

# Dream

## by Dizzee Rascal



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# Dream by Dizzee Rascal

## AS Component 1: Investigating the Media A level Component 1: Media Products, Industries and Audiences

### Subject Content: Media Language Focus Area: Representation, Media Contexts

#### PRODUCT CONTEXT

- Dizzee Rascal is a solo rap artist within the genre of garage/ grime who won the Mercury Music Prize for his debut album, *Boy in da Corner*, in 2003.
- *Dream* was released as a single in 2004, taken from Dizzee Rascal's second album *Showtime*.
- *Dream* samples lines from *Happy Talk*, a single that was released in 1982 by Captain Sensible and originally featured in the musical *South Pacific* (a Broadway stage show in 1949, film version released in 1958).
- The video for *Dream* was directed by Dougal Wilson for the Colonel Blimp production company. Wilson is an award-winning director of commercials and music videos.

#### PART 1: STARTING POINTS - Media Language Cultural Contexts:

The video references 1950s children's television, most specifically *Muffin the Mule*, which was aired on the BBC from 1946 until 1955 (when it switched to ITV). The BBC programme was presented by Annette Mills who sang and interacted with a puppet mule and other characters who appeared on her grand piano. The programme was broadcast live and was hugely successful, becoming the first children's television programme to have its own merchandise. The actress who plays the female pianist in *Dream* bears a clear resemblance to Annette Mills, the puppet mule is also featured, and the set is similar to *Muffin the Mule*.

The use of these references creates an innocent,

child-like backdrop to the video and contrasts with the contemporary issues and problems depicted.

An example from *Muffin the Mule* can be viewed via this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spQY2FbCUtM>

#### Consider the codes and conventions of media language:

- *Dream* combines elements of **performance and narrative**, typical of the music video form.
  - » Two '**worlds**' are constructed – the salubrious 1950s sitting room and the contemporary city setting, established through the set, props and puppets on the grand piano.
  - » The video features a female pianist who directly addresses the audience, introducing Dizzee Rascal and singing some lines from *Happy Talk*. She acts as a **presenter/narrator** and reacts to the action, arguably reflecting the 'typical' or 'expected' response of an older audience to rap music.
  - » Dizzee Rascal **performs** and directly addresses the audience, also commenting on the narrative and actions of the puppet characters.
  - » The **narrative** is linear, featuring disruptions and a resolution that reflects the dominant message of triumph over adversity through commitment to a dream.
- The video features many **postmodern** elements, juxtaposing 1950s children's television characters with familiar contemporary iconography such as the nightclub and off-licence, and a matriarchal older female with a young male grime artist. This creates a fable-like quality to the video, as Dizzee Rascal tells the story of the development of a successful career.
- The images are highly **illustrative**, often featuring a literal interpretation of the lyrics e.g. 'off licence', 'young baby mothers'. This adds to the sense that a vivid story is being told.

### Consider how elements of media language influence meaning:

- The period setting of the sitting room is established through the **mise-en-scène** of the striped wallpaper, floral curtains and grand piano, connoting a middle-class environment that contrasts dramatically with the contemporary setting of the narrative. The stereotypically socially deprived, inner-city environment is constructed through the set and props on the piano (e.g. off licence building with letters missing, graffiti).
- There are many **props** that reference childhood:
  - » Pastel coloured building blocks at the beginning and end of the video.
  - » Musical box from which Dizzee Rascal emerges – and returns to at the end of the video when it is covered in stars, connoting his success as a music artist.
  - » Toy police car and helicopter.
  - » Puppets – Muffin the Mule, youths, policeman etc.
  - » The use of this iconography of childhood establishes a sense that the video is a fable with a clear moral message. This, coupled with the juxtaposition of the 1950s references, helps to distance the audience – there is little attempt to create verisimilitude or the illusion of reality – it is clear that it is a constructed narrative.
- Dizzee Rascal begins to use the **microphone prop** at the point where he talks about discovering music and gaining air time. The microphone **connotes power** – Dizzee Rascal's voice can now be heard (literally and metaphorically), and this signifies a move away from deprivation and rebellion towards achieving his dream and becoming a respected member of society.
- The use of simple **props and iconography**, such as the nightclub signified by the disco ball and dimmed lights, constructs distinct and recognisable settings to illustrate the lyrics and communicate meanings.

### Consider how developing technologies affect media language:

- The video makes use of green screen technologies to allow Dizzee Rascal to perform on the piano and interact with the puppet characters. The following article gives further information about the process:

<http://www.studiodaily.com/2005/02/something-old-something-new-in-dizzee-rascal-video/>

### Consider how meanings are established through intertextuality:

- The **references to 1950s children's television**, especially the use of direct address by the pianist, ironically **position the audience** as children being told a story. The puppet characters are interwoven into the narrative e.g. Muffin the Mule operating the sound recording desk and the Lord Charles puppet in the pram – this juxtaposition potentially creates a sense of surprise or unease, provoking the audience to think about the narrative and messages in the video.
- Dizzee Rascal also **intertextually references Captain Sensible**, who recorded *Happy Talk* in the 1980s, when he says 'This is too sensible for me, man' as he climbs out of the musical box.
- These references could create a sense of **nostalgia** and **pleasure** for viewers who recognise them.

### Consider theoretical approaches:

#### Semiotics – Barthes

- Many of the images illustrate the lyrics but connote deeper meanings in relation to the more abstract notion of working to achieve a 'dream'.
- The idea of 'myth' relates to the use of iconography such as the 'hoodie' which, over time, has become recognisable as a symbol of youthful rebellion.

#### Structuralism – Levi-Strauss (A level)

- Many binary oppositions are evident, most prominently that of the young black male v older white female which reflects the idea of hierarchies of power in society. The female is physically bigger than Dizzee Rascal, due to the difference in scale, and she shows disapproval of the anti-social behaviour and approval of the positive actions. Despite Dizzee's success, she arguably retains the power as he gets back into the box at the end.
- Other oppositions include youth v police/ authority – with some sense of resolution as they all dance together towards the end of the video.
- Anti-social behaviour v hard work and dedication - the central message of working hard to achieve a 'dream' reflects a dominant ideological message that hard work offers an 'escape' from social deprivation.

## PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

### Social and Cultural Context

The representation of the white, upper middle class pianist reflects **1950s Britain** when people in positions of **power** tended to belong to hegemonic social groups. *Dream* is also interesting to consider in the context of the **post-war period** in Britain when many people from the Caribbean, as well as from India and Pakistan, moved to Britain to work and British society was becoming more **ethnically diverse** as a result of this period of **immigration**.

The 1950s references create a sense of **distance** and allow the audience to view the video as an **allegory** and understand the use of quite extreme **stereotypes** as a way of exploring contemporary issues. For example, police brutality may be considered as something that would have occurred more frequently in the past, but there are cases of this happening in contemporary society.

*Dream* is also interesting to consider in the **context of the early 2000s** when it was released, in relation to concerns about antisocial behaviour amongst inner-city youths. The decision by Bluewater Shopping Centre in Kent to ban ‘**hoodies**’ in 2005 received widespread media coverage. ‘Hoodies’ have been worn by hip hop artists since the 1980s and have become to be associated with **rebellion and antisocial behaviour**. The following article gives some further background information on the topic: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/09/power-of-the-hoodie>

### Consider the way social groups are represented through processes of selection and combination:

#### Representations of gender, age and ethnicity.

- The **pianist** is constructed as a **stereotypical 1950s white, middle-aged, middle-class woman** through the mise-en-scène of her upright posture, formal jacket with large floral brooch and hair style.
  - » She fulfils a **matriarchal** role and uses quite a patronising mode of address (‘Hello boys and girls’), especially as she introduces Dizzee (‘he’s such a rascal’).
  - » This creates **humour**, especially as the video progresses and reaction shots reveal her shock and disapproval of the actions of the ‘youths’.
  - » Her horror as the helicopter flies past her face connotes her **stereotypical British reserve** – she does not like this invasion of her personal space and is not used to encountering antisocial behaviour.
- » She **reinforces dominant messages and ideologies**, smiling her approval on the positive elements of the narrative, for example holding up Dizzee Rascal’s album and singing ‘just do it’.
- **Dizzee Rascal** is constructed as a **rebellious young black male** through the dress codes of red tracksuit with a ‘hoodie’ top and trainers.
  - » He appears to be a **stereotypically defiant youth who challenges authority** at the beginning of the video, reinforced by the lyrics e.g. ‘reckless with no shame’.
  - » As the narrative progresses, a more **positive representation** of Dizzee Rascal is constructed as he describes his strong sense of purpose, hard work and achievement.
  - » Later in the video, following Dizzee’s transformation, the **youths** also partake of more creative and less destructive behaviour (e.g. kicking a football, break-dancing), establishing him as a **role-model**.
  - » This **positive representation** of a young black rapper **challenges** many negative stereotypes of this social group.
- **Positive messages and values** are embedded in the representations e.g. the power of pursuing a ‘dream’ is connoted when Dizzee Rascal is inside the recording studio and the policeman is battering on the window, but cannot reach him – perhaps suggesting that music offers a ‘protection’ from the harsh realities of the outside world. Similarly in the nightclub scene, the puppet characters, including the policeman, dance harmoniously, connoting the power of music to bring people together.
- Many clear **stereotypes** are constructed through the ‘puppets’ to create recognition and humour, and also convey messages and values:
  - » **Youths** are constructed as irresponsible and having no purpose in life – skateboarding, spraying graffiti, stealing the TV.
  - » The **Scots character** (red hair, tartan) is constructed as a drunk with a lager bottle.
  - » The **police officer** is constructed as a brutal, baton-wielding white male, beating a youth in a style that references ‘Punch and Judy’.

The puppets are attached to strings, linking to the notion that this story is a fable, but also suggesting hierarchies of power and control – they are conforming to stereotypical, possibly pre-ordained roles. This raises questions about key issues in contemporary society such as crime, antisocial behaviour, underage sex etc. and how these can be tackled.

### Consider theoretical approaches:

#### Theories of representation - Hall

- The video deliberately constructs the puppet characters as stereotypes to exemplify the way in which these social groups are often represented – and to demonstrate that these stereotypes can misrepresent individuals from these groups.

#### Theories of ethnicity and postcolonial theory - Gilroy (A level)

- The construction of the white matriarchal children's TV presenter and the young black male 'rascal' is interesting to explore in relation to postcolonial theory, especially in the social and historical context of the 1950s and increasing ethnic diversity in Britain.
- The narrative embeds positive messages and values, constructing a representation of a successful rapper and subverting negative stereotypes of ethnicity. However, the female can be seen to be in control, especially as Dizzee Rascal is diminutive, arguably depends on her for 'endorsement' of his album and returns to the box at the end.
- While the story suggests that 21st century Britain is an inclusive and multicultural society, the repeated shots of the TV presenter looking shocked and her patronising tone towards Dizzee Rascal imply that society is not yet fully integrated.