

Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging



Suitable for:

KS3/4 Media, English and Film Studies

Film details:

Cert. PG, Running time 120 mins

Gurinder Chadha's film is based on Louise Rennison's best-selling series of books. This British comedy follows the eccentric Georgia Nicolson as she overcomes the trauma of being a teenager.

Representation, Reality and Readers

The themes contained in *Angus, Thongs, and Perfect Snogging* (ATPS) are recognisable to a teen audience in particular. However, the representation of teenagers is something that is more commonly seen from the other side of the Atlantic. How important do you think it is that we see a range of on screen representations? Gurinder Chadha talks exclusively to students that attended a special Film Education screening of *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging*:

GC: The books are really popular here and they are also really popular around the world and in America so the film rights for the books were bought by Hollywood, by Paramount Studios, that had been trying to make the film for five years but they couldn't quite get the script right. They had these two American guys trying to write what it was like to be a schoolgirl in Britain. So when I got the script and was reading their draft it wasn't really reflective of what it's like to be growing up in England. What I liked about the books is that

they reminded me of being at school because I grew up in London and went to school in Ealing. And, I thought it was a great opportunity to make a film like the Americans make all the time about high-school shenanigans, films like Clueless, Mean Girls etc. And, I thought it was a great opportunity to make a British version of a high-school movie for the rest of the world.

We tested this film in Los Angeles and initially the studios weren't sure how the film would play in America because they thought it might be too English but actually it was fantastic and it was a very similar reaction to what we saw today with you. The girls in LA absolutely loved it and they really loved the idea of seeing English girls and boys going through exactly what they go through in California. I'm very proud that it's a British version of the kind of film Americans usually make and in terms of the title, if you know the books, Angus, Thongs and Full-frontal Snogging, you'd know that was a jokey title. But if you don't know the books, and a lot of adults don't, some people actually thought we were making a porno film because it has thongs and full-frontal in the title and the combination of the two sounds like something very rude. To calm it down a bit we decided to go for Perfect Snogging instead of Full-frontal Snogging but I like that because the message of the whole film is that you're perfect as you are, you don't need to get a nose job or dye your hair, just be yourself.

This quote raises many questions about representation. Firstly, in terms of making a British version of a genre that's more often made in America. From watching the trailer and or the whole film what aspects would you identify as particularly British?

Gurinder Chadha talks about the stages that the script went through before it eventually got made. She says the script '*...wasn't really reflective of what it's like to be growing up in England.*'

Do you think this is as important for British audiences? What stereotypes might an American or international audience rely on to understand British life? Think about other British films that have had international success. Are there any common representations or stereotypes that these draw on? Do you feel that these are representative of life in Britain as you experience it?

Consider the issues raised by the testing in LA. It is important to consider the production context and how this impacts on the final content of the film.

Q: You said you wanted to make the film more multi-cultural but I never saw any black, Asian or Chinese people in the film except for Ellen.

GC: *Do you know why? It's because it was set in Eastbourne, there aren't many black people in Eastbourne is there? But the school is full of all kinds of different kids from different backgrounds. It's an important point though because for those of you who have read the books, you'll know that there aren't any Indian or black friends in it but I wanted to make one of them Indian or black but in the end I went for Manjeevan because she was a good actress and just by casting her there was a huge uproar on the internet. People said, no you can't do that because in the books, no one is Indian but as a director I wanted to produce something a bit more culturally mixed. There was a huge debate about it but I stuck to my guns and in the end I cast her and I think a lot of people who were protective of the books, didn't really like that. We shot the actual school that Georgia goes to in Hillingdon so that's got more of a London feel I think and I made sure I shot it because culturally that was quite mixed.*

This quotation demonstrates a number of issues about the complexity of representation. Consider the following questions and statements for discussion:

- A film is always a work of deliberate construction. Do you think a filmmaker has a responsibility to present diversity even if its not based on fact?
- When adapting a book to the screen you should always be as faithful as possible.
- A film needs to be internationally successful in order to be commercially viable. So from this point of view appealing to the widest possible audience with multi-cultural characters is essential.
- Filmmaking is not just about commercial success, and by including multi-cultural characters purely for these reasons is tokenistic.

Representations of Gender



Q: Some of your films like Bahji on the Beach have domestic violence and quite serious themes. Was it a bit odd with this film to concentrate more on what an average teenager was like, without the darker, more morbid side?

GC: *It was a different film. That's a good question actually. This is a different film but on the other hand, I do think that this film is making serious points but it does it jokingly, like when Georgia turns up with Vaseline on her eyelashes, or she's doing the pencil test, it's making serious points about the fact that girls are always being told they're too fat or too thin, or they're not curvy enough, or their hair is too straight and with all the magazines, there's constant bombardment of having to look like a particular type of perfect model. And, one of the reasons I cast Georgia in this movie is because she is not Hollywood, she*

looks like a regular, average, normal young English girl and I think in some of the scenes she looks really, really pretty and in other scenes she looks really plain and average and that in itself is quite an important political statement.

Questions for discussion

- What do you think Gurinda Chadha means by '*...she is not Hollywood*'? If you were casting this film, is this something that would be important to you?
- The pressures on girls and women to look a certain way are raised here and throughout the film. Do you agree with Chadha that '*...in other scenes she looks really plain and average and that in itself is quite an important political statement.*'?
- Do you think there is a climate of expectation for film to push a political agenda through their work, and should this also apply to films targeted at younger audiences?

Further Scenes For Discussion

Generically the romantic comedy requires that the central couple don't get together immediately. Georgia has many sequences where she is trying to get noticed. Think about the scene where we find the two characters in the swimming pool. How is comedy generated here?

Georgia undergoes many scenes of embarrassment in her journey to become desirable. In the sequence with her sister and the shaved off eyebrow, how would you explain the audience's pleasure in this sequence?

For the full interview with Gurinder Chadha please go to the British Cinema page.