

# Teaching Television Drama

# TELEVISION DRAMA

- Television drama is one of the longest running and most popular of television genres mainly because it cuts across a range of different sub-genres including soaps, costume dramas and hospital dramas. The defining features of the genre are

- CHARACTERS
- SETTING
- NARRATIVE.



# TELEVISION DRAMA

Television dramas are the fictional recreation of real life stories. The best television dramas engage the audience because we believe in the characters and the worlds they create, even if those worlds and characters are seemingly unbelievable, for example, *Dr Who*.





## SUB-GENRES/ HYBRID GENRES

- Costume drama
- Science fiction/fantasy
- Hospital
- Teen
- Soap opera
- Action/adventure
- Comedy



# Narrative in Television Drama

How is the narrative  
'shown' to the audience?

# Narrative techniques in audio visual texts

**Manipulation of time and space**

**Split screen narratives**

**Three strand narratives**

**Flexi-narratives**



# Narrative conventions in audio visual texts

- **Flashbacks**
- **Point of view shots**
- **Apparently impossible positions**
- **Privileged spectator position**
- **Enigma codes**
- **Action codes**
- **Dialogue/ voice over**



# Codes and conventions



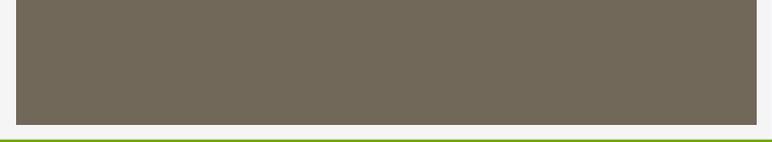
This is more complex because of the range of sub-genres:

- ⦿ Dramatic narrative
- ⦿ Ensemble cast – characters with own storylines
- ⦿ Specific technical codes e.g. Realistic lighting and editing of social dramas e.g. *Skins*
- ⦿ Use of stereotypical characters to transmit messages quickly.
- ⦿ Narrative formula – *Casualty* (three strand), *Homeland* (flexi-narrative).

# Codes and conventions

- Recognisable settings related to the genre
- Iconography specific to the genre
- Format linked to production values – one-off, short series have high production values e.g. *Downton Abbey*
- Scheduling is usually prime time
- Some target specific audience e.g. *Hollyoaks*





**How is the narrative  
established in the opening  
sequence of a Television  
Drama?**

### Too Scary?

'The series has become increasingly reliant on the internal fears of children. The crack in the bedroom wall that is really a tear in space and time and the Weeping Angels that send you into the past when you blink. Clever writing, but not great for getting the kids to sleep.' The Guardian

### Characters:

- ✓ Appeal of Dr Who 'I'm not a hero. I really am just a mad man with a box'
- ✓ Strong gender representations
- ✓ Engagement
- ✓ Innovation

## TEXT: Dr Who

### Narrative:

- ✓ Complex story arc for more sophisticated audience
- ✓ Manipulation of time and space
- ✓ Exciting and predictable plot situations
- ✓ Settings reflecting hybrid genre
  - ✓ Enigma codes
  - ✓ Action codes
- ✓ Links to loyal audience and new generation

### Technical and audio codes

- ✓ High production values
  - ✓ Special effects
- ✓ Audience involvement
  - ✓ Theme tune

**Target audience is broad:**

- ✓ Older viewers  
Whovians
- ✓ Young children new to the programme
  - ✓ families
- ✓ Those who have expectations of quality from BBC

**Pleasures and expectations:**

Some audiences will take pleasure out of being scared and being able to predict outcomes.  
Plays on fear of the unknown

**AUDIENCE**

**Uses and gratification:**

**Escapism** – every week we are taken to new worlds  
**Social interaction** – everyone is talking about it!

**Interactivity:**

- ✓ The website includes quizzes and games
- ✓ Dr Who free party packs to celebrate the series DVD launch
- ✓ Website activities

**The audience is loyal and passionate:**

'Most kids care more about the Doctor than God, and he shouldn't die just for the sake of a clever plot.'

# Using Television Drama

- **GCSE** Textual Investigation/area of study
- **AS/A2**
  - preparation for examination topic
  - studying **technical and audio codes**
  - investigating **audience** targeting, appeal and responses
  - Investigating **representation**