

# DISCOVERY FILM FESTIVAL

Scotland's International Film Festival  
for Young Audiences

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## Teachers' Resource Pack: **Boy**

Senior Phase | Created by Meg Brough

**Discovery Film Festival: Sat 21 October – Sun 5 November 2023**

**DCA**

Dundee Contemporary Arts

**DUNDEE**  
ONE CITY, MANY DISCOVERIES



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

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[discoveryfilmfestival.org.uk](https://discoveryfilmfestival.org.uk)

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With support from the DCA Cinema and Learning teams



## Introduction

Discovery Learning Resources give you exciting classroom activities to enhance Curriculum for Excellence delivery.

They are created by classroom teachers and education professionals.

Each resource aims to:

- support and extend working with film in the classroom
- help prepare teachers for a class visit to a Discovery Film Festival film and to extend the impact of that visit for delivery of CfE
- develop confidence in Moving Image Education approaches and working with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacy/moving image texts

Each resource is free and available to download from:

<http://www.discoveryfilmfestival.org.uk/resources>:

### **Boy**

Dir: Taika Waititi

New Zealand 2010 / 1h27m

English and Maori



# Boy

## Synopsis:

In 1984, 11-year-old Boy lives on a farm with his younger brother Rocky (who thinks he has magic powers), their gran, and a goat. Shortly after Gran leaves for a week, Boy's father Alamein appears out of the blue. Having imagined a heroic version of his father during his absence, Boy comes face-to-face with the real version: an incompetent hoodlum who has returned to find a bag of money he buried years before.

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## Themes:

Responsibility, family relationships, fatherhood, coming of age, hero worship, loss of innocence

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## Advisory note:

There are frequent uses of strong language, often the 'f' word. References of a sexual nature but no sex or nudity. References to alcohol and drugs. Some darker themes including child neglect and violence, one example depicts a gory injury. This pack aims to delve deeper into the theme of parental neglect and coming of age. This is most often dealt with in a humorous tone. Recommended for ages 15+ as this focuses on the central characters and how they navigate difficult situations and family relationships.

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## BBFC rating:

15 (strong language, drug misuse, brief comic violence)

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## Teacher's notes:

This resource pack will be mainly of use to English and Media teachers although the issues raised could be usefully explored in Personal and Social Education. Ages 15 and above would gain most benefit from the film and associated tasks as it focuses on the central characters of a similar age. Therefore, the work in this pack has been geared for Third and Fourth Level. The most obvious E&Os are listed after each task. However, there may be more from other curricular areas that could apply, depending on the approach to the task.



## Before watching the film

### Activity 1: Film trailer analysis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP05fUP9xAo>

You should watch the trailer and analyse the media language used before you attend the screening. This will give you a better understanding of how the director uses film language to explore the issues surrounding the film. (These questions will help you to analyse any film trailer.)

- 1 What is the purpose of a film trailer? What might the reasons be for the creation of this film?
- 2 What information should be included in a successful film trailer? Has this film trailer been successful in providing this information?
- 3 Which genre do you think this film falls into? How can you tell?
- 4 Do you notice anything stylistic about this film? Does it remind you of any other films?
- 5 What will the tone or mood of this film be? How can you tell?
- 6 Now you have watched the trailer, who do you think might watch this film? Think about things such as age, gender and interest. Give reasons from the trailer to back up your answer.
- 7 What are the main societal issues you think will be highlighted in this film? How can you tell? Do you think this piece of media will challenge how you see the world?

## Institutional Factors

### Interview with Taika Waititi on making kiwi film *Boy* – YouTube

In this interview Taika Waititi talks about the creation of *Boy* and the process of making it, alongside actor James Rolleston. This details the factors at play which influence the final movie.

- Make a list of the institutional factors which affected the creation of *Boy*.

### CFE Outcomes

*To show my understanding, I can give detailed, evaluative comments, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts, and respond to different kinds of questions and other types of close reading tasks. ENG 4-17a*



## Introductory Speech

### Activity 2: **Listening Task**

At the beginning of the film we immediately understand who Boy is as a character through his description of himself. Answer the following questions based on his speech

- Why does he say he loves Michael Jackson?
  - Who does he live with?
  - What can we tell about Boy's character as a result of this speech?
  - What initial impression does this speech give us of Boy's father?
  - How does this contrast to what we meet later?
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### Activity 3: **Writing task**

Begin a piece of personal writing about your own life. Explain who you are in a similar, childlike tone. Think about the mundane or negative elements of your life that you could possibly embellish in a fantastical way, and have fun doing this.

## CFE Outcomes

### Reading

I can:

- *Discuss and evaluate the effectiveness of structure, characterisation and/or setting using some supporting evidence*
- *Identify how the writer's main theme or central concerns are revealed and can recognise how they relate to my own and others' experiences*
- *Identify and make a personal evaluation of the effect of aspects of the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre using some relevant evidence and terminology. **ENG 4-19a***

### Writing

*I enjoy creating texts of my choice and I am developing my own style. I can regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to suit the needs of my audience. **LIT 3-20a / LIT 4-20a***

### Listening

*As I listen or watch, I can make notes and organise these to develop thinking, help retain and recall information, explore issues and create new texts, using my own words as appropriate.*

**LIT 3-05a / LIT 4-05a**

Activity 4: **Representation**

Taika Waititi is known for creating characters who help to create ‘happy sad’ black comedy. They are often deadpan in their delivery which makes what they say and do even more humorous.

In the following table, the descriptions of the characters have been done for you. Can you find a quotation or example of when we see this and why this is important?

Name	Character Trait	Description and Analysis
Boy	Responsible Growing Up	
Boy	Optimistic Youthful	
Boy	Irresponsible Childlike	

Overall, would you say that Boy’s father, Alamein, is an ‘antagonist’ and/or villain? Give reasons for your answer, referring to examples from the film.



## Activity 5: Representation and Differential decoding

Differential decoding is when the audience has interpreted (consciously or subconsciously) the meaning or theme of a media text in a different way to what the creator intended.

In this article, and video, **Taika Waititi talks about why 'normal' Indigenous representation in film matters**. Watch the video where Taika Waititi talks about the importance of representing Indigenous voices.

He states “ I think the only authentic way you can a story from a particular place is to get someone from that place – someone who knows that content and knows the culture – to tell it.” He has drawn on his own experiences of living in New Zealand and has previously stated that it was not uncommon to be left to his own devices as a child. Some critics argue that Waititi has not portrayed the Indigenous way of life positively.

- 1 Would you say that Waititi has perpetuated negative stereotypes in this film? Give some examples of how he can be argued to have has represented Maori culture in a negative way.

Waititi goes on to say “We're the Native presence in films that talk to trees, and we're smudging all the time, and we're riding whales, and we're talking to the ghosts of our ancestors – which, sure, maybe for a few of us... I don't. I'm just a normal dude.”

- 2 Can you argue that Waititi has not created a negative stereotype? (Hint: Watch the closing Thriller/Haka Scene). Do you think it's important for directors to represent things accurately? Do you think bringing 80s western culture together with traditional Maori culture helps with this?

## CFE Outcomes

### Reading

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- *Identify how the writer's main theme or central concerns are revealed and can recognise how they relate to my own and others' experiences*
- *Identify and make a personal evaluation of the effect of aspects of the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre using some relevant evidence and terminology. **ENG 4-19a***

### Writing

*I can persuade, argue, evaluate, explore issues or express and justify opinions within a convincing line of thought, using relevant supporting detail and/or evidence. **LIT 4-29a***

Activity 6: **Narrative Theory – Binary Opposites**

This contrast in representations brings us to the narrative structure of Binary Opposites. Claude Lévi-Strauss was interested in narrative structures. These are structures that stories use to create meaning. When he analysed traditional stories, he identified that stories need to have conflict or contrast in order to produce meaning and drive the story forward. He also believed that these conflicts give meaning and tell audiences something about the kinds of ideas and beliefs society should accept. This often looks like good vs evil, or old vs young. Strauss called these conflicts ‘binary oppositions.’

Taiki Waititi subverts traditional conventions and creates opposing ideas in many of his films, including *Boy*.

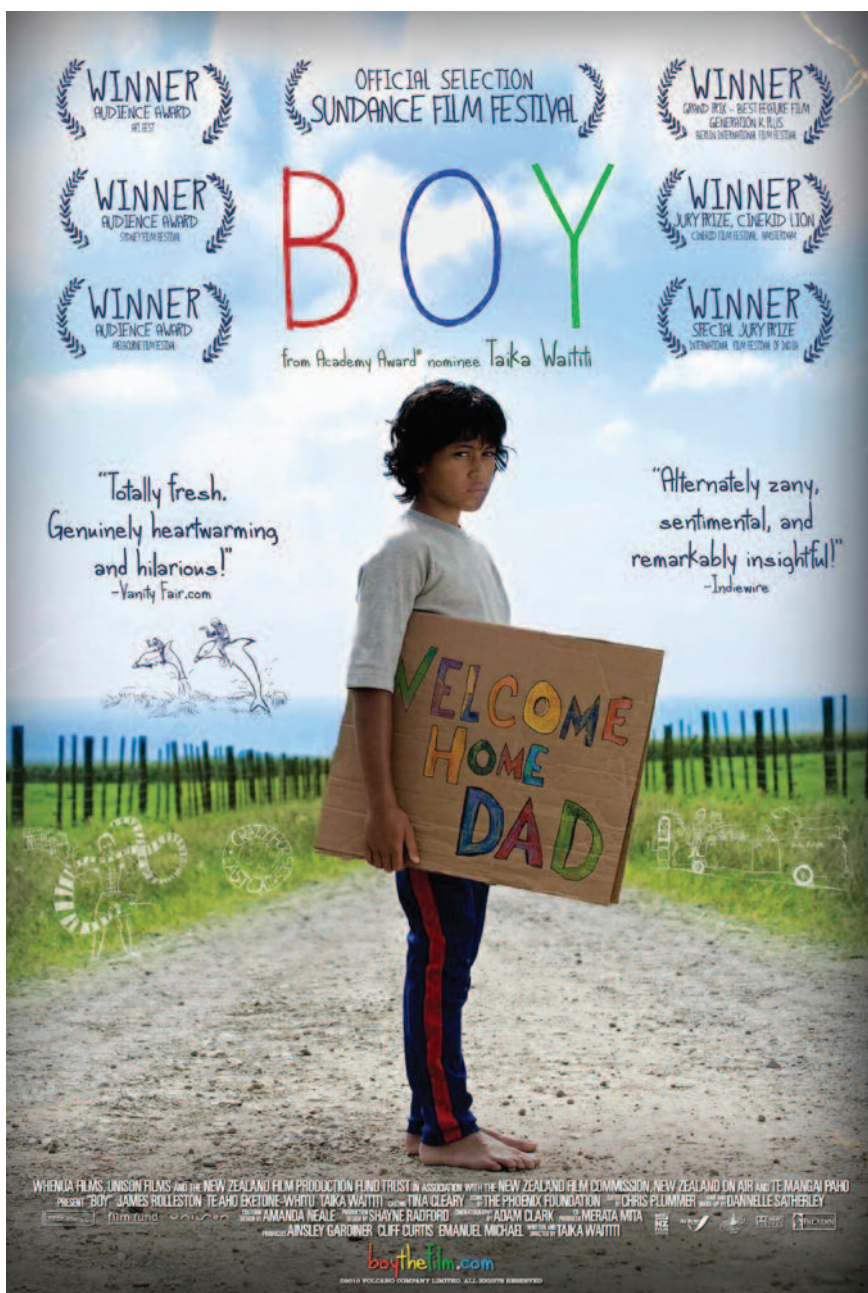
Contrasts	How do we see this?	What is the director trying to say/do here?
Negative Stereotypes of Māori Culture vs Positive representations of New Zealand		
Responsibility of Father vs Son		
Fantasy vs Reality		
Male gender roles Vs female Gender Roles		
Humorous tone vs Serious subject matter		



## CFE Outcomes

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Activity 7: **Tone and Genre – Humour vs Serious**

Comedy from New Zealand often falls under the ‘black comedy’ genre.

- 1 Do some research online, and come up with a definition of the ‘black comedy’ genre. What conventions would we expect to see in a black comedy?

Taika Waititi is known for his ability to take serious issues, which cause pain and heartbreak and deal with them in a humorous way. He explains “I want to explore the painful comedy of growing up and interpreting the world. I believe that despite our faults and inadequacies, through all the pain and heartache, there is still room to laugh.” **BOY (nzfilm.co.nz)**

In this table, choose one of the examples you gave in the previous task, which deals with one of these serious issues. Explain how the media language in a particular scene creates either a humorous or serious tone (or both).

<b>Scene:</b>			
Tone – Humorous/ Serious			
Music/Sound Effects			
Lighting/ Colour			
Setting (place/time/ use of props)			
Use of camera			
What the characters say/do			

Finally, think about the 'Billie Jean' scene, when Boy fantasises that his father is dancing, when is actually fighting with a rival gang. Describe how Waititi has used film language to create an absurd scene which balances out the harshness of reality.

## CFE Outcomes

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Activity 8: **Themes – Fantasy/Hero Worship/Optimism**

Fantasy helps this family to negotiate difficult situations and relationships. Often characters see visions or create delusions to make life more bearable. Using the table below, identify and describe some of these fantasies, and try to work out why Waititi has chosen to have these characters create these fantasies.

<b>Fantasy</b>	<b>Description of Scene(s)</b>	<b>Why do you think this character does this?</b>
Rocky's Powers		
Rocky's Drawings		
Boy's visions of his father		
Alamein's delusions about himself		

What other recurring fantasy motifs appear in this film? Write down any you can think of.



## CFE Outcomes

I can:

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  - *Identify how the writer's main theme or central concerns are revealed and can recognise how they relate to my own and others' experiences*
  - *Identify and make a personal evaluation of the effect of aspects of the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre using some relevant evidence and terminology. **ENG 4-19a***
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### Activity 9: **Climax and End Scenes**

- 1 In the final scenes of the film, we see Boy's realisation that his hero, his father, is flawed. Write down some examples of how we can see that Alamein has fallen in Boy's estimations. Think about Boy's actions, the things he says, and how the director uses film language to tell us things that the characters might not say out loud.
- 2 As Alamein leaves, we see that Boy still creates a fantasy that his father is in Japan as a samurai warrior. Why do you think Boy still chooses to fantasise where he has gone, despite his realisation that his father is fundamentally flawed?
- 3 In the final scene we see the three male characters around the grave of the mother.
  - i) Why do you think Waititi chose to have Alamein go to the grave?
  - ii) What do you think this scene tells us about their relationship?
  - iii) What is the significance of the final line, "How was Japan?"
  - iv) What do you think will happen next in their relationship? Is there hope for the future?

## CFE Outcomes

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## Evaluating this resource

We hope that you found this resource useful and appropriate.

Please do send us any film reviews, letters from your pupils, documentation of classwork and your feedback by e-mailing [mike.tait@dca.org.uk](mailto:mike.tait@dca.org.uk).

## Would you make a good Discovery Film Festival Case Study?

We are seeking a number of simple Case Studies in how teachers have used or are using Discovery films in the classroom across Curriculum for Excellence and across the Levels.

Any case studies that we develop would be intended for presentation on GLOW, the Creativity Portal and on Discovery Film Festival websites. We have a simple template to be completed and are keen to have classwork and documentation included.

If you would like to be a Discovery Case Study please e-mail [sarah.derrick@dca.org.uk](mailto:sarah.derrick@dca.org.uk)