

Exam Topic– Television Drama



Media Language

Forms and conventions

Students need to become familiar with the style and content of serial television dramas. The genre is broad and many sub-genres exist. However, there is a typical style and an accepted set of conventions that ensure they appeal to audiences. The tension and drama created, cliffhangers at the end of episodes, and plots that develop and twist and turn over episodes are important factors.

Serial television dramas past and present have their characters as central to their success and appeal. Characters that we love or hate, or can relate to and feel empathy for, drive the appeal of many serials.

The setting of a serial television drama often plays a key part in its success. Whether the setting is rural or urban, past, present or futuristic, its authenticity is another vital ingredient.

Suggested activities

1. Describe and compare the settings of two contrasting serial television dramas.
2. Compare two contrasting lead characters from serial television dramas. How do the characters engage and appeal to audiences?

Institutions

'Who produces serial television drama' is a useful starting place to explore institutions. Serial television drama is a regular feature on the schedules of many channels and case studies of how serial television dramas are financed, produced and distributed would be an excellent way of addressing the key concept of institutions.

In recent years, the rise of on demand television providers has grown significantly. For example, one in four homes in the UK now has access to Netflix. Looking at the impact of on demand viewing and the value of synergies, convergence and multi-platform promotion would also be useful for covering the key concept of institutions.

Suggested activities

1. Compare the promotion of two serial television dramas on different channels.
2. Compare the financing and production of two serial television dramas on different channels.



Audience

Why have serial television dramas remained so popular with audiences? Like any other investigation into audience, it is important to consider the demographic profile of different audience groups. This work can be developed into drawing up profiles of both mainstream and niche audiences and then matching them to contrasting programmes.

Secondly, why do audiences watch serial television drama? By exploring a range of examples, there is a discussion to be had about how serial television dramas appeal to different audiences for different reasons. Suspense, dramatic storylines and engaging storylines grip audiences. The characters and settings in a serial television drama can also be key aspects of audience appeal.

The ways in which audiences consume serial television drama has evolved over time, particularly with on demand platforms. Now we are able to watch multiple episodes in one sitting and 'binge viewing' is common. This is another interesting area to look at.

Suggested activities

1. Compare two contrasting serial television dramas. How does the scheduling and format of each differ for different audiences?
2. Create a demographic profile of the target audience for a selected serial television drama.

Representation

Many serial television dramas are aimed at mainstream audiences and have broad appeal. Part of that appeal is having characters from all walks of life that audiences can relate to. Similarly, serial television dramas can offer a 'window of the world' and a view of types of characters that the audience would not normally come into contact with.

A discussion about how different groups of people: age, gender, ethnicity, class etc are represented in serial television dramas would make an important starting point for work on this key concept.

Suggested activities

1. Look at how particular groups are portrayed in serial television dramas. Are they portrayed in a positive or negative way?
2. Look at how 'heroes and villains' are portrayed in serial television dramas.

Production Skills

All students should be thoroughly grounded in all media production skills. For this paper, students need confidence in working with all aspects of design and production conventions for serial television drama.

