



Film Studies

A Level

Film Studies

F633 Section A:

Messages and values in
Global Film

Study Guide 1: Elite Squad

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CONTENTS

Film facts	4
Synopsis	4
Before Viewing – Issues and research points	
Social / historical / political / cultural contexts	4
Messages and values	5
Genre	5
Narrative	5
Representation	5
Authorship	6
Theme	6
While Watching	
Genre	7
Narrative	7
Messages and values	7
Representation	7
Authorship	7
Theme	7
Style	7

After viewing – weighing it all up

Genre	8
Narrative	8
Messages and values	8
Representation	8
Authorship	8
Theme	8
Style	8

F633 SECTION A: MESSAGES AND VALUES IN GLOBAL FILM

STUDY GUIDE 1: ELITE SQUAD

FILM FACTS

Directed by:	José Padilha
Certificate:	18
Running time:	115 minutes
Release date:	8th August 2008

SYNOPSIS

The film is set in the late 1990s, in the run-up to the Pope's visit to Rio. Rio has a considerable organised crime problem and criminal gangs have turned some favelas into 'no-go' areas. The BOPE (Battalion of Special Operations) are fighting the criminal gangs and corruption inside the ordinary police force in their bid to bring peace and order to Rio. Captain Nascimento, joined by his two apprentices, Matias and Neto are on the front line of this inter war and the story follows their tribulations – private and professional – as they attempt to accomplish their mission.

BEFORE VIEWING – ISSUES AND RESEARCH POINTS

Whilst this study guide is specifically geared to supporting approaches to Elite Squad, many of the materials here could be easily extended and adapted to facilitate work on Elite Squad: The Enemy Within and on City of God (Mereilles, 2002).

There are many elements of this film which can be used as platforms for study for this unit. It is vitally important to have some preparatory knowledge and understanding of the eight bullet points listed on pages 14 and 15 of the specification (F633 Section A: Messages and Values in Global Film). Completion of the tasks below will give you the platform to develop your viewing of the film in relation to the bullet points.

This section of the unit is in some ways like Section of the AS exam unit – in that both units require a focus on at least two films and students need to be able to apply various tools of textual analysis to begin constructing their interpretations of the films they study. However, there are some differences too. The biggest difference is that of the necessity to discover contextual information about the country or countries of origin of the films studied.

As such, it is vital for students to build up an in-depth profile of this country or countries so that they can understand the contextual backgrounds of the films they are studying. There are a number of online resources suggested in this study guide. For the sake of ease, these online links are all hosted on one blog, with the links on the blog clearly identifying what each link – these links can be found at <http://waynesfilmstudiesblog.blogspot.co.uk>. These materials are also referred to here.

SOCIAL / HISTORICAL / POLITICAL / CULTURAL CONTEXTS

There are a number of relevant documentaries pertinent to Elite Squad and Brazil and the following documentaries are recommended for the reasons stipulated.

The History of Slavery in Brazil – gives a detailed historical context to the foundation of the nation-state of Brazil and how its development has been steered by colonialism and the use of the slave trade.

A Brief History of Brazil – as a brief introduction, or reminder, this provides a very good, quick overview.

Ross Kemp's Extreme World series 3, episode 6: Rio de Janeiro – offers a very contemporary and accessible approach to what life is like in the urban areas of Rio

Unreported World: Brazil Slum Warfare – similar to the above, with a more news-like tone / mode of address.

Inside Story – Battling Rio's drug gangs – as above.

In addition to these documentaries the following articles are also valuable sources of information in building contextual knowledge and understanding.

***Please see the BBFC FAQ on showing films in an educational context in schools for suggested 18 certificate A2 films:**
<http://www.bbfc.co.uk/education-resources/teacher-guide/teacher-faqs>

BBC News – Brazil: Key facts and figures

The articles below all seek to contextualise the film within its wider social context, debating in various ways how accurately the film represents the real Rio

BBC News – Film casts light on rough justice in Rio

New York Times article – A Violent Police Unit, on Film and in Rio's Streets

Pajiba.com article – From Rio With Love: Elite Squad and the Brazil Problem

Guardian article – Andrew Purcell speaks to Elite Squad director, José Padilha

Guardian article – Number one with a bullet

MESSAGES AND VALUES

This area underpins all of the bullet points within Section A of this unit – as such it is vital that students grapple with, and master an understanding of this concept. The best way to start with this is by taking it personally – and engaging with it on a personal level.

Films are acts of mass communication - they all have many things to say, and they will exhibit some type of value system - highlighting the importance of certain types of behaviours: what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour in different contexts. We as individuals give out our own signals which express elements of our personalities.

If you are studying film in a school setting, you probably have to wear a uniform or follow a dress code. How closely do you keep to the rules? Your answer to that question should tell you something about whether you share the same values regarding appearance as your school. How closely or not you keep to the uniform / dress code policy will communicate something about your personality to yourself and to others around you.

If you are studying film in a college setting, you may well not have a set dress code. However, consider to what extent you dress in similar ways to the other members of your film class? This will say something with regard to your own message about who and what you are.

GENRE

The links below will help you develop a precise understanding of this key concept in film and media studies plus enable you to develop a detailed understanding of the conventions of crime films.

http://www.mediaknowall.com/as_alevel/alevkeyconcepts/alevelkeycon.php?pageID=genre

<http://www.filmsite.org/genres.html>

While this film is derived from real life events, generically speaking, this is a crime film – and to be slightly more precise, falling into the sub-genre of the police procedural. Investigating

the history and codes and conventions of the crime genre should enable students to develop an understanding of the extent to which Elite Squad is typical of its genre and sub-genre.

In addition to these articles, the articles below should help students to make strong connections between theory and film.

Eyeforfilm.co.uk article – Interview with José Padilha about Elite Squad

Reverseshot.com – Bus 174 & Elite Squad

NARRATIVE

Like genre, this is one of the fundamental concepts upon which the study of film is based. Reading through the materials to be found at the two links below will give you a very detailed insight into the key theoretical perspectives on analysing narrative.

<http://shaunladd.wordpress.com/theory/narrative-theory/>

http://www.thewritersjourney.com/hero's_journey.htm

In addition to these two general approaches to narrative, the articles below will help students to link abstract points to concrete examples and also develop their understanding of this key theoretical dimension on the subject.

Variety.com – Review: 'The Elite Squad'

Pajiba.com article – From Rio With Love: Elite Squad and the Brazil Problem

Ceasfiremagazine.co.uk article – Review: Elite Squad & Elite Squad: The Enemy Within

BBC News – Film casts light on rough justice in Rio

Eyeforfilm.co.uk article – Interview with José Padilha about Elite Squad

REPRESENTATION

The film offers fertile ground for analysing aspects of representation. Daniel Chandler (and others) have identified the 'C. A.G.E.' (social class, age, gender and ethnicity) of identity. These areas of representation offer multiple points of analysis with the film.

Prior to viewing the film and analysing aspects of representation it is useful to undertake the following activities:

Social class – what is it?

Working class / middle class / upper class

To begin becoming familiar with key terms in the study of social class, go to the following link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2k1iRD2f-c&feature=kp>

This clip, while old now, encapsulates the core of ideas about social class in Britain. To further develop and refine your knowledge, research into the JICNARS scale. If you're feeling

brave and / or you're studying Sociology, then look into what the terms bourgeoisie and proletariat mean

Gender

To develop an understanding of gender representation and the concept of stereotyping, go to

http://www.mediaknowall.com/as_alevel/alevkeyconcepts/alevkeycon.php?pageID=gender

<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/sciences/sociology/sex-and-gender/gender-stereotypes>

Read through the articles and then think back to what you saw in the clips from the previous exercise.

What evidence of stereotypical representations of gender can you find in such clips? This will be useful for later considering how similar or different 'Elite Squad' is in its representation of gender to other crime films?

Ethnicity / National identity

First, use a dictionary to explore definitions of the term 'ethnicity'. Establish what you consider to be your ethnic identity or ethnic identities (it's possible to feel different ethnic identities).

The film is set in Brazil, with a Brazilian director, cast and crew. As such, it is a challenge to explore representation of ethnicity and national identity within the film when analysing the film from an external standpoint. However, this is perfectly possible with enough wider contextual knowledge and understanding of Brazil and Brazilian people.

To be able to analyse the representation of ethnicity and national identity in Elite Squad, it would be beneficial to become familiar with the information to be found at the article below:

BBC News – Brazil 2010 census shows changing race balance

Some particular articles about the film and issues of representation are detailed below.

Eyeforfilm.co.uk article – Interview with José Padilha about Elite Squad

Variety.com – Review: 'The Elite Squad'

New York Times article – A Violent Police Unit, on Film and in Rio's Streets

AUTHORSHIP

The question as to whether films have an author has long dogged the subject. You can begin to explore this debate by going to the following:

<http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~simpson/Connections/Film/Autor/index.html>

<http://alisashortfilm.wordpress.com/2011/05/06/francois-truffaut-auteur-theory/>

<http://alisashortfilm.wordpress.com/tag/auteur-film-2/>

<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/sep/10/tinker-tailor-soldier-spy>

Further to this, some articles which deal (explicitly and implicitly) with questions of authorship are listed below:

Eyeforfilm.co.uk article – Interview with José Padilha about Elite Squad

Littlewhitelies.co.uk article – José Padilha Review

Reverseshot.com article – Bus 174 & Elite Squad

Cinema-scope.com article – Elite Squad

Guardian article – Andrew Purcell speaks to Elite Squad director, José Padilha

Guardian article – Number one with a bullet

THEME

'Theme' is one of those odd words with which most people are familiar, yet knowing precisely what the word means, is a trickier prospect than it first looks. To be able to detect what theme or themes are worked across in a film, it's important to develop an understanding of the meaning of the word, plus some familiarity with core themes in films to be able to see how such ideas do or do not apply to Elite Squad.

<http://www.cod.edu/people/faculty/pruter/film/literary.htm>

<http://thescriptlab.com/screenwriting/story/development/1005-top-10-central-themes-in-film>

STYLE

Like theme, style is another of those amorphous words which it can be hard to concretely define. Reading the article at the link below should enable you to further develop your understanding of this area.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_styles

In further support of the areas of style and theme, the articles below should be of value:

Eyeforfilm.co.uk article – Interview with José Padilha about Elite Squad

Guardian article – Andrew Purcell speaks to Elite Squad director, José Padilha

Guardian article – Why Brazil's favela films remain flavour of the noughties

Variety.com – Review: 'The Elite Squad'

WHILE WATCHING

To develop your ability to write about Elite Squad in relation to the study areas outlined in the bullet points on pages 14 and 15 of the specification, you (and a group of fellow students) should make notes on the following prompts:

GENRE

1. What crime film codes and conventions are present? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?
2. How closely or not does Elite Squad stick to the patterns established by other crime films?

NARRATIVE

1. How readily can Propp's ideas be applied to the characters and narrative of Elite Squad?
2. How readily can Vogler's concept of the hero's journey be applied to the narrative of Elite Squad?
3. What sets of binary oppositions can you identify in the film? How do these help to drive the narrative forwards?

MESSAGES AND VALUES

1. What message does the film seek to communicate about the scale of the organised crime problem in Rio?
2. What message does the film seek to communicate about the role or function of the BOPE in relation to ordinary police and criminals?
3. How much are individuals like Nascimento, Matias and Neto valued by their colleagues and by Brazilian society?

REPRESENTATION

Focussing mostly on the characters of Nascimento, Matias, Neto, Rosane and Maria make notes to answer the following:

1. Social class – what social classes are represented? How are they represented? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?
2. Age – what age groups are represented? How are they represented? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?
3. Gender -- How are the two genders represented? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?
4. National identity / ethnicity -what nationalities and ethnic identities are represented? How are they represented? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?

AUTHORSHIP

1. What evidence can be found of a José Padilha auteur signature here?
2. Is it possible to locate other 'authors' in the film in the shape of the character Nascimento himself – because of how his voiceover potentially shapes audience responses to the film?

THEME

1. What theme or themes are evident in the film? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?
2. Can you detect any sense of allegory in the film?

STYLE

1. To what extent does the film follow the patterns of the 'Classical Hollywood narrative'?
2. How are visual and aural aspects of film style being used to support responses to any and all of the above questions?

AFTER VIEWING – WEIGHING IT

ALL UP

GENRE

1. How important to the film's commercial and critical success is the adherence to generic codes and conventions?
2. To what extent is this a typical crime film?
3. In what ways is this similar to and different from British and American crime films you are familiar with?

NARRATIVE

1. How similar / different are Nascimento and Matias to other crime film 'hero' characters that you are familiar with? Why do you think this is the case?
2. How similar / different is Baiano to other crime film villain characters that you are familiar with? Why do you think this is the case?
3. Is there a plausible case for identifying Nascimento as the villain of the film?

MESSAGES AND VALUES

1. What are the key messages and values of the film? How are these communicated using aspects of film language?
2. What do you consider the preferred reading to be of the value of the BOPE? Is this your reading of the film?

REPRESENTATION

1. Focussing on the characters of Mari and Rosane, consider how the film represents females.
2. Focussing on the characters of Nascimento, Matias and Neto, consider how the film represents males.
3. Is BOPE membership represented positively or negatively? Consider what you see of the training programme and of their real operations.
4. To what extent is it true that Elite Squad reinforces the social status of white Brazilians?

AUTHORSHIP

1. Who / what is the author of Elite Squad? –José Padilha / Wagner Moura / André Batista (author of the book "Elite da Tropa" / crime film conventions / audience expectations of a crime film / the real life experiences of Brazil's favela dwellers?

THEME

1. Arguably, the film is very concerned with exploring the idea that 'the means justify the ends'. From what you have seen, do you think that the the means justify the ends'?
2. Focussing particularly on the characters of Nascimento and matias, to what extent is it true possible to see this as a story of a father and a son?

STYLE

1. To what extent is this film stylistically similar to / different from to other crime films?
2. Why do you think the film does / does not follow the patterns of the 'Classical Hollywood narrative'?

To give us feedback on, or ideas about the OCR resources you have used, email resourcesfeedback@ocr.org.uk

OCR Resources: *the small print*

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