

I, Daniel Blake

(2016)



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AS Component 1: Investigating the Media A level Component 1: Media Products, Industries and Audiences

Subject Content: Media Industries Focus Area: Media Contexts

PRODUCT CONTEXT

- *I, Daniel Blake* is an independent social realist film directed by renowned filmmaker Ken Loach (*Kes*, *Raining Stones*, *Sweet Sixteen* etc.).
- A UK/French co-production, it received funding from the BFI and BBC Films.
- It became Ken Loach's largest grossing film at the box office (taking over \$8 million), was highly critically acclaimed and generated much debate due to the contemporary social and political issues addressed in the film.
- *I, Daniel Blake* was exhibited at many film festivals, won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, and was nominated for many awards including several BAFTAs.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS - Media Industries

Social and Political Contexts:

I, Daniel Blake addresses contemporary British social issues such as poverty, the welfare system and the Work Capability Assessment. The film portrays a group of traditionally underrepresented characters in Newcastle struggling in poverty to gain benefits and support. *I, Daniel Blake* conveys a clear left-wing political message and criticises specific government policies. Consideration of the wider economic context and concept of "austerity" might be useful in exploring how changes to benefit policy had been justified.

Much of Ken Loach's work has addressed similar issues (*Cathy Come Home*, *Raining Stones*) and he is a social campaigner, known for his socialist political views. This is important to consider in terms of film production and maintaining audiences (arguably the intended audience for this film is

educated, media literate and socially aware).

Consider the significance of economic factors, including commercial and not-for-profit public funding, to media industries and their products:

- Economic factors including **funding** are extremely significant to this independent British co-production. The funding bodies are the BFI (through National Lottery Funding) and the BBC.
 - » Consider the ways in which this film is funded differently from many mainstream films, exploring **Public Service Broadcasting** and the respective remits of the BBC and the BFI.
- Discuss why vast financial **profits** might be less important for practitioners working in this genre of film.

Consider processes of production, distribution and circulation and the impact of digitally convergent platforms:

- *I, Daniel Blake* is a low **budget** social realist film, funded by the BFI and BBC. It was filmed largely on location (hospital, job centre etc.), features lesser known actors and does not rely on special effects.
- Consider how films and their marketing are **distributed and circulated**:
 - » Where and how are films and their marketing most likely to be **consumed** by audiences?
 - » How has this consumption changed/ been impacted by the ubiquity of **online and social media**?
 - » Are audiences now more likely to seek out marketing (e.g. new trailers) online as **active consumers**?
 - » How does this impact the **relationship** between audience and product?
- The *I, Daniel Blake* website includes links to **social media** and the trailer offers a hashtag (#idanielblake) suggesting links with Twitter, but it is worth considering the ways in which the marketing might be more likely to be consumed in more traditional ways. Might an assumed older audience be more likely to see the trailer

at the cinema and less likely to search for it on the internet? Consider how the film was **marketed** more traditionally (poster campaign, trailer in cinemas etc.) as well as online.

- The film was **exhibited** at various film festivals and received a **theatrical release** in Britain and various other countries (including France, Spain, Brazil and Japan – although not in the USA). It was later released on **digital download** and **DVD/Blu-ray**.

Consider the effect of individual producers on media industries:

- It may be useful to explore Ken Loach and his significance as a practitioner in British and Global cinema - how Loach has been able to repeatedly secure **funding** for social realist films and the extent to which the **genre** itself exists in its current form due to his work.
- Consider the extent to which *I, Daniel Blake* can be described as a **mainstream** product. Loach is a well-known and successful figure in the UK and Europe but is his work mainstream? Does the fact he is challenging governmental policy mean he is also challenging mainstream opinions?
- It might also be interesting to consider whether there exists a pre-sold **audience** of Loach fans who are eager to watch his films and the extent to which this gives him license to make films that might not otherwise secure finance.

Consider how media organisations maintain, including through marketing, varieties of audiences nationally and globally:

- The **marketing** materials establish the status and reputation of film – positive critical comments on the poster, reference to the Palme d'Or award in the trailer etc.
- The **genre** (British social realist film) and **director** Ken Loach are important factors in maintaining an audience. Loach has a long history of directing work in the genre (*Kes* from

1969 might be a useful specific comparison) and, unlike some film genres which have been impacted by technical developments and special effects, might this genre be particular in its tendency to resist change?

- There are specific and distinct **potential audiences** that the film is attempting to target through its **marketing**:
 - » The trailer references the BBC, BFI and the Palme d'Or. Discuss the extent to which these references suggest an assumed education and level of media literacy in the **target audience**.
 - » The **trailer** explores specific governmental policy which also may suggest audiences will have an awareness of political and social issues in the UK.
 - » The only specific “star” identified in the trailer using intertitles is the **director** Ken Loach. Loach’s work whilst having broad appeal sits firmly within the niche of social realism and candidates may discuss the extent to which the fans of his work are pre-sold based on his name alone.

Consider theoretical perspectives:

Power and media industries – Curran and Seaton

- Consider the extent to which the trailer is a **challenge** to ideas set out by Curran and Seaton.
 - » The trailer seems to offer an experience that sits outside the logic of **profit and power** and may arguably also demonstrate a level of variety and creativity that does not reflect Curran and Seaton’s ideas about the impact of media concentration.
 - » Candidates might also consider whether the trailer is able to offer a more adventurous production due to socially diverse patterns of **ownership** or (as above) Loach’s own pre-sold **audience**.