutting in the opening sequence shows us the different strands of narrative (Jamal, Salim and Latika)
- The film won the 2009 Academy Award for Best Film Editing – an interview with Chris Dickens goes over the challenges and technical aspects of his role (which might help with some students choosing filming production work) [http://www.kenstone.net/fcp\\_homepage/slumdog\\_dickens\\_jordan.html](http://www.kenstone.net/fcp_homepage/slumdog_dickens_jordan.html)

##### Sound

- The use of diegetic sounds from the TV studio, along with the show’s leitmotif, indicate the setting and the link between the film and the global TV export, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*
- Sound bridges are used to connect the different elements of narrative

(especially in the opening sequence).

- Urban soundtrack by A. R. Rahman featuring MIA (controversial female British Sri Lankan artist) reflects the gritty realism and the film's Mumbai/Western fusion. Won Best Original Score and Best Original Song (Jai Ho) with O Saya (song from sequence 1 part 2 – slums) being also nominated.

### PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts

#### Social

- Boyle and Beaufoy both have stated they wished to transport Western audiences to the slums of India to portray the energy and community to try and challenge some of the more traditional representations of poverty-stricken slum dwellers often seen in documentaries and campaigns.
- Controversy surrounded the film both in regard to how cast/crew were paid/acknowledged and in regard to the representations within the film. Please see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Controversial\\_issues\\_surrounding\\_Slumdog\\_Millionaire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Controversial_issues_surrounding_Slumdog_Millionaire) for an overview.
- Casting – Dev Patel (British) was cast as an antithesis to the traditional Bollywood male (strong/handsome/hero) from his role on C4 TV show *Skins*.

#### Historical

- The film draws on and makes references to the tradition of Bollywood (superstar Amitabh Bachchan is referenced and shown as well as the final dance scene being a nod to the traditional dance scenes played out in Bollywood romances).
- Boyle talks about the cultural significance of cinema in India and how that is referenced in the film and difficulties of shooting in the short documentary 'Slumdog Dreams: Danny Boyle & the Making of 'Slumdog Millionaire''

(2009), such as the scene when Salim sells Bachchan's autograph to the projectionist.

### PART 4: STARTING POINTS - Specialist Focus - Narrative

- The narrative is told through a series of flashbacks as Jamal Malik (18 at the time) recounts how he is able to answer each of the 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?' quiz questions correctly.
- Narrative built around the game show – cumulative tension as final question heralds the dénouement.
- Use of flashback (and some flash-forwards to scenes of Latika at the end of the film) and how a non-linear narrative can impact on the audience (some criticism of this format and 'product placement' for gameshow also produced by Celador)
- Questions mark the chapters in his life – this is a good way to break down the narrative with students and consider using visual presentations/timeline in classroom/students work to piece together the linear narrative.
- Applying narrative theory such as Propp (Jamal or Salim as hero at the end? Latika as traditional heroine (a feminist reading?), Todorov – applying to narrative flashback sections of film and as whole.
- Levi-Strauss – Jamal & Salim, poverty & wealth / happiness & status / India & West (Cultural Imperialism), Realism & Fantasy.
- Looking at how the screenplay relates to the film <http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Slumdog-Millionaire.html> useful for how narratives are constructed and can be related to Production work (Component 3)