

Sample response in class

Question: Discuss how at least one visual text you have studied has challenged the audience's expectations

Slumdog Millionaire challenges the audience's expectations that western society (a capitalist society) will be presented as the most desirable way on life, in comparison to the Dharavi slum where the characters in the film live. This has been achieved through the use of characterisation and symbolism.

Comment [SM1]: I explicitly state which particular expectations are being challenged.

Comment [SM2]: I identify which conventions have been used by the text.

Slumdog Millionaire uses the characterisation of Maman to portray how capitalism exploits others. Prior to viewing this film the western audience believes that capitalism provides equal economic opportunity for everyone. However the character Maman challenges the western audience's perspective on capitalism. Maman basically kidnaps slum kids and offers them food and shelter persuading the children that he is a 'saint'. However, he actually exploits the children for his own economic benefits by forcing the children to become professional beggars while Maman pockets the money the children earn. This is evident in the scene where Maman purposely blinds Avinda. Maman blinds Avinda to make him more profitable, because people will have more sympathy for a disabled child and Avinda will earn more money for Maman begging on the streets. Maman is always dressed in a western style costume such as dress pants, a white shirt and designer sunglasses and he embodies capitalist values such as the desire for wealth, power and success. Maman is a capitalist and represents the way western culture exploits the third world countries. This represents the way a capitalist economy exploits workers' labour. This exposes to audience that a capitalist economy is in fact not equal, because if you are a worker, you will be exploited.

Comment [SM3]: Topic sentence

Comment [SM4]: In my first explanation I need to explain what the audience's initial expectations are PRIOR to them viewing the film

Comment [SM5]: Detailed example

Comment [SM6]: Final explanation where I explain how the example has worked to challenge the audience's expectations of capitalism

The symbolism of the game-show itself challenges the western audience's perspective on people's values and attitudes in regards to wealth. When audiences view the beginning scene, a question is posed to the audience in the format of a 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' question. It asks:

'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 is a genius
- d) It is written'

Audiences expect that Jamal is on the show because he wants to win the money. However, towards the end of the film, the audience learns that Jamal's motive for being on the show is not the prospect of becoming a millionaire. Instead, Jamal chose to become a contestant because he hopes to find his childhood love, Latika. This challenges the audience's expectations because in western society, the attitude is that wealth and success is desirable. Western audiences learn from this film that money and success should not be valued so highly, that love and hope are also necessary for success.

Danny Boyle utilises characterisation and symbolism to challenge the western audience's perspective on capitalism. However, Slumdog Millionaire is made for a western audience, by a director who grew up in a western society. Furthermore, Boyle was also accused of exploiting the child actors in this film by paying them a low wage (in comparison to the typical Hollywood child actor wage). Audiences aware of this information may then question the validity of Boyle's portrayal of western capitalist society as a greedy, exploitive culture, because he too has exploited the Indian people for his own economic and professional success.

Comment [SM7]: Restate my thesis, but in a different way.

Comment [SM8]: In the last portion of my conclusion, I offer some contextual knowledge and an alternative perspective on the text.

Audiences expect that Jamal is on the show because he wants to win the money. However, towards the end of the film Jamal never wanted the money, he only desired Latika's love. This challenges our expectations because in western society the attitude is that wealth and success is desirable. Western audiences learn that money should not be valued so highly, that love and hope is also necessary for happiness.

