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Introduction

Overview
Submarine follows 15-year-old Oliver Tate in a coming of age story. Oliver, who lives in Swansea with his parents, is desperate to impress the girl of his dreams, and at the same time trying to save his parent’s marriage. Told in the style of Oliver, this quirky and comedic film delivers an interesting narrative structure in which the developing relationships and identities merge. Oliver is a socially alienated outsider who falls for Jordana. This budding relationship faces a number of obstacles that are told in a frank but touching manner as Oliver learns about himself and those who surround him. Moments of innocence, comedy and absurdity combine, such as Oliver being convinced that if he poisons Jordana’s dog it will help her cope with her mother’s potential death. The storyline is accompanied with Oliver’s voiceover which gives the audience an insight into how he believes this should all play out, and then reflects on what really happens. The ending leaves the audiences with questions, but with a clear love for this socially awkward teen, who has features reminiscent of Adrian Mole. Submarine is an excellent example of British independent film.

Title
Submarine is named after the periods of depression suffered by Oliver’s father, who likens them to being completely submerged at the bottom of the ocean. Later in the film Oliver experiences similar feelings when he and Jordana have split up. There are also references when Oliver discusses ultrasound (34 minutes) and how animals can hear within the ultrasonic frequency. This is likened to humans not being able to hear or understand what others think or feel, and relates to the idea of being submerged and trying to hear / feel through obstacles.

Themes
The overriding theme of the film is coming of age. Other issues include family relationships, sex and sexuality, experience, the past, depression, illness and mortality, emotions and not being able to deal with emotional situations. The storyline deals with themes from Oliver’s perspective, showing the audience his experience of situations rather than the reality. So it deals with themes of perception, understanding, unspoken issues and communication.

Narrative
The approach to narrative is interesting. Oliver’s voiceover, combined with the actual events, creates a subjective narrative. There is a conscious engagement with the typical three-part narrative structures of Hollywood films, which is highlighted through subheadings (Part One, Part Two, Part Three) and the Prologue and Epilogue that set the scene and style of the film.

This offers opportunities to discuss typical narratives and those that subvert expectations and offer something different. Submarine creates humour by allowing the audience to see the contrast between Oliver’s perception and what actually happens. Throughout the narrative there are intertextual references to the filmmaking process, through montage and dream sequences and through direct references to other texts. This gives the narrative a self-reflectivity that can be used to explore the film’s position within the industry and its creative process.

Location
Filmed on location in and around Swansea, Barry, the Valleys and Cardiff the film offers a representation of South Wales and of Britain. It draws on the rural elements but also offers a view of the docks and industrial elements of the area.

Other films
A range of other films could be explored when considering the genre, industry or themes of Submarine: Social realism / comedy films such as: Happy Go Lucky; Attack the Block; Four Lions. Coming of Age films: Fish Tank; Kidulthood; Juno; 500 Days of Summer
# Media Studies

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# Film Studies

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Teaching Curriculum

The film can also be used to teach other areas of the curriculum:

**Practical filmmaking**
As part of the Film Studies specification the film’s micro elements can be studied and used to inform practical filmmaking. This would also be useful for practical filmmaking courses, or BTEC courses that include practical filmmaking.

Initial scenes such as the montage sequence of the relationship between *Oliver* and *Jordana* would be useful for considering the use of sound to create a mood. You could make links to music videos and explore the use of contemporary music.

You can consider scenes like the scene where *Zoe* falls into the water, the use of freeze frame, and other editing techniques.

*Oliver* discusses the use of film techniques in the prologue. This could be used to explore filmmaking. You could ask the students to listen to the sound from the prologue and ask them to film their own version.

You could use the scene leading up to the kiss between *Oliver* and *Jordana* to explore cinematography, editing and the use of sound.

**Creative writing, speaking and listening**
The film can be used within English Language and Literature. You could use it to compare the book and film and discuss adaptation, going on to consider adaptations of both heritage and more recent books.

You can explore narrative and how the story is told from the perspective of unreliable narrator *Oliver’s*. Students could rewrite scenes from the film from other characters’ perspectives or from a neutral perspective to explore how styles of writing can be changed and adapted depending on the author.

**Identity and pastoral support**
The film could be used in any curriculum area that deals with ideas around personal, regional, and national identity. You could consider issues around coming of age may be in a pastoral situation. The film could be useful for addressing issues such as bullying, growing up, family relationships and health.
Background and context

*Submarine* (18 March 2011) was directed by Richard Ayoade and produced by Warp Films. The film was adapted from Joe Dunthorne's first novel. Dunthorne is a friend of Ally Gipps of Warp Films. Richard Ayoade is best known as an actor and comedian in TV series such as *The IT Crowd* and *The Mighty Boosh*. *Submarine* is his first feature film. He has subsequently directed *The Double*. He had worked with Warp Films before *Submarine*, directing pop music videos for the Arctic Monkeys (*Fluorescent Adolescent* and *Arctic Monkeys at the Apollo*). The film features the song *Piledriver Waltz* by Arctic Monkeys.

*Submarine* won six awards including BAFTA Cymru Awards for Best Actor (Craig Roberts) and Best Feature / Television Film and a British Independent Film Award for Best Screenplay. Its 14 award nominations include a BAFTA for Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, British Independent Film Award for Best Supporting Actress, Most Promising Newcomer (both Craig Roberts and Yasmin Paige) and the Douglas Hickox Award.

*Submarine* awards and nominations on IMDb: www.imdb.com/title/tt1440292/awards?ref_=tt_awd

Both Craig Roberts and Yasmin Paige, though new to feature films, have done a range of TV work from a young age. Sally Hawkins has had a number of film roles, including *Happy-Go-Lucky, Made in Dagenham* and *Never Let Me Go*. She has also worked in TV throughout her career. Noah Taylor has worked on a number of high profile films such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Almost Famous* and *New World*. Paddy Considine is known for his film and TV roles, frequently with director Shane Meadows. He directed the award-winning *Tyrannosaur* (2012), also produced by Warp Films.

*Submarine* was funded by Warp Films, Optimum Releasing, Film4, Protagonist Pictures, UK Film Council (no longer in existence), Wales Creative IP Fund, Dragon DI, Film Agency for Wales (now Ffilm Cymru Wales) and Red Hour Films.

One of the executive producers is Ben Stiller.

With an estimated budget of £1.2 million, the film has taken $466,000 at the USA box office and £652,000 at the UK box office.
**Links**

**Production links**
warp.net/films/submarine
press.optimumreleasing.net/dyn/SUBMARINE_PRODUCTION_NOTES_2011.pdf
www.imdb.com
www.joedunthorne.com/
www.longroadfilm.co.uk/blog/submarine-uk-independent-film/

**Reviews**
www.rottentomatoes.com/m/submarine-2010/
www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/mar/17/submarine-review
www.empireonline.com/reviews/reviewcomplete.asp?FID=137139
www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-12718670
www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/8085164/Submarine-London-Film-Festival-review.html
old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/6030

**Educational resources**
www.showroomworkstation.org.uk/submarine
industry.bfi.org.uk/whatwefund
The film begins with Oliver in his bedroom staring out of the window. There is a voiceover from Oliver, introducing himself. He is questioning how people think of themselves as individuals. The bedroom is where the audience sees him a number of times throughout the film. Images of the bedroom are alternated with credits. This scene runs until the start of the Prologue. It could be used to discuss:

• Funding of British films. Students could use these credits to further research the institutional information about the film.
• Diegetic sound. How does this set the scene and establish the rural location?
• Lighting. The film was shot at times when the sun was not fully out in order to obtain the desired muted, cooler colour palette. This scene demonstrates the slightly watery and blue colour of the light. (This is further discussed in the director’s commentary.)
• Narrative, and the voiceover as a narrative technique. How does this impact on the narrative structure of the film? What other films have used similar techniques? The film has an Adrian Mole feel to it, so a clip from the TV show could be used to demonstrate similarities. How does the voiceover affect the audience and who they are positioned to identify with throughout the film.
• Mise en scène – discussion of the representation of Wales and the characters
This scene starts with a black screen with the word *Prologue* on it. It cuts to a classroom, with a teacher asking the students; “What kind of young person am I, that is the challenge I am giving you this term…” This topic links to self-discovery, one of the themes of the film. Oliver’s voiceover starts with him discussing how he gets through life but picturing himself in an entirely disconnected reality. A montage sequence starts, where Oliver imagines how people would behave if he was dead. This is shown through a screen that resembles an old TV screen.

This sequence can be used to discuss

- The themes of teen movies and how far this film complies
- Discussions around stock characters, locations and iconography
- Cinematography and the use of the montage sequence
- How humour is established within the sequence
- How characters are introduced, and what the audience is positioned to think about them.
The scene starts with Oliver’s voiceover about Jordana. He is discussing how he can attract her. This continues to a discussion about bullying. Oliver’s friend (Chipps) steals Zoe’s bag and they proceed to run around throwing the bag between them and Jordana. They go out into the woods where they continue to keep Zoe’s bag from her. Eventually Oliver has the bag, Zoe grabs it, the camera freeze frames just before Zoe falls backwards into the water. Oliver is then seen trying to placate Zoe afterwards.

This scene could be used to discuss:

- Bullying and issues in school
- Cliques and stereotypical characters in teen movies
- Use of cinematography in the sequence. How does it position the audience? How does this foreshadow what is going to happen? What impact does the use of freeze frame have? Does it make the sequence more effective? Why?
- How does the audience view Oliver after this sequence? Is this surprising?
The scene starts after Oliver’s father has given him the compilation tape. He starts to listen and we see a montage of shots/sequences of him and Jordana which shows their relationship developing. This cuts to a scene with Oliver and his friends, discussing the fact that Oliver and Jordana haven’t had sex yet. A contrast in lighting and shots brings the characters back to the present time and the harsher reality of teen life.

This sequence can be used to discuss:

- The use of a montage sequence to demonstrate time passing. The intertextual links to filmmaking by Oliver’s voiceover and the use of Super-8 footage.
- The use of sound and the choice of music
- Cinematography: handheld camera
- The contrast between the montage and the scene back at school
- Themes such as love, sex and peer pressure. Discussion around typical themes for a coming of age story.
Oliver spots his Mum leaving the hairdressers with Graham, as he and Jordana leave the cinema. He is convinced they are having an affair. The voiceover then commences with how Oliver imagines the situation is going to develop. The sequence includes scenes at home with his parents, Oliver imagining his mother leaving and his father helping her pack. Oliver proceeds to find a portrait of his mother drawn by Graham. The family are having breakfast, Oliver then decides to speak to his father about the situation.

The sequence can be used to discuss:

- Use of lighting and colour to create a tone.
- Narrative development: the contrast between the voice over, Oliver’s internal thoughts and the reality. How this is demonstrated to the audience and its impact.
- The mise en scène of the house. What era is this film set in? It has not been clearly placed in a time, so when do the students believe it is set? Why?
- Family relationships, themes within the film, talking/communication, fears, love, loss.
Death of Jordana’s dog 51.03

The sequence starts with Oliver and Jordana looking out to sea. Non-diegetic music plays. Oliver’s voiceover discusses how he is attempting be a good boyfriend and support her with her mother’s illness. This continues through the death of Jordana’s dog and Oliver being invited to her parents for dinner.

The sequence can be used to discuss:

- Use of sound
- Representation of Wales / Britain
- Use of mise en scene
- Issues such as health, death and loss
- Use of comedy as a narrative technique to address difficult issues,
- How this could be rewritten to make the tone more serious. This could be useful for practical filmmaking, where students can take a scene and reshoot it to convey a different emotion.
The sequence starts with Oliver's parents in his room discussing what happened with Graham, and what Oliver did in Graham's house. This is the start of the sequence demonstrating how Oliver copes following his breakup with Jordana. The letter from Jordan takes the form of her voice. This is a change in the narrative as it does not allow Oliver to impose his view on the situation.

This sequence could be used to discuss:

- Use of sound
- Cinematography
- The similarities between this sequence and a music video, and how this links to the work of the director before the film.
- Themes in teen narratives
- Emotional issues, love, loss
- The end scene – intertextual references to romantic / drama films.
The sequence starts with a black screen and *Epilogue* written on it. It continues with Oliver’s voiceover about how he feels after Jordana turns him down. He reflects on moments of his and Jordana’s relationship. Oliver announces this is “the end”, this can be perceived as the end of his relationship and the film. He sees Jordana down by the water’s edge. They talk, again showing Oliver’s inability to communicate at times, yet his feelings for Jordana. The audience is left wondering if Oliver and Jordana get back together.

The sequence can be used to discuss:

- Use of light / colour
- Use of sound
- The narrative resolution, use of enigma codes and lack of a closed ending
- Audience response to this resolution, what audience pleasure does this give?
- Could this sequence be re-written to become a conventional Hollywood ending?
- Intertextual references: what genre does this reference?
Lesson plan
Submarine and the Film industry

This could cover a number of lessons over a week. It links to the AS Film and A2 Media specifications. Submarine can be used as an exemplar case study for the difference between Hollywood and the British film industry, how British films are funded and links between film and TV.

First lesson

**AIM:** Understand the differences between Hollywood and the British Film Industry.

PowerPoint identifying key features of Hollywood films.

Inclusion of a High Concept Film spider diagram for students to use and apply to a Hollywood film of their choice (see following page).

Class discussion on the differences between the high concept film elements and Submarine. Students to then create a spider diagram identifying the typical elements of a British film.

Second lesson

**AIM:** Understand the production companies associated with Submarine. Understand how British films are funded and how funding operates in the British industry.

Research task for the students to undertake investigating the production companies associated with Submarine.

Worksheet to guide the students in terms of what to research.

Questions:

- Who are the production companies of Submarine?
- What other films have they funded in the last three years?
- Do they appear to focus / specialise in a genre?
- What other business interests do they have?
- How much money do they have to invest?
- Are they linked to any other companies?
- Are there links with TV?
- What has happened to the UK Film Council?
- What is the purpose of The Film Agency for Wales (now Ffilm Cymru Wales)?
- Why does Wales have specific funding available?
- Why do British films rely on a number of companies, rather than a single studio like Hollywood films?

Students could work together or independently to complete this research.

Alternatively students could be allocated a company and have to feedback to the rest of the class. This could also be a homework task.

Third lesson

**AIM:** Recap on knowledge from previous lessons about the differences between Hollywood and British industry, funding of the British industry, and the links between TV and Film. Focus on applying this knowledge to exam/essay style questions.

Questions:

- Why is Submarine a good example of an independent British film?
- What are the key differences between British and Hollywood films?
- How does the British industry impact on the style, location and themes of Submarine?
- What other films can you compare to Submarine as an example of British films?

These lessons could lead to further discussion / teaching about the importance of marketing, distribution and exhibition strategies for Submarine as a case study, and draw comparisons between this and Hollywood films.
Comparison with Hollywood films

Elements of a High concept film

- Large international audience
- Sold on its look; SFX, location, stylish, attractive
- Star led
- High production / distribution budget
- Exhibitor cinema acts as shop window – local press ads, point of sale displays, preview screenings
- High marketing budget
- Released at carefully selected times: eg holidays for children
- High profile soundtrack
- Mainstream genre
- Simplified narrative
- Marketing before & during film’s shelf life at the cinema
- Emphasis on sequels / prequels / remakes / adaptations
- Commercial tie-ins: toygetic etc / food / computer games / clothes, fast food themes / confectionery / CDs
- Narrative deals with universal / cross cultural themes (love/ conflict)

High Concept Films

Submarine teaching resource © 2015 Ffilm Cymru Wales
Lesson plan

Submarine and Audience

Submarine could be used a number of ways for the AS Media specification. As mentioned earlier, scenes could be deconstructed to examine how they have used cinematography, editing, sound, lighting. The film could also be used to explore representation of gender, youth, issues such as sexuality, growing up, bullying, and family relationships.

This lesson plan could be used to explore the target audience for Submarine and how different audiences may respond / understand the film.

AIMS: Identify the target audience for the film. Discuss why this audience is the target audience. Understand how and why different audiences may have different responses.

Teacher-led question and answer session about the target audience. This should cover questions of

- where the film is set
- the age of the characters
- humour used
- whether the film deals with universal themes or localised specific themes
- accent
- style and cinematography
- use of stars
- marketing
- release at film festivals
- awards won
- reviews on the DVD cover

Students should work in pairs to discuss how the target audience would view and respond to the film, and then feed back to the class.

Students should then work in small groups, with each group being allocated a different audience that isn’t the assumed target audience. They should consider why this audience might not

- enjoy the film
- understand the humour
- understand some of the culturally relevant material
- identify with the characters

Following on from this, further lessons on audience could be developed to discuss audience positioning, audience appeal, and pleasure.