

# hunky dory

FROM THE PRODUCER OF **BILLY ELLIOT**



SOME DAYS LAST FOREVER

## Teaching resource

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# Introduction

## Overview

*Hunky Dory* is a feelgood film about the summer of 1976, set in a school in Swansea. It features Minnie Driver as Miss Vivienne May, a drama teacher who has big ambitions for the school's end of term play. With her heart set on producing a rock version of *The Tempest*, she sets about convincing the students and teachers to support the project. She's met with a range of obstacles, from students arguing to teachers trying to stop the play. The film follows the ups and downs as the students approach the end of their time at school.

*Hunky Dory* features a number of songs from The Beach Boys, David Bowie, Roxy Music and The Byrds. It can arguably be seen as a Welsh take on the populist teen films and TV shows such as *Camp Rock*, *High School Musical* and *Glee*. However it combines some elements of British social realism and reflection on the times, with the upbeat music that defined a generation. It has much in common with other British films such as *Billy Elliot* that examine the aspirations and coming of age journey of teens in the 1970s and 1980s, as they fight to be creative and musically talented against a society that refuses to accept this as a form of education. It's a film that combines social commentary with some upbeat musical light-heartedness. A memory of the summers that were long and hot, before teens grew up to face adult responsibilities.

## Title

*Hunky Dory* was the name of David Bowie's fourth album released in 1972. Throughout the film there are references to Bowie amongst other musical artists and bands of the time. Viv (Miss May) says that both Shakespeare and Bowie would be proud of the musical show the students are putting together.

## Themes

The overriding themes of the film deal with coming of age, teenage angst and emotions. It also addresses family relationships; love; ambition or lack of it; the future; class division; the view of the arts in 1970s society (which invites comparisons with recent reductions in funding for arts programmes) and overcoming obstacles. The film addresses the theme of the absent parent, communication, loss and loyalty through elements like the death of Viv's father and her relationship with her brother, and Davey and Angus who live with their father but appear to have little contact with their mother. A key theme, typical of this genre of film, is that of teens being heard. Comparisons can be made to a range of teen movies and TV shows. Many of the students, such as Kenny, Angus and Evan, struggle to find their voice as their move from school to adulthood approaches.

## Music

The use of music from the era is a defining feature of the film. Diegetic and non-diegetic music are used to reflect the characters and their emotions and to drive the narrative throughout the film. Music is central to the plot. Marc Evans (director) discussed how the music was chosen to reflect points within *The Tempest*. Although the whole performance of the play is never seen, its rehearsals are important in setting the scene and the characters.

## Stars

Minnie Driver has been hailed in a number of reviews as the key to the film. She has been seen as convincing, "saves the film", and amongst mixed reviews can be seen as the central figure who appears to support the plot. Her performance as the fiery drama teacher is central to the journey that takes place within the film, and her passion for the children and the arts is believable.



## Location

Hunky Dory was filmed on location in and around Swansea and Port Talbot. The film offers a representation of South Wales, and Britain. It draws on rural elements and representations of the idyllic summer of 1976, but elements of working class and urban life are also shown.

## Other films

A range of other films and TV shows could be explored when considering *Hunky Dory*:

Drama / comedy / teen movies such as: *Happy Go Lucky*; *History Boys*; *Dead Poets Society*; *Across the Universe*; *Footloose*.

Films set in the 1960, 1970s and 1980s: *This Is England*; *Billy Elliott*; *The Full Monty*; *Brassed Off*; *Almost Famous*; *The Boat that Rocked*.

TV shows such as: *Glee*; *Skins*; *Hollyoaks*

These could be used to explore the realistic representation of the past (1970s) and what *Hunky Dory* has in common with other recent films set in the past. You could explore the genre conventions of “feel-good” British films and how these differ from the social realism that the British film industry is known for. This could draw comparisons between representation of class, place, the time, events, and youth. The film can also be used to explore the re-emergence of the musical genre and popularity of films that combine musical with teens, or shows such as *Glee*.

# Teaching Media and Film Studies

## Media Studies

Deconstruction of the text	Macro elements of the text	Industry	Audience
Use of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Cinematography</li> <li>• Editing</li> <li>• Stars/performance</li> </ul>	Representation of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gender</li> <li>• the family</li> <li>• age</li> <li>• the era</li> <li>• nation / location, culture.</li> </ul> Narrative Genre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British Film Industry</li> <li>• Welsh Film Industry</li> <li>• Comparison to Hollywood</li> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Location</li> <li>• Typical genres/narratives</li> <li>• Use of stars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target audience</li> <li>• Audience positioning</li> <li>• Audience responses</li> <li>• Audience appeal</li> <li>• Audience interaction</li> <li>• Fans</li> <li>• Reviews</li> </ul>

## Film Studies

Micro elements of the text	Macro elements of the text	Industry
Use of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Cinematography</li> <li>• Editing</li> <li>• Stars / performance</li> <li>• Producers' commentary about the style and look of the film</li> <li>• Director's commentary about musical choices</li> </ul>	Representation of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Welsh identity</li> <li>• British identity</li> <li>• British themes</li> <li>• Narrative structure/themes linked to Britishness/Storytelling techniques/culturally relevant to Britain</li> <li>• Genre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British / Welsh Film industry</li> <li>• Comparison to Hollywood</li> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Location</li> <li>• Typical genres / narratives</li> <li>• Use of stars</li> <li>• Audience responses, appeal, targeting</li> <li>• Fans</li> <li>• Production</li> <li>• Distribution / Marketing</li> <li>• Exhibition</li> <li>• Success: Box office v critical success</li> </ul>

# Teaching Curriculum

The film could 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 vocational filmmaking courses.

The use of lighting is interesting. It was intentionally manipulated during production, rather than adapted post-production. The interview with producer Jonathon Finn highlights how Marc Evans used colour filters to mute the whites and create the golden glow that is evident in many of the scenes. This could be used to develop students' understanding of lighting and lighting effects.

Students could study further how music creates emotion and how it is used throughout the film to develop the narrative and characters.

## Creative writing, speaking and listening

The film could be used to explore the English Language and Literature curriculum. *The Tempest* is the focus of the film, and the music was selected to comply with events within the play, so the film could be used to develop students understanding of that and other Shakespeare plays.

## Recent history

The film could be used to discuss social, cultural and political developments from the 1970s onwards. It has references to skinheads, Mrs Thatcher, mining, drugs and the music of the era.

## Identity

Curriculum areas that deal with ideas around personal, regional and national identity could use the film. In a pastoral situation, it could be used to explore issues around coming of age.

## Background and context

Hunky Dory was released in 2011 and met with mixed reviews.

The film is directed by Marc Evans, known for a range of TV work and films such as *Snow Cake*, *My Little Eye* and *Patagonia*. Producer Jonathan Finn is known for *Billy Elliott*. Both the director and producer claim that the idea for the film started pre-*Glee*, but due to a range of other commitments, funding and finding the cast, *Hunky Dory* was not released until this genre had become established.

Minnie Driver has links to Wales: her father was born in Swansea. She is known for her film and TV roles and for working in music. Her role in *Hunky Dory* was met with complimentary reviews: “*Minnie Driver is a class act who saves the movie,*” and, “*Driver delivers a characteristic combination of savvy and likeability...*” Evans and Finn both agree that she was the perfect choice for the role of Vivienne May.

A number of the cast came from the Welsh College of Music and Drama, including Aneurin Barnard, Danielle Branch and Tom Rhys Harries.

*Hunky Dory* was released by Universal Pictures in the USA and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox worldwide. It's the first independent British film to be secured by a major studio. Despite this it only took \$17,000 at the USA Box Office.

Hunky Dory received funding from the Film Agency for Wales (now Ffilm Cymru Wales).

# Links and resources

## Production links

The interview with the producer and director on the DVD extras contains some interesting information about the actual development of the film.

[www.imdb.com/title/tt1727300/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1727300/)

[independentfilmcompany.com/films/hunkydory.php](http://independentfilmcompany.com/films/hunkydory.php)

[www.viewlondon.co.uk/cinemas/marc-evans-interview-feature-interview-4400.html](http://www.viewlondon.co.uk/cinemas/marc-evans-interview-feature-interview-4400.html)

[industry.bfi.org.uk/media/pdf/6/r/Regional\\_Funding\\_Fact\\_sheet\\_Sep\\_2008.pdf](http://industry.bfi.org.uk/media/pdf/6/r/Regional_Funding_Fact_sheet_Sep_2008.pdf)

## Reviews

[www.empireonline.com/interviews/interview.asp?IID=1470](http://www.empireonline.com/interviews/interview.asp?IID=1470)

[rantbit.wordpress.com/2013/04/04/hunky-dory-2012/](http://rantbit.wordpress.com/2013/04/04/hunky-dory-2012/)

[www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/mar/01/hunky-dory-review](http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/mar/01/hunky-dory-review)

[www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/content\\_display/reviews/specialty-releases/e3if77d045f31f6658703d785f7dbbbbbed4](http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/content_display/reviews/specialty-releases/e3if77d045f31f6658703d785f7dbbbbbed4)

[www.elle.com/news/culture/minnie-driver-hunky-dory-interview](http://www.elle.com/news/culture/minnie-driver-hunky-dory-interview)

[www.film4.com/reviews/2011/hunky-dory](http://www.film4.com/reviews/2011/hunky-dory)

[www.viff.org/festival/films/f5299-hunky-dory](http://www.viff.org/festival/films/f5299-hunky-dory)

## Educational resources

[www.bfi.org.uk/live/video/811](http://www.bfi.org.uk/live/video/811)

[www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/hunky-dory-2012-0](http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/hunky-dory-2012-0)



## Scenes

### Opening sequence 00:00



The film opens with the heading “South Wales Summer 1976”. Miss May is in the rehearsal room with a number of students, asking them to think about stories. They don’t offer their own stories, but “Miss” – as the students call her – then tells them a brief story reflecting on her own youth and wishes. The easy relationship she has with the students is clear. Non-diegetic music starts as credits appear, alternating with the opening sequence images. Diegetic sound and dialogue continue as the students suggest musical acts they like. Miss May goes on to tell the students she wants to put on a show “that Shakespeare and David Bowie would be proud of”. The next shot is of a window in the toilets with graffiti on it. The audience is then shown Miss May walking down the corridor in the school, with the diegetic sound of ‘*Life on Mars*’ (David Bowie) being sung by Davey.

- How does this opening sequence establish the narrative / plot of the film?
- Apply narrative theories to this sequence.
- How does the sequence establish the genre ?
- Compare it to other teen movies and identify similarities. Does this sequence compare to other British or Hollywood sequences?
- Consider the use of sound – how does this establish the time of the film and the “feel” of the film?
- What is noticeable about the lighting in the sequence?

## Davey, Angus and their father 11:28



The scene starts with Davey and Angus sitting in the back garden, whilst Angus is fixing his bicycle. Their father is helping Angus change his tyre. Angus tells Davey "...everyone thinks you're a poof...". He's clearly not happy with Davey being part of the school production. This is reinforced by his father laughing and making a comment about their uncle loving the "dramatics".

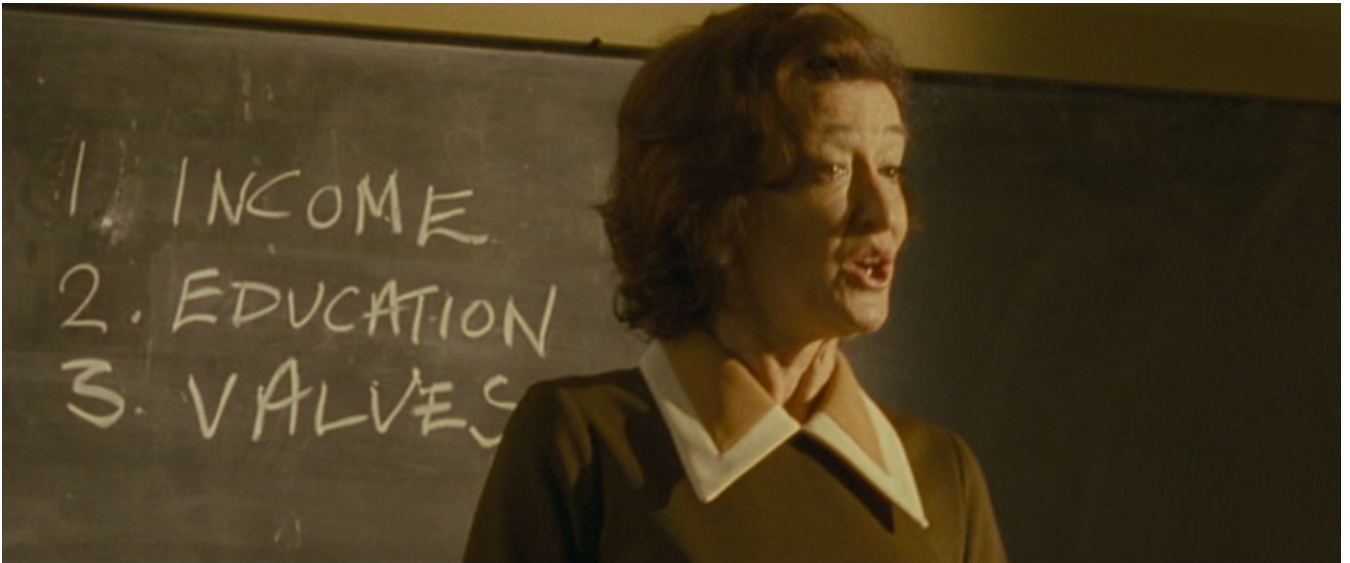
This short sequence gives an opportunity to discuss parental relationships, representation of masculinity, and the perception of actors and performers, particularly in this era. Links to films such as *Billy Elliott* can be made here: the situation is similar with an absent mother, and a father who exhibits typical masculinity, whilst one of the sons is deemed "effeminate" because of his interests.

- How is Davey represented?
- How are Angus and their father represented?
- What elements of the mise en scène establishes their class?
- Discuss the use of language. This can be used to embed Diversity and Equality within the classroom. Discuss the word 'poof' and the negative connotations of this. Why would this be used in 1976, whereas today this language is outdated?

The scene could also be used in English language lessons – the discussion about the language used and how this has changed over time.

The scene could be used to discuss representations of masculinity across Film and Media and in subjects such as Sociology.

## Sociology Lesson on class 26:32



Mrs Valentine (the sociology teacher) is leading a lesson on class. The scene demonstrates the difference between teaching styles, the engagement with students and enthusiasm within the lesson compared to Miss May.

This is a short scene but could be used to discuss class and the representation of class in the media. For Film or Media studies the discussion could focus on how far this represents Britishness and British values. Is class a British theme that is evident in other British films? Does this differ from American films?

In lessons such as Sociology, this could provoke debate on:

- How we would expect teachers to deal with class today?
- Does class still exist in Britain?
- How does the teacher judge the student's class?
- What is class? How do we measure it?
- What is wrong with these measures?

This scene could be combined with the image of Kenny as a skinhead, Davey's house, and the house Miss May lives in to ask students to identify the signifiers that indicate class.

## “What is human nature?” 27:04



The scene starts with Miss May asking the students “what is human nature?” This raises discussions about being the outsider, not fitting in and being excluded by one’s peers, and everybody needing love. The outsider theme is typical of teen movies.

Kenny argues with another student and the situation is then interrupted by Mr Cafferty checking all is OK. The scene cuts to Angus being picked on in the changing rooms and Mr Cafferty intervening. At this point the diegetic music from the rehearsal room has started, with Kenny singing, “Everybody’s been burned” by *The Byrds*. The scene of Kenny singing continues until the camera cuts to Davey, Stella and Evan walking away from school.

- The scene can be used to identify conventions of teen movies; iconography, style, themes and character types.
- Analysis of the use of music throughout the scene and how the diegetic sound informs the mood and audience’s understanding of both Angus and Kenny. This can be used to discuss the reason Kenny shaved his head and became part of the skinhead culture his brother is involved in. The idea of fitting in and complying with peer pressure can be explored.
- Analysis of cinematography and lighting and how this creates an emotional response for the audience. How is the scene encoded by the producer? How does the producer want the audience to feel about Kenny / Angus / Miss May?

The scene can also be used to examine links between *The Tempest* and the film. If studying *The Tempest* in English literature, discussions could feature around where would this song be used? Why would this character sing this song? Is the character misunderstood? What should happen to the characters, can the situation be improved?



## Don't Talk (Put your head on my shoulder) 42:00



The scene starts with Davey in the fish and chip shop. He sees Stella with Marvin. Rehearsals start and Stella doesn't arrive on time, Miss May sings *Don't Talk (Put your head on my shoulder)* from The Beach Boys with Davey and there is a connection between them. Davey is clearly attracted to her. The Headmaster arrives to take his part in the play and interrupts them. Stella also arrives. The scene continues with Stella and Davey singing, Davey is clearly angry with her and eventually leaves. Miss May goes after him and talks to him about love.

- This scene can be used to discuss narrative techniques and how this scene changes the direction of the plot
- Discussion of genre, how the theme is typical, issues of unrequited love, friendships, overcoming obstacles, teenage angst.
- The use of sound can be studied, how this diegetic sound can be seen as foreshadowing what Davey may feel for Miss May.
- This could be linked to the study of English / Shakespeare as a typical theme in many of his plays – students to identify and map out which plays could be deemed to fit with this narrative.

Discussion around the role of the teacher, and changes between how Miss May behaves compared to how teachers behave now – this could be linked to the study of recent history and how attitudes and values have changed.



## The Man Who Sold the World 56:30



The scene starts as Evan has admitted that he thinks he is homosexual to his Dena. He is leading the singing of *The Man Who Sold the World* by David Bowie. The cast are all taking part, with the Headmaster central to the singing and dancing. The cast led by Miss May dance around the rehearsal hall.

This scene is particularly useful to deconstruct cinematography, sound, lighting and mise en scene. The mood of this scene is essential to the changing mood within the film. Miss May has finally got the Headmaster on her side, with his taking a role in the play. Despite challenges from other teachers the play appears to be going ahead, The students are becoming closer, with honest confessions and trust being built. This scene contextualises this. It is also key in terms of performance. The interview with Marc Evans highlighted how the choreography had not been rehearsed, and was led by Minnie Driver. This would allow for discussions around her as a star but also experience, background and the ability to carry a film like this due to her musical interests. It gives an opportunity to examine performance within the play and within the scene.

## Start of the play: 1:26:00



The scene is the start of the play outside. Miss May is watching as various cast members are preparing for the play. Diegetic music starts, as the audience watch intently. Davey and Stella start performing *Life on Mars*, David Bowie. Miss May is backstage directing the crew, as they perform with a tree as their central point. The audience give a round of applause, including those teachers that didn't support the play. Evan then takes the stage, with Kenny saying his lines. Kenny sings *Sea Breezes* by Siouxsie and the Banshees. During a long orchestral sequence the editing cuts between the play and Angus returning home.

This sequence could be used for:

- An analysis of the use of editing throughout the sequence.
- Use of music and how this creates emotion / tension.
- The conventions of teen movies, when the group are successfully brought together, the teen returns home to his father and the situation is restored to harmony.
- Discussion about the representation of childhood, innocence and coming of age.
- Discussion of *The Tempest* and where in the play this scene would occur. How could this be played out differently? Could the students think of more contemporary songs that would suit this scene?

## It's a Living Thing 1:34:50



Scene starts with Davey singing *It's a Living Thing* by ELO. The rest of the cast join in. It's the end of the play. The scene is typical of many teen movies and signals the closure of a number of storylines. All of the students within the film have made peace with each other. There is a poignancy to the lyrics, with them metaphorically being used to symbolise the loss of innocence and the move to adulthood that the end of the summer signifies. The scene sees Miss May leaving the play. It's reminiscent of some Hollywood films where the teacher has done what was intended and leaves the students to their success. The sequence needs to be watched through the credits where the audience are told what the students and Miss May are doing now.

- Discussion of the tropes of teen movies. Comparison to the resolution of other teen movies and how they compare. This can draw comparisons with Hollywood films and how similar *Hunky Dory* is. Why is this? Does this make the film more or less satisfying as a British film.
- Discussion about narrative, the use of images and text that tells the audience what the students went on to do, with the implication that this is a true story. What does that bring to the narrative? Does it distract the audience from the fiction of the story? Why did the director decide to do this?
- Use of cinematography throughout the sequence. The framing and composition: throughout the film Miss May has appeared very much with the students, whereas in this scene she is positioned alone and on the outside. Comparisons could be drawn between this scene and the earlier scene when Evan sings *The Man Who Sold The World*. Does this position her as the outsider?

## Lesson plan

# Hunky Dory and representation

This could cover a number of lessons over a week. It links to the AS Film specification, the AS and A2 Media specification.

*AIM: discussion of representation in Hunky Dory, identifying the use of stereotypes, comparing how Hunky Dory represents groups in society compared to other media.*

This could focus on the representation of: gender, youth, Wales, Britain, class, family, themes that are culturally distinctive.

Scenes such as the first scene at Miss May's house, and when Davey visits her house, offer a representation of rural Wales.

The representation of gender and sexuality could be explored through the scenes with Davey, Angus, and their father when discussing performing in the play, and Evan's admission to Dena that he thinks he is homosexual.

Representation of youth runs through the film and there are a number of scenes that could be used to examine this. You could compare the representation in *Hunky Dory* to representations offered by other media, such as TV shows, newspapers or magazines.

Use of the scene in the Sociology class can be used to start conversations about class and the signifiers associated with working class and middle class.

The narrative deals with a number of themes. Students could prepare to discuss how far the narrative of the film addresses British themes. They could identify those themes that are universal and therefore will appeal to international audiences and those themes that address culturally distinctive themes that are particularly focused on British issues.

# Lesson plan

## Hunky Dory and the importance of stars

The film could be used to examine how important stars are for the film industry. This would be suitable for both AS Film Studies and the A2 Media Studies (Film industry).

Resources for the lesson could include:

- Interview with Minnie Driver, from the DVD extras
- Review: [www.viff.org/festival/films/f5299-hunky-dory](http://www.viff.org/festival/films/f5299-hunky-dory)

*AIM: students to understand why stars are important for films. The difference between Hollywood and British films, and the use of stars. What other factors are important for the success of the film. To discuss what stars bring to films and how this may have enhanced the marketing, reviews and viewing experience of Hunky Dory.*

This could be based in a similar way to the AS Film Studies exam for the Producers and Audiences section – where the student have to access resource material and discuss the importance of stars.

- Introduce the notion of stardom
- Identify Hollywood stars and what they bring to films
- How stars are utilised by production companies to market films
- The difference between Hollywood films and British films in their use of stars
- Identify British stars
- Discuss how Minnie Driver helps market *Hunky Dory*
- What are the similarities between *Hunky Dory* and other British films that use stars?

This lesson could form part of a number of lessons using different case studies. There are links between British film and TV stars, providing an opportunity to discuss differences between Hollywood and British film industry and the relationship between TV and the British film industry.

- How stars are used by the film industry
- Star persona
- The use of unknown talent for many of the cast in *Hunky Dory*.