

Explore how elements of **media language** construct **representations** of **place** and **cultural identity**.

Encourage learners to select a small number of approximately 5 minute extracts to study in depth.

Gavin & Stacey, series 3, episode 5: *From Billericay to Barry* (2009). Original broadcaster: BBC3.

When studying this text, learners should be **supported to develop** an understanding and knowledge of **media language**, **media industries** and **media audiences**. They should be able to answer questions about how the text represents Wales as a place and explore how Welsh cultural identity is represented, including the social and cultural significance of the text's particular representations of the world.

In addition, learners should be expected to gain knowledge regarding the text's financial value to the television industry, and its popularity with television audiences.

The BBC and S4C are Public broadcasters, funded by licence fee and government money. They have a remit to educate, inform, and entertain.

Gavin & Stacey's genre codes and conventions are in many ways typical of **British contemporary sitcoms** relying on familiar **characters** and **locations** and on-going **linear** and **multi stranded narrative** which raises **issues** and **themes** relatable to a wide **audience**. Its appeal is broadened due to elements of **hybridity**: comedy/romance/drama. It is also useful to consider how it challenges a number of other **mainstream** conventions.

The original 20 episodes produced by the independent production company Baby Cow finished filming in 2010. The series originally aired on BBC3, but its growing cult audience saw *Gavin & Stacey* move to BBC2 and finally to BBC1. It was shown repeatedly on BBC and is available on BBC iPlayer as well as many pay to view channels. Due to the adult nature of some of the issues covered, such as Nessa and Smithy's infidelity, the BBC chose to air **post-watershed**. James Corden took to Twitter to reveal that he and co-writer Ruth Jones had been working on a script for a Christmas special for 2019 – nearly a decade after the airing of the third series.

Series 3 Episode 5 is set on a Bank Holiday Monday. The Essex contingent arrive at Barry for a sunny day out at the beach; even Doris gets her sun dress on. One of the main **storylines** of the third series of *Gavin & Stacey* is the main couple's difficulty in conceiving a child, revealed at the beginning of the episode to be a result of Gavin's low sperm count. This prompted feelings of inadequacy in the character and sets the backdrop to this episode. Gavin's heart-to-heart with his dad gives him something more to think about, but a dark cloud looms on the horizon when Dave arrives to find Nessa and Smithy enjoying the fun of the fair.

Consider representation of characters and their relationships, place and cultural identity through the exploration of:

Technical Codes

Use of camera
Type of shot, movement distance
Editing
Lighting
Sound

Narrative Codes

Linear/multi-stranded
Characters/Relationships
Stereotypes
Issues/Themes

Visual codes

Mise-en-scène
Settings
Locations
Costume
Props
Mode of address

Explore how the **linear** and **multi-strand narratives** in *Gavin & Stacey* rely on the traditional convention of a **limited number** believable, relatable, funny and sometimes troubled character, each with his or her own storyline. **Propp's character theory** would be useful to explore here. The interplay between characters and their **relationships** is an important area of study. The narrative's comic scenes provide a cathartic release from the serious **themes** and **issues**.

- The protagonists are Gavin, the straight-laced comic **anti-hero**, and Stacey, the naïve and ditz **princess**. The main supporting characters (**sidekicks**) are Nessa, who is assertive and vulgar; and Smithy, who is carefree and loyal. The rest of the main cast consists of the friends and family of the main **protagonists**.
- Other rich characters for learners to explore representations include:
 - Uncle Bryn (Rob Brydon) is repressed, well-meaning, and highly protective of his niece.
 - Doris (Margaret John) constantly **subverts** stereotypical expectations with her saucy quips and fun-loving attitude to life. Analyse how Doris teases Gavin that she is going to dig out her bikini to go to the beach – the **camera cuts** to a head and shoulder two shot enabling the audience to focus on Gavin's reaction of shock and horror at the thought. Doris's wicked sense of humour has broad appeal to the **audience**. Other appeals could be explored here- apply **Bulmer and Katz theory**.
 - Gavin's parents: his happy-go-lucky father Mick (Larry Lamb) and his fussy, loud, and over-protective mother Pam (Alison Shipman), the **binary opposite** of her husband.
 - All the characters have entertainment value and are based on established **cultural stereotypes**: e.g. Essex family values v South Wales family values.
- Can the triangular relationship between Dave, Nessa and Smithy be viewed in the context of complex English / Welsh representation of cultural identity?

Possible routes for study:

- Explore how characters are represented. Use appropriate **media language** to analyse the appeal of the various characters to audiences.
- Refer to specific scenes and events in the episode, such as **dress code**. Consider how each character's **dress code** and props are stereotypical of their class, gender or age.
- Analyse representations of **place**, e.g. the iconography of Barry and Essex.
- Explain the representation of different **cultural identities**. Does the text draw on stereotypical representations of the Welsh and the English? Are Stacey's Welsh friends and family the binary opposite of Gavin's English friends and family?
- Features of **setting, mise-en-scène, location** (street, caravan, beach, fair, car, caravan, bus, car, garden.) Think about the typicality of **Welsh cultural identity**.
- Consider features of **mise-en-scène: dress codes** and **props** for the characters studied.
- How does *Gavin & Stacey* create a sense of **national identity**? **Uses & Gratification** theory could be applied here.

Visual codes, Mise-en-scène, Setting and location:

- Shot mainly on **location**; consider the various representations of Barry (a working-class environment, a stereotypical Welsh town). Audiences negotiate their own response.
- Mise-en-scène**: terraced housing and close family units (everybody knows everybody's business); a socially and economically-deprived area (Nessa lives in a caravan, BBQs in the small back garden); a traditional bucket and spade holiday resort with funfair and ice cream stands – a popular destination for hen and stag parties (the Elvis troop).

Camera shots and editing:

- Exterior establishing shot** – a slow pan of Barry's stereotypical Welsh terraced housing concludes with a framed long shot of Gavin answering his phone. This enables the audience to immediately focus on his character and assess his mood.
- Cut to wide-angle exterior shot of Marco's ice cream parlour where Stacey is working. This establishes the nature of their relationship (warm and loving) at the beginning of this episode. No reference to their relationship troubles, although this is firmly established for the audience during the opening sequences.
- Interior shots** – Nessa and the baby in the caravan. Over the shoulder **two-shot shot reverse cuts** between Nessa and the baby. Here the audience are invited to see Nessa's unconventional approach to parenting as she educates baby Neil on the difference between Barack Obama and Osama bin Laden.
- Exterior shots** at the funfair: use of handheld camera, **fast pans, close-up** shot, **slow-mo** and **jump cut** editing, **synchronised** to the soundtrack of Paolo Nutini's 'Pencil Full of Lead.' This represent the characters enjoying carefree fun at the fair, which is brought to an abrupt end with Dave's arrival.
- Tracking shots** such as those used during the beach scenes would be worth further exploration by learners. Editing adds moods and atmosphere to the scene.
- Lighting**:
 - High lighting** in exterior shots creates a realistic representation of Barry on a warm summer's day.
 - Softer darker lighting and **strobe lighting** in the fair scene adds to the exciting atmosphere.
 - Low lighting** in Nessa's caravan creates a sense of intimacy between her and baby Neil as well as creating a sense of an impoverished, chaotic **mise-en-scène**.

Sound Codes:

- Explore & analyse: **diegetic** sound, characters' accents and idiolects (Nessa's iconic 'What's occurin?')
- No canned laughter, non-diegetic** opening title sequence, and other incidental musical contributes to the representation of the mood and drama of particular scenes e.g. 'Colourful Life' by Cajun Dance at the beach scene, Paolo Nutini's 'Pencil Full of Lead' at the playground.

