

'Rob Roy' Teachers' Notes



Intended for GCSE and A' level Media Studies students, this study guide looks at the idea of representation from a number of different viewpoints. It considers the representation of place (Scotland) and also of historical period. It also examines the ways in which 'heroes' and 'villains' of stories are represented. Finally, it examines the ways in which the film itself is represented to an audience.

Should you wish to introduce the concepts of representation and audience to your students, guides introducing these two concept areas are available, free of charge, from Film Education.

Please visit the website at www.filmeducation.org for details

Synopsis of Film

A passionate romantic epic, 'Rob Roy' is the true story of Robert Roy MacGregor, a hero of 18th century Scotland, whose love for one woman gave him honour, courage and, ultimately, his life.

The leader and provider for his entire clan, Rob Roy arranges to borrow money from the Marquis of Montrose to survive the harsh Highland winter. However, his trust in less honourable men makes him a pawn in a ruthless plot that threatens to destroy everything he knows. When honour no longer serves, it is love alone that can save him.

Further Reading

Audience, Heather Owen, Film Education Concept Guide.

Representation, Louise Chater, Film Education Concept Guide.

Rob Roy MacGregor, Gilbert J. Summers, Jarrold, 1986.

INTRODUCTION

You will be given a still from a film. Look carefully at all of the still - what is at the front of the picture and also what is in the background.

Look carefully for any clues about when and where the action in the film is taking place.

What details are used to build up the setting (the period and the place)?

What are the most important details?

On the photo, circle each of the clues which helped you to decide on when and where the film takes place.

When you have completed this exercise, write down a list of all of the different types of clues which helped you decide on the setting of the film. Was it just the general scene? What else helped?

What you have done is to look at the way a film tells its story. Some details that may have helped you to say when the story was set were the clothes worn by the characters and the buildings in the background. Both of these are very important to the filmmaker in communicating when a film is set.

CREATING 'ROB ROY'

Filmmakers take months, sometimes years, preparing to make a film. What areas do you think would need to be researched before a film is shot?

In a film such as 'Rob Roy', the filmmakers have to think carefully about the period in which the story takes place. Since the film is set in the past, they have to make everything look as authentic as possible.

The makers of 'Rob Roy' had to find out how people lived, what they would wear, what towns and villages might have looked like.

Where do you think they could have found out this information? What sources may have been used?

Historical subjects have always attracted filmmakers. Yet dealing with history holds certain problems for the filmmaker, e.g. whose point of view is represented, what is included or excluded. Similarly, films hold problems for the historian. Even documentary films have to be treated carefully by the historian.

1. What are the problems that you think face a feature filmmaker when he/she comes to make a film about an historical subject?
2. When a student of history looks at a feature film dealing with a historical subject, what ought he/she to bear in mind about the ways in which history is presented?
3. In what ways are feature films reliable sources for historians and in what ways are they unreliable sources?

Anyone involved in the design of 'Rob Roy' will have had to consider two things - the period in which the action is set and also an audience's expectation of how the setting and characters should be portrayed. The action of the film takes place around 1713 in Scotland, which establishes the time and place.

'Rob Roy' - Images of Scotland

Because the story of 'Rob Roy' is set in Scotland we need to think of the expectations that we, as an audience, would have of 'Scotland', based on how it is represented in the media. Many of you reading this will never have visited Scotland, others will live in Scotland and thus have a different idea of what 'Scotland' is, compared to the ways in which it is represented.

TASK

You should collect as many holiday brochures as possible which relate to Scotland. What pictures are shown in the brochures? How do the brochures describe Scotland?

When you have analysed the brochures, think carefully about the way you perceive Scotland? What do people wear?

It is worth bearing in mind that Scotland is often divided into two - the Highlands and the Lowlands. Historically this is important, particularly when considering the story of 'Rob Roy'. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, with problems arising over the succession to the throne of Britain, the Highlanders - who were in the main Jacobites, followers of the Stuart kings and princes - were often in conflict with the Lowlanders - who tended to side with the English. The ways of life were also different in terms of culture, language and values.

If you look at the images of Scotland that you have collected, which of the two cultures seems to be represented the most, the Highland or the Lowland?

It has been said that the story of Rob Roy represents the clash between the two cultures; the thousand year old culture of the clans from the Highlands and the developing culture of the Lowlands which was being steadily influenced by the English. Think carefully about the ways in which Argyll and Montrose are presented in the film. How does each represent the different cultures? Think of the ways in which the filmmakers show the differences between them.

'Rob Roy' Reality and Legend

There is no question that Rob Roy MacGregor existed. However, it is worth thinking about the different Rob Roys which are presented to us. At the time he lived, the Highlanders would tell stories of their heroes orally. It was not until the time of Sir Walter Scott that the story of Rob Roy was written down in any detailed form. However, Scott's novel, 'Rob Roy' was not written until the beginning of the 19th century, more than half a century after Rob Roy's death. Scott used the stories that he had heard in order to construct his own narrative.

Since, by that stage, Scott was writing about a way of life that had been destroyed by the English, his account of the story was one which glorified the Highland way of life.

The story which we are told in the film Rob Roy is not Scott's story but one based on various incidents which are known to have occurred. However, because the filmmakers wish to tell a story, certain events have been changed and characters added.

The Real Rob Roy

Any filmed biography will take an attitude towards the central character that it is dealing with. It is worth considering briefly the life of the real Rob Roy and the incidents in his life on which the film concentrates.

Born in 1671 at Glengyle, Rob Roy learnt the skills of cattle droving and swordsmanship as a boy. At the age of 16, his reputation started to grow when he recovered stolen cattle from a band of rustlers. As he grew older he became famed for his cattle dealing and in 1712 was loaned £1,000 by the Duke of Montrose to buy cattle. However, the money was stolen and Rob Roy was consequently declared bankrupt and an outlaw. His family was evicted from their home and went to live under the protection of the Earl of Breadalbane.

In 1715, Rob Roy took part in the Jacobite uprising, but following the collapse of the rebellion, was hunted by Government troops. His home was destroyed by these troops and as revenge, he captured the factor (steward) of the Earl of Montrose and started raiding the Earl's lands, stealing cattle and goods. Despite being captured a number of times, Rob Roy always managed to escape the forces of law and order.

In 1725, Rob Roy was granted a pardon and settled down to cattle dealing and cattle protection. He died in 1734.

TASK

1. Look at the brief life of Rob Roy given above. Which sections of his life have been used in the film? What time scale do these cover? When you have seen the film, identify what changes have been made to his life-story. Why might this have been done? Having seen the film, what did you think the time scale of events was?
2. Find out about life in the Highlands at the turn of the 18th century. In what ways does the film try to reproduce that way of life? Compare the ways of life to the representation of the highlands now. In what ways are they different?

The Hero of the Piece

In many ways, Rob Roy himself can be seen as one of a line of heroes - Robin Hood amongst them - who fight authority in the name of honour and the truth. However, it is possible to look on all of these characters in a different light. Rob Roy, as well as being a hero, can also be seen as a cattle thief and murderer - all in all, a complete reprobate - the exact opposite of a hero). This always depends on what information the filmmaker has chosen to give us. We need to consider carefully the ways in which heroes are presented to us in film and then to think whether the hero of the film 'Rob Roy' fits into this mould.

TASK

In the chart below, write down the titles of three films that you have seen recently. In the relevant boxes, describe the qualities of the central male character. What are the characteristics that we expect to find in a hero'?

Film Title	Central Male Character	Characteristics

From the characteristics that you have noted above, how many can be applied to the character of Rob Roy?

Many techniques are used by filmmakers to give us information about a character. Some of the common techniques are:

- their physical appearance (including dress, voice, looks)
- personality (friendly, happy etc.)
- actions of the character
- setting: where they usually appear
- the way they interact with other characters
- other characters' comments about them
- music associated with a character

Is Rob Roy a hero) according to the above categories? Take each one and apply it to the way he is presented on screen.

Obviously, for us to realise that Rob Roy is the hero, it is also necessary for us to identify who the villains of the piece are. Archibald Cunningham certainly fits the bill for a villain. But how? How is he represented to us? Who else would you say could be termed a villain of the piece? Again, use the ideas above to analyse both Archibald and any other character that you think might be termed a villain.

it is interesting to line up the characters in order to see who fits into which camp - hero or villain - and examine the details/clues which contribute to his representation on screen.

Placing the Audience

Your work on heroes and villains will have allowed you to see that the various characters are shown in one light or another. In watching 'Rob Roy', we need to be aware that the film has taken a particular stance regarding the central character and the overall representation of both Highlanders and the English.

Imagine that you were retelling the story from the point of view of Montrose. How would you present Rob Roy? Would he hold all of the heroic characteristics which you described earlier? What impression of Rob Roy would be given? How would Montrose portray himself?

We, as members of an audience, are shown how we should react to the characters and events by the way that they are represented.

TASK

Think of instances from the film where Montrose and Cunningham are shown to us in a negative way. Can you think of any positive moments from the film which show both of the characters in a different light?

Are there any moments in the film which show us that Rob Roy might not be the blameless character that we are encouraged to believe he is?

As well as the way they are shown, we must also think about the values that the characters represent. What does Rob Roy himself stand for? What does Montrose stand for? What values does each believe in?

Which set of values do you think an audience might find the most attractive?

Mary MacGregor

Mary and the Montrose's maid are the only two female characters which we see in any detail during the film. How are they presented to us? In what ways is Mary central to the development of the story? Both are victims of Cunningham. Yet both react in different ways to his treatment. If you think about your work on the values of the characters, are the different value systems shown by Rob Roy and by Montrose reflected in these two female characters?

To what extent does Mary force Rob Roy into action? In what way could she be called the central character of the story?

Representing 'Rob Roy'

The next thing to think about is how an audience can be attracted to see 'Rob Roy'. The most obvious way is to have a poster which will give the audience some idea of what the film will be about.

Look in the newspapers. You should find that there are some film advertisements which are reproduced in the entertainment pages. Look at them carefully. You will see that they give a lot of information. Some of it is written, some of it is in picture form. Consider the way in which each ad tries to sell the film. What image of the film is given? In what ways does each try to communicate the type or 'genre' of the film?

Before you construct your own poster for 'Rob Roy', you will need to consider what sort of film it is. Is it a romance? Is it an action adventure film? Is it an historical drama? You need to think which of these might attract an audience the most? Possibly you may wish to combine elements of all three in your design. Remember however, that you cannot represent 'Rob Roy' as something that it is not. Audiences would pay their money to see a particular type of film and if, when they get into the cinema, they realise that they have been tricked, then bad word of mouth will spread about the film.

So how would you represent 'Rob Roy' on a poster?

What information should you give on your poster for 'Rob Roy'? Below is some of the written information you should give:

- The name of the Film
- The names of the stars who are in the Film
- What would you include in the copy headline to complement the visual image?

What you should also have on your poster are some pictures or drawings which will let the audience know what the film is about. The final choice is yours, but you should bear in mind the type of film that you decided that 'Rob Roy' is. It may be interesting if each person or group tries to represent the film differently. See how many alternatives you can come up with.