

## Submarine Study Notes



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**Directed by:** Richard Ayoade

**Certificate:** 15

**Running time:** 97 mins

**Release date:** 18 March 2011

### Synopsis:

*Submarine* is an offbeat comedy about a fifteen-year-old, Oliver Tate, who is obsessed with books, films and...a girl called Jordana. Desperate to lose his virginity while equally desperate to save his parents' crumbling marriage, Oliver takes us on a quirky and strangely beautiful journey of love and loss through the industrial landscape of South Wales.

**These Study Notes are intended for students of Film and Media Studies at GCSE and AS/A2 or equivalent. The subject matter of the film also touches on aspects of the curriculum for PSHE.**

## Before Viewing

### **Submarine** and music

Music plays a particularly important part in *Submarine*. The film features a number of original songs written and performed by Alex Turner of the Arctic Monkeys. The film contains long wordless sequences underscored by these songs and, understandably, many critics have compared these sections to music videos.

Interestingly, most of Ayoade's directorial experience before *Submarine* was in music videos.

- What sort of feeling and impact can music video have and what effect could a music video-style sequence achieve in a film?
- Can you think of other films which feature extended montage sequences that are quite like music videos?
- Take a look at Ayoade's music videos for Kasabian's 'Vlad the Impaler', The Last Shadow Puppets' 'My Mistakes', Vampire Weekend's 'Cape Cod Kwassa Kwassa' and Arctic Monkeys' 'Fluorescent Adolescent'. All of them can be seen at [warp.net](http://warp.net). As you watch, consider the look and feel of these texts.
- To what extent are they cinematic? How much do they try to tell a story?
- Now watch the trailer for *Submarine*. Do you see any similarities in terms of visual style? Can you identify any stylistic or thematic motifs across these texts?

## After Viewing

### **Voiceover** and narrative

*Submarine* makes very extensive use of voiceover. The use of voiceover in films is sometimes criticised, as there is a feeling that a film should rely on the visual narrative and the narrative conveyed in the dialogue.

- What effects do you think are achieved by having Oliver speak directly to the audience through voiceover?
- Do you think there is a gap between what Oliver says about himself and the reality that we see on the screen? If so, what effects does this create?

### **The voiceover** and literature

*Submarine* is based on a 2008 novel by Joe Dunthorne. The influences of other books, especially JD Salinger's 'The Catcher in the Rye' (1951), have been discussed in relation to the film.

- Do you feel that the film is quite literary – does it feel like it is an adaptation of a book? In what ways?

## **Seriousness, comedy and the voiceover**

The film deals with serious issues: mental and physical illness, bereavement and marital breakdown. Oliver likes to make out that he understands these issues and is, in the case of his parents' marriage, able to see things that they can't.

- To what extent did you feel the film's comedy comes from a tension between what he says he understands (through his voiceover) and what he actually understands?

## **Submarine, Welshness and Britishness**

*Submarine* went down well at 2010's Sundance Film Festival and has secured a good distribution deal in the USA. The film does not offer the landmarks or country houses that make many British films attractive to American audiences, and yet has managed to be successful there.

One of the most romantic sequences in the film takes place against a very industrial landscape. Ayoade and his cinematographer can make the industrial (and post-industrial) beautiful.

- How do they do this? How are scenes shot and lit? How does the ordinary appear extraordinary?

Like many of the films produced by Warp Films (based in Sheffield), *Submarine* provides a glimpse of parts of Britain that are often overlooked on the big screen.

- Do you think it is important that British films should show real landscapes and cityscapes of everyday British life? Is it important for British audiences to recognise their own experiences of Britain on film?

Extended activity: Try filming or photographing everyday landscapes in ways that make them engaging or even romantic. Think of using natural light and finding times of day, where the quality of light can give an ordinary scene new life.

## **Intertextuality**

*Submarine* is full of references to other films. Richard Ayoade is keen to emphasise that this is not about postmodern playfulness. Instead he is simply trying to present a character who is obsessed with films. He argues that most characters in films, bizarrely, appear not to be interested in film.

## **Extended activities:**

- Write a treatment for a film based on the events of your own life. Think of ways in which you could transform the circumstances of your life, however mundane, into something truly cinematic.
- Storyboard or script an everyday scene from your life. Try to use voiceover to comment on and narrate the action.
- View some further films and consider in what ways you think they may have influenced Richard Ayoade. Suggestions for further viewing include *Harold & Maude* (Ashby, 1971); *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Hughes, 1986); *Rushmore* (Anderson, 1998); *Election* (Payne, 1999) and *Juno* (Reitman, 2007)

## ***Submarine* from a PSHE perspective**

- What does *Submarine* show us about the complexities of life for this fifteen-year-old boy in Britain today?
- To what extent is this experience familiar to you? Explain.
- How do you respond to the way the film portrays love, divorce, bereavement and illness?

*Written by Adam Robbins*