Billy Elliot

(2000, 110 minutes) Rated 15, FILMCLUB suggests 14+

Rural Inclusion Project

What’s this film about?

This exhilarating and inspiring comedy drama concerns young Billy, the son of a coal miner during the turbulent strikes of the early 1980s. Dissatisfied with his weekly boxing lessons, Billy secretly (and bravely!) starts attending the ballet rehearsals down the hall, bringing out a previously unknown talent for dancing. But his new obsession is unlikely to go down well with his dad and older brother and the very macho community that surrounds him. Billy Elliot features a timeless soundtrack and big British stars such as Julie Walters (Harry Potter, Mamma Mia!) and Jamie Bell (Tintin, King Kong). And this is, of course, the film that inspired the West End musical of the same name.

Why have we chosen this film?

Issues raised

Gender and Tradition: Billy’s participation in ballet is met with anger and confusion by those around him. As his dad says at one point in the film, ‘Lads do football or boxing or wrestling – not ballet!’

Political Upheaval: The miners’ strike and the tension between the Union and those breaking the picket line is the backdrop to the film.

Sexuality: Billy is confronted with different avenues of blossoming sexuality through his relationships with the young daughter of his dance teacher and with his gay best friend Michael.

Family: Billy’s mother has died and he lives with his bullying older brother, macho father and frail grandma.

Be aware of...

Contains some moderate swearing and some violent scenes.
Before the film: Starter activity

Have you ever done anything (an activity, joined a club, listened to music) that you knew might lead to your being ridiculed by your friends?

Are there activities today that are strictly for girls or strictly for boys? Is there equality and accessibility in areas such as sport, acting, directing, politics, music, business, etc?

List your top three favourite sports to watch or participate in. Now choose a town or city in another country – do you think the same clubs are as popular with boys/girls the same age?

After the film: Discussion questions

How are the people in the town and city portrayed differently within the film?

Does Billy Elliot challenge any stereotypes or forms of prejudice? What sort of traditions and expectations are enforced in Billy’s family and community?

How is the community of Everington seen to help each other (and turn against each other) in the face of turbulence and turmoil?

After the film: Further explorations

1. Look at the plot synopses for the following British films using IMDB (www.imdb.com):

   The Full Monty
   Quartet
   Lucky Break
   Song For Marion
   Brassed Off

   How are they similar to Billy Elliot? Why do British audiences like films which end with climactic performances in which the protagonists have to step out of their comfort zone?

2. Teams should do an audition to the group, showing them a ‘party trick’, a dance, song, rap, story etc they prepare. The rest of the club form the judges’ panel. How does it feel to be on each side?

Get reviewing

Check the FILMCLUB Guide to Writing Effective Film Reviews – Secondary for ideas and activities to help club members write their reviews.