

Happy-Go-Lucky



Suitable for:

AS/A2 Media/Film Studies

Film details:

Cert. 15, Running time 115 mins

Mike Leigh's latest follows Poppy, a primary school teacher, who loves the children she teaches, and works hard. We see how she deals with the harsh realities of life with a smile, never losing her sense of humour.

Happy-Go-Lucky and Leigh

Mike Leigh is a well-respected figure in British cinema with work that spans several decades. Like Ken Loach, Leigh started his work in television. Television provided a training school extraordinaire for talented young writers and directors to learn and develop their craft.

One of Leigh's most well known pieces is Abigail's Party that started as a stage play, then transferred to the BBC. Leigh's success with Abigail's Party was just the start of numerous close character studies that regularly use the partnership between Leigh and the actors working toward Leigh's ideas and concepts around the piece.



Happy-Go-Lucky Leigh?

You may or may not have seen other Mike Leigh films, but taking your experience of Happy-Go-Lucky think about the following quote:

'Like Woody Allen, Mike Leigh is a born pessimist; if you dismiss his work for being overly gloomy, it is probably because you prefer lighter, more optimistic reflections of the human drama.'

Garan Holcombe, 2005

www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=authC2D9C28A1b0d427815kSj429BD6A

- Does this description of Leigh's work match with your experience of Happy-Go-Lucky?
- Is this description enough to begin an assessment of Leigh's work as an auteur?
- If this is not a defining feature then are there others that you might be able to uncover by taking a closer look at other films that Leigh has directed?

Relationships and Representation

The title of the film Happy-Go-Lucky is obviously meant to be a description of the lead character Poppy. As the narrative progresses we see her going through her everyday life. Toward the end of the film we see her, and her friend Zoe, rowing a boat on the river. Zoe says to her, 'You can't make everyone happy?' Do you think that this is what Poppy is trying to do?

In the film we meet Poppy's sister Helen. How would you describe the visit to Helen and her husband? In what ways do Poppy and Helen contrast? Helen says to Poppy that she doesn't think she's happy? What is it that Helen sees as the things or events that would bring Poppy happiness? Do you agree with this? Does this suggest a wider gendered idea of happiness? How do such stereotypes sit with the characters in this film?

- How typical would you say this scene is of Leigh?
- Can you make connections between this scene and others in different films to support your answer?

Driving to Distraction

During the first driving lessons with Scott, Poppy is alarmed by Scott's overt racism. As her lessons continue she discovers that he holds other attitudes and beliefs that are very different from her own.

- Why do you think she continues with him for so long?
- The final scene between Scott and Poppy builds a great deal of tension, is this what you expected to happen? As Poppy walks away what impact do you think this episode has on her?



Further Discussion Points

- Think about the representations of gender in the film. How are they different? Do we see the same variety of male and female characters?
- The narration restricts us to Poppy's point of view as we see the scene between her and the homeless man. She doesn't talk about it when she gets home, however, we, as the audience, is privileged to see this sequence. What purpose do you think this scene serves? What does it tell us about Poppy?