BILLY ELLIOT
THE MUSICAL
JAN 14 - FEB 6 2016
STUDY GUIDE
The Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre
Production of

BILLY ELLIOT
THE MUSICAL

Book and lyrics by
Lee Hall

Music by
Elton John

Originally directed by
Stephen Daldry

Study Guide by Anna Schmidt
THEATRE ETIQUETTE

“*The theater is so endlessly fascinating because it's so accidental. It's so much like life.*” – Arthur Miller

Arrive Early: Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. Please ensure you arrive with enough time to find your seat before the performance starts.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please TURN OFF your cell phones/iPods/gaming systems/cameras. We have seen an increase in texting, surfing, and gaming during performances, which is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. The use of cameras and recording devices is strictly prohibited.

Talking During the Performance: You can be heard (even when whispering!) by the actors onstage and the audience around you. Disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait to share your thoughts and opinions with others until after the performance.

Food/Drinks: Food and hot drinks are not allowed in the theatre. Where there is an intermission, concessions may be open for purchase of snacks and drinks. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, but we respectfully request that patrons refrain from wearing hats in the theatre. We also strive to be a scent-free environment, and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If an audience member leaves the theatre during a performance, they will be readmitted at the discretion of our Front of House staff. Should they be readmitted, they will not be ushered back to their original seat, but placed in a vacant seat at the back of the auditorium.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave the performance if that person is being disruptive. Inappropriate and disruptive behaviour includes, but is not limited to: talking, using electronic devices, cameras, laser pointers, or other light- or sound-emitting devices, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: All Tuesday evening performances and final matinees at MTC feature a talkback with members of the cast following the show. While watching the performance, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors. Questions can be about the story, the interpretation, life in the theatre, etc.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, applaud, cheer and respond to the performance appropriately. Make sure to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause during the curtain call.
MAJOR CHARACTERS

Billy Elliot  A young boy with a passion for dance
Michael     Billy's friend
Jackie      Billy's father, a miner
Tony        Billy's older brother, a miner
Mum         Billy's mother
Grandma     Billy's grandmother. She appears to suffer from dementia and has a taste for pasties.
Mrs. Wilkinson  Billy's ballet teacher
Mr. Wilkinson Mrs. Wilkinson's husband
Debbie     Mrs. Wilkinson's daughter, she takes ballet class with Billy
Mr. Braithwaite The pianist
George     The boxing teacher
Lesley      A miner
Big Davey   A miner
Ballet Girls Young working-class girls in ballet class. All they want to do it shine.
The Miners  Working class men, miners who are on strike.

Creating Billy Elliot—The Story

On September 29, 2000, Universal Pictures and Focus Features released a British film called *Billy Elliot* about a boy whose dream of becoming a ballet dancer put him at odds with his working class coal-mining family. The film was produced by Greg Brenman and Jon Finn, written by Lee Hall, directed by Stephen Daldry, and co-produced by BBC Films, Tiger Aspect Pictures, StudioCanal and Working Title Films. Set in north-eastern England during the 1984-85 coal miners' strike, the film stars Jamie Bell as 11-year-old Billy. The film was both a critical and a box office success.

One of the audience members at the film's first screening at the Cannes Film Festival was Sir Elton John. John related immediately to the themes

Jamie Bell as Billy Elliot (source -- http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/billy-elliot/images/3806769/title/jamie-bell-billy-elliot-photo)
and characterizations of the film, and his partner David Furnish remarked that it would make a great stage musical.

Inspired by what he had seen, Elton John joined forces with Lee Hall who had written the original screenplay. Hall wrote the book and lyrics for the stage musical, with John composing the music. Stephen Daldry returned to direct, and *Billy Elliot the Musical* opened in London’s West End in 2005. It opened in Australia in 2007 and on Broadway in 2008.

**Creating Billy Elliot – The Character**

The film version of *Billy Elliot* owed much of its success to the brilliant performance of Jamie Bell, the 14-year old actor who took on the demanding title role. Performing the character of Billy Elliot requires skills in dancing, singing, and acting, as well as tremendous endurance to carry the energy of the whole play. For that reason productions typically cast more than one boy in the leading role, with the young performers taking turns so that no one boy has to be on stage for every performance.

The twenty-minute video documentary, *Finding Billy Elliot*, highlights the challenges and reveals the long and complex process of selecting the young actors to play Billy for the musical’s Broadway debut. The video clip can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc7w608_S6Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc7w608_S6Q).

**DID YOU KNOW...?**

The Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre has two Billys, Ethan Ribeiro and Eamon Stocks. Ethan and Eamon have been immersed in a 12 week training program to get ready for their roles. Their program includes twenty-two hours of dancing per week (ballet, modern, tap, jazz, and contemporary dance), two hours a week of vocal training, and two hours of acro training – all while keeping up with their school work!

They haven’t done it alone. Our Billys have had the support of Canada’s Royal Winnipeg Ballet School Professional Division Faculty, a Billy Trainer, a vocal coach, a private acro instructor, acro classes, academic support from The University of Winnipeg Collegiate, and two private academic tutors. It takes a village to raise a Billy!
HISTORY

The Miners’ Strike

Billy Elliot is set against the backdrop of the year-long miners’ strike that devastated communities throughout the United Kingdom (UK) from March 6, 1984 to March 3, 1985, described by the British Broadcasting Corporation as “the most bitter industrial dispute in British History.” The strike was the culmination of years of tension between the miners’ union and the government.

Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister of the UK in 1979. In the early years of her tenure, her conservative fiscal policies aimed at aggressively fighting inflation had the effect of dramatically increasing the already high unemployment.

The British mining industry had a long, proud labour history. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, established in 1888, evolved into The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in 1945. In 1909 the union became formally affiliated with Labour Party.

Demand for coal had been high right after the Second World War, but began to wane as other energy sources began to take precedence. Large-scale mine closures in the 1960s meant that many miners migrated to the Yorkshire and Midlands regions where the coalfields were richer. Labour unrest grew from 1969 onwards, culminating in a national strike in 1972 and further strike action in 1974 in response to a ban on overtime. In 1981 the Thatcher government announced a plan to close 23 pits, but backed down at the threat of a strike because coal stocks were low. In fact, the government gave the miners a 9.3% raise, encouraging increased productivity. Ironically, this increased productivity led to coal being stockpiled, which then enabled the government to justify further closures.

Between March 1981 and March 1984, the National Coal Board—the government agency responsible for the mines—cut 41,000 colliery jobs. Some miners transferred to other mines and there were some localized strikes. Many mining towns had no other serious industries, so closing the mine effectively meant destroying a community.

In 1982 Arthur Scargill, a militant Yorkshire miner, became president of the NUM. Scargill was a vocal attacker of Margaret Thatcher’s government— he believed the government was out to destroy both the coal industry and the NUM.

The strike lasted a year, and involved over 142,000 miners. Mining communities suffered extreme hardship, and there were violent clashes between the strikers and the police, resulting in three deaths and countless injuries.

The NUM voted to return to work on March 3, 1985. The miners were defeated, and the political power of the NUM in particular and the British labour movement in general was severely reduced. What was left of the British coal industry was privatized in December 1994. By 2009 there were only 6 working mines left of the 174 that had been in existence prior to the strike. Today, Britain imports the majority of the coal it uses.
Royal Ballet School

The internationally famous Royal Ballet School began in 1926 when Dame Ninette de Valois opened her Academy of Choreographic Art in collaboration with Lilian Baylis, Manager of the Old Vic Theatre. The school and associated dance company underwent a number of moves and name changes, until the Royal Charter was granted in October 1956 and they were renamed The Royal Ballet School, The Royal Ballet and the Sadler’s Wells Royal Ballet (later renamed Birmingham Royal Ballet following its move there in 1990). Well-known alumni include Margot Fonteyn, Anya Linden, Kenneth MacMillan, Lynn Seymour, David Wall, Antoinette Sibley, Anthony Dowell, Marguerite Porter, Stephen Jefferies, Darcey Bussell and Jonathan Cope.

Admission to the School continues based purely on talent and potential, regardless of academic ability or personal circumstances. The majority of students rely on financial support to attend the School. Students who are selected embark on an eight-year carefully structured dance course, along with an extensive academic program.

SYNOPSIS

Act 1

Scene 1: It is March 1984. As the play opens the small Yorkshire mining community of Easington receives word that the National Union of Mineworkers has voted to strike. The opening musical number, The Stars Look Down, highlights the solidarity of the striking miners and their determination to fight for a better future. We meet young Billy Elliot, who shares a glimpse into his own dreams of a different future.

Scene 2: Breakfast in the Elliot household. Billy’s older brother Tony and their father Jackie head off to the picket line, leaving Billy to navigate breakfast with his grandmother, whose behaviour suggests she has Alzheimer’s. It is evident that the Elliot family is struggling in the wake of the untimely death of Billy’s mother, who appears to Billy in a quiet moment.

Scene 3: Billy and his best friend Michael go to their regular boxing lesson. Billy’s lack of interest in boxing is eclipsed only by his lack of ability in the sport.

Scene 4: George, the boxing instructor, leaves Billy behind at the community hall to practice his boxing moves, and Billy suddenly finds himself caught up in a ballet class under the instruction of Mrs.
Wilkinson, the mother of Billy’s classmate Debbie. He ends up participating in the whole class, dancing along with the girls to Shine. Mrs. Wilkinson makes it clear she expects to see him back next week.

**Scenes 5:** Billy is back home with Grandma, once again dealing with her forgetfulness and confusion.

**Scene 6:** In Grandma’s Song, Grandma remembers clearly that her life with Billy’s grandfather was not a happy one. She regrets having devoted her life to doing only what others expected of her.

**Scene 7:** With a police blockade as a backdrop, Billy returns to Mrs. Wilkinson’s dance class. The strains of Shine now intermingle with the miners’ chorus chants of Solidarity and the angry police response.

**Scene 8:** Billy’s father is furious to discover that his son has been skipping boxing class to attend ballet and forbids Billy to continue.

**Scene 9:** Mrs. Wilkinson tells Billy that she thinks he has enough potential as a dancer to audition for the Royal Ballet School, and offers to teach him privately.

**Scene 10:** Billy goes to visit Michael, and finds his friend dressing up in women’s clothing. Once Billy gets over the initial shock, he joins Michael in the musical number Expressing Yourself, celebrating the value of being true to oneself.

**Scene 11:** Clashes between the striking miners and the police have become increasingly violent, and some of the more militant miners are beginning to take the law into their own hands. Jackie intercepts Tony who is heading out armed for a fight, and they engage in an ugly standoff that sends Billy screaming to his room.

**Scene 12:** Billy arrives at his first private lesson with Mrs. Wilkinson. At her request, he has brought a collection of odds and ends that mean something to him so that they can come up with ideas for a dance. He shares The Letter that his mother left for him shortly before she died. They dance to We Were Born to Boogie!

**Scene 13:** Debbie flirts with Billy but his mind is only on his imminent audition.

**Scene 14:** The morning of the audition, Billy’s home is in chaos because Tony has been injured in a fight. Frustrated that Billy hasn’t arrived at their agreed-upon meeting spot, Mrs. Wilkinson shows up at the Elliot house and adds to the chaos by informing Jackie that his youngest son is missing his audition for the Royal Ballet School. Jackie orders her out, and Billy to his room.

**Scene 15:** Billy’s dances his Angry Dance as the strikers riot, and the curtain falls on Act 1.

**Act 2**

**Scene 1:** Christmas 1984. The strike is in its tenth month, and the hardship that the community is facing is barely masked by the satirical choruses of Merry Christmas Maggie Thatcher. Jackie’s bittersweet song I won’t leave them until I die evokes memories of Billy’s mother.
Scene 2: Billy and Michael share a beer in the empty community hall. Michael expresses his feelings for Billy with a kiss. Billy is momentarily shocked, and he makes it clear that he doesn’t share the attraction. As a gesture of friendship, Billy offers Michael a tutu to try on.

Scene 3: Michael heads home and we flash forward into a Dream Ballet in which Billy dances with his adult self. Jackie comes looking for his youngest son, and the dream ends with Billy standing up to his father.

Scene 4: Following some soul-searching, Jackie goes to see Mrs. Wilkinson to ask if she thinks Billy really has a chance to be accepted into ballet school. She informs him that, although Billy missed the local audition, there is still a chance he could audition in London. Jackie refuses her offer of financial support, insisting that Billy is his responsibility.

Scene 5: Having made up his mind that he needs to raise the money to send Billy to London to audition, Jackie swallows his pride and crosses the picket line to join the other “scabs” who are continuing to work the mine. Tony tries to stop him, and Billy gets caught in the midst of their struggle. When they realize what the fight is about, the other miners rally together to collect money for Billy’s audition.

Scene 6: Jackie swallows his pride and accepts a generous donation from one of the scabs. They are off to London for the audition.

Scene 7: Billy and his dad arrive in London for the Royal Ballet School audition. Jackie feels uncomfortable and out of his element, but a chance conversation with a male dancer leaves him reflection on what it would mean to support Billy’s dream. Billy, meanwhile, is a nervous wreck. He is surprised to learn that the audition consists only of a series of exercises, and that the audition panel has no interest in observing the dance he has worked so hard to prepare. In frustration, he lashes out and shoves another boy. The audition panel reprimands him sternly. Just when it seems the audition has been a complete disaster, a panelist asks one final question that inspires Billy to express what dance means to him, which he does in Electricity.

Scene 8: Back in Easington, the miners are gathered in the community soup kitchen for their meagre meal. Everyone is eager to know how Billy’s audition went.

Scene 9: The long awaited letter arrives from the Royal Ballet School. Billy has been accepted into the school! As the family celebrates, they get word that the strike has ended. The National Union of Miners has caved to the government’s demands and the miners will go back to work with nothing to show for their year-long battle.

Scene 10: Billy returns to Mrs. Wilkinson’s ballet class one last time to tell his teacher his news and to say goodbye.

Scene 11: The miners wish Billy well and prepare to go down the mine, singing Once we were kings.

Scene 12: Billy’s mother appears to him one last time and it appears that he is now ready to wish her farewell. The final farewell, however, is for Michael, who looks on as Billy embarks on his new life.
GLOSSARY

Brit-speak

**Cush** is regional slang for “excellent.”

**Esquire** is a title that historically referred to a young nobleman.

Billy pays “fifty p” for his lessons, which is short for “fifty pence.” A pence is one hundredth of a pound, or the British equivalent of a penny.

**Loo** is British slang for washroom.

**Pouf** is a derogatory slang term for a gay man.

**Trainers** are athletic shoes – what we might call “sneakers” or “runners.”

**Loo** is British slang for washroom.

**Labour Language**

**Colliery** is another name for a coal mine and the structures associated with it. A coal miner is called a **collier**.

When a group of workers band together formally to collectively negotiate their working conditions with their employer, the group is referred to as a **labour union**, or just a **union**. Large unions will typically be organized into smaller groups, or locals, each of which will have a leader or **steward** chosen by the group members. Stewards would meet together to strategize under the leadership of a **convenor** chosen from their ranks.

When a union is unable to reach a negotiated settlement with the employer, it will sometimes resort to a **strike**: union members refuse to work in the hope that the employer will be forced to meet their demands so that the company will not cease to be productive. Strikes are typically a last resort; they can be very hard on the striking members since as long as they are not working they will not be paid.

Striking union members will typically walk a **picket line** carrying signs to draw public attention to the labour dispute in order to put pressure on the employer.

It sometimes happens that an employer will bring in other workers who are not members of the union to keep production going during the strike. These **strikebreakers** are so reviled that they are only referred to as **scabs**. A scab might also be a member of the striking union who has opted to report to work regardless of the strike. Going to work as a strikebreaker or scab is often referred to as **picketing**.
to as “crossing the picket line.”

**Ballet terms**

Ballet has a whole vocabulary of its own, traditionally in French. Here are some terms you will hear in the play.

**Attitude** is a standing position on one leg with the other leg lifted in the front or the back with the knee bent at an angle of 90 degrees and well turned out so that the knee is higher than the foot.

A **balletomane** is someone who is a fan of the ballet.

The horizontal wooden bar attached to the walls of the ballet classroom which the dancer holds for support is called the **barre**. Every ballet class begins with exercises at the barre.

**Chainés** (pronounced sheh-NAY) Means “Chains, links”. This is the most simple term for “turns”. The dancer performs a series of traveling turns by quick steps that involve alternating feet.

A **développé** is a movement in which the working leg is drawn up to the knee of the standing leg and slowly extended (develops) to an open position in the air with control. It requires great balance and strong center!

**Devant** simply means “in front.”

**Pirouette**, possibly the most commonly known ballet term, means “spin”.

**Plié** means “Bent, bending”. One of the most famous moves in Ballet, it refers to the bending of the knee or knees with strong turn out from feet, knees and hips.

**A tutu** is the short classical ballet skirt.

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**DID YOU KNOW...?** Ballet dancers must train for many years before becoming professional dancers – in fact, many spend more years in training than they do dancing professionally! Most dancers begin their training by the age of ten, and although it is advantageous to begin earlier, some male dancers can still be successful if they start training much later. Female dancers who intend to study pointe work must meet a number of criteria, including previous training and their age in relation to bone development.
Questions for Discussion

1. Mrs. Wilkinson tells Billy, “... dancing is as much about you discovering things about yourself as it is discovering about dancing.” What does Billy discover about himself throughout the play?

2. Mrs. Wilkinson also states, “You see, there are two basic theories about dance. One is, it’s a technical exercise - Something you learn from the outside and just repeat. Or it's a very personal expression that you realize from within.” How are these two viewpoints on dance reflected throughout the play? In the end, which viewpoint does the play appear to advocate? Do you agree with this viewpoint?

3. The play opens on the start of the miners’ strike, and closes with the day, a year later, when the miners return to the pits in defeat. What role does the strike play in Billy’s journey?

4. How is Michael’s exploration of his sexuality important to the story?

5. Billy has to contend with his community’s deeply held stereotype that “ballet is for girls.” What other stereotypes are revealed and challenged throughout the story?

Activities

1. View the original film version of *Billy Elliot* that was the inspiration for the stage play. In many ways the stage play remains very true to the original story, but there are some differences. In what ways does the play differ from the movie? What reasons might be behind these differences? Which version do you prefer and why?

2. The 2014 British movie *Pride* is another story in which the Miners’ strike of 1984-85 is central to the story. *Pride* is a retelling of the true story of a group of gay and lesbian youth from London who supported a Welsh mining community which was struggling financially due to the strike. Compare how the events and impact of the strike are portrayed in *Pride* with the way they are portrayed in *Billy Elliot*.

3. Here in Winnipeg we have our very own “Royal Ballet School”—affiliated with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet! Research the program of studies that is offered by the RWB Professional Program. If you can, attend a performance by the RWB.

4. In the song *Electricity*, Billy struggles to find words to describe the indescribable. Write a poem, song or story that attempts to capture in words a feeling or experience that is difficult to put into language.
| Physical Education / Health | K.4.8.A.1 | Examine the effects of stereotyping based on a variety of factors (e.g., gender, age, race, roles, media influences, body type, sexual orientation, source of income...), and ways (e.g., set/review personal and group norms, standards...) to promote acceptance of self and others. |
| English | K.4.7.A.1 | Compare attitudes and behaviours (i.e., inclusive/exclusive, positive acceptance/rejection, open/discriminatory) that contribute to a sense of belonging. |
| | GLO 2 - Comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print, and other media texts | Experience Various Texts (2.2.1) Experience texts from a variety of forms and genres and cultural traditions; explain various interpretations of the same text. |
| | GLO 5 - Celebrate and Build Community | Appreciate the Artistry of Texts (2.2.3) Discuss how word choice and supporting details in oral, literary, and media texts [including books, drama, and oral presentations] affect purpose and audience. |
| Social Studies | Senior 4: Western Civilization | Appreciate Diversity (5.2.3) Reflect on ways in which the choices and motives of individuals encountered in oral, literary, and media texts provide insight into those of self and others; discuss personal participation and responsibilities in a variety of communities. |
| Drama | DR C-1: The learner develops understandings about people and practices in the dramatic arts. | Major Movements and Events of the 19th Century: Reaction (Conservatism) versus Reform (Liberalism) |
| | DR C-2: The learner develops understandings about the influence and impact of the dramatic arts | engaging with local, Manitoban, and Canadian contributors and contributions to the dramatic arts (e.g., drama/theatre artists, groups, events, community and cultural resources, innovations) to expand learning opportunities |
| | DR C-3: The learner develops understandings about the roles, purposes, and meanings of the dramatic arts | examining how the dramatic arts and artists influence, comment on, question, and challenge social, political, and cultural discourse and identity |
| | | examining the impact of context (e.g., personal, social, cultural, political, economic, geographical, environmental, historical, technological) on the dramatic arts and artists |
| | DR–R1: The learner generates initial reactions to drama/theatre experiences. | exploring how drama/theatre and artists make and communicate meaning and create unique ways to know self and to perceive the world. |
| | DR–R2: The learner critically observes and describes drama/theatre experiences | examining how the dramatic arts can be a means of sharing diverse viewpoints and of understanding the perspectives of others examining ways that the dramatic arts reflect, interpret, and record traditions, values, beliefs, issues, and events in society and culture |
| | DR–R3: The learner analyzes and interprets Drama/theatre experiences. | expressing first impressions (e.g., thoughts, feelings, intuitions, associations, questions, experiences, memories, stories, connections to other disciplines) evoked by drama/theatre works and experiences as a starting point for critical analysis and reflection |
| | | discerning details about drama/theatre elements, forms, styles, tools, and techniques to inform analysis, interpretation, judgment, and evaluation |
| | | generating and co-constructing criteria to critically evaluate artistic quality and effectiveness |
Resources

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/12/newsid_3503000/3503346.stm


Finding Billy Elliot. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc7w608_S6Q

Making of Billy Elliot. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuBzGWrBCwE

Miners' strike 30 years on: 'I fought not just for “my pit” but for the community'
http://www.theguardian.com/politics/guardianwitness-blog/2015/mar/05/miners-strike-30-years-on-i-fought-not-just-for-my-pit-but-for-the-community

The Miners' Strike - 30 Years of Hurt (Wales This Week) 03-03-14
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMbNcTimUtw


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_miners%27_strike_(1984%E2%80%9385)

Visit the official Billy Elliot the Musical website for additional resources and lesson plans:

http://london.billyelliotthemusical.com/resources/