

| Institutional information | |
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| Director: | Kathryn Bigelow |
| Production company: | Independent Film (Lionsgate) |
| Country of production: | USA |
| Specialist writing | Tara McKelvey, 'The Hurt Locker as Propaganda |

| Context: |
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| In Component 1, Section C, you are required to engage with a piece of Specialist Writing alongside the study of one US independent film 'The Hurt Locker' |
| You may wish to use small quotes to illustrate points but this is not compulsory as long as you know the key ideas |
| You must choose at least two key sequences to illustrate your points. |

| Key Ideas in the specialist writing | |
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| Key Idea 1 | The film presents itself as an 'anti-war' film but aspects of the film, such as the 'beautiful cinematography' and the 'compelling music', instead, glorify war |
| Key Idea 2 | The film uses techniques which put the viewer into the soldiers shoes, therefore the audience has empathy for the US soldiers above anyone else |
| Key Idea 3 | The film purposefully contrasts boring suburban life with the excitement of being a soldier at war. This is controversial given the films' supposed anti-war stance. |
| Quote 1 | Do you think that the film 'serves as a rather effective military recruiting tool' |
| Quote 2 | Does the film 'place the viewer squarely in the mindset of a soldier on the verge of shooting someone?' |

| Characters | |
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| Sergeant James | There are a lot of close ups of his face as he thrives under the intense pressure of defusing IED's or improvised explosives. He has the most dangerous job in a very dangerous warzone. The camera uses a lot of point of view shots. Some from inside the helmet to allow us to empathise with his experience. He has nerves of steel most of the time but the trauma of his role comes to the surface in key scenes where he goes after revenge for 'Beckham' and then is unable to settle in domestic life when he returns home. For him 'war is a drug' |
| Sanborn | Sanborn is the professional soldier who follows the rules and does his job well. He is not a maverick like James and disapproves of this 'cowboy' soldier. This binary opposition between the two characters ends in a drunken fight. He just wants to finish his tour of duty and follow a chain of command so that he gets out alive. His role is the protector and he is often represented as watching over the other soldiers with his gun trained on possible enemy targets. He has to keep it together but he is not immune to the psychological effects of the conflict and opens up briefly to reveal his desire for life and hope to have a child after this horror is over. |
| Eldridge | Eldridge is the least able to cope with the conflict but tries hard to learn from experienced soldiers. He visits a psychiatrist who helps with his psychological issues caused by the daily risks he has to take. He just wants to survive Insurgents capture Eldridge after shooting him in the leg. James and Sanborn rescue him. The following morning, James is approached by Beckham, who he believed was dead, and walks by silently. Before being airlifted for surgery, Eldridge angrily blames James for his injury |
| The Iraqi People | The people of Iraq are seen as silent observers or innocent bystanders in a conflict they have no control over. There is a sense that the enemy is watching and the camera often peers through obstacles restricting the view as if the audience is a civilian or an insurgent watching the soldiers. This adds to the suspense as the soldiers cannot distinguish between the two |

| Style and Aesthetics – the film's 'look' | |
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| Style | Virtually all the scenes in Iraq are shot and edited in a <i>verité</i> style similar to news or documentary footage. It was shot using four handheld HD cameras, with operators shooting numerous extreme CU and CU of character's faces, as well as extreme LS (often to show the POV of James' increasingly frustrated support team or civilians). |
| Camera | The camera movement is jerky and 'nervy', often using 'crash zooms' and 'zip pans' to create an agitated, anxious atmosphere as well as a sense of immersion as the viewer becomes the 4 th member of the team |

| Key scenes: | |
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| Intro to SGT James | <p>Mise-en-Scène</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sgt James: sat in the dark, smoking, he pulls the protective screen from window. Set dressing and lighting is used to establish James as a ‘maverick’. Colour scheme of browns and oranges conveys the oppressive heat; the fine dust that covers every surface complements this and creates a sense of discomfort. The shots of litter and rubbish on the streets and of Iraqi bystanders, creates a sense of threat; especially after the opening sequence where we see how both could be sources of danger. • The bomb disposal suit resembles a spaceman’s suit, emphasising the sense that the soldiers are in a hostile, ‘alien’ world. <p>Cinematography Bird’s eye LS of Sgt James surrounded by partially buried bombs. Establishes sense of extreme danger. In the opening scene, we saw James’ predecessor killed by just one of these IEDs (Improvised Explosive Device), and now that level of danger has been multiplied. Symbolism: James deactivated one IED then discovered wires leading to these hidden bombs – is this symbolic of the US invasion of Iraq i.e. recklessly rush into a situation to neutralize one obvious threat (Saddam Hussein) only to uncover hidden threats on all sides</p> |
| Back in the USA | <p>Cinematography The scenes set back in the USA contrast with those set in Iraq, especially the scene in the supermarket. Deep focus is used, as well as lots of wide LS to show the abundance of products (compared to the poverty of Baghdad) and to make James look small and dwarfed by the location. He seems lost in the vastness of this store, the LS (especially of the seemingly endless cereal aisle) reflecting his aimlessness and bewilderment compared to the simplicity and clarity of his task in Iraq.</p> <p>Mise-en-scene. The supermarket is bright white, the products garishly coloured, in total contrast to the almost sepia colour scheme used in the scenes in Iraq. The scenes at his family home are darker, but seem damp and chilly, in contrast with the warm, dry atmosphere of the desert -again conveying James’ sense of discomfort.</p> |
| Sniper scene | <p>Use of the camera Bigelow cuts between four cameras, further creating a ‘nervy’, anxious atmosphere - but also establishing a sense of space and character’s positioning in each scene and the sense of ‘360 degree threat’. In the extended, ‘real time’ sniper shoot out in the desert 00:55:27-1:10:03, there is also crosscutting between the US soldiers and the Iraqis. This inclusion of the enemies’ POV prevents them from being a faceless, de-humanised foe.</p> <p>It also suggests that both sides are engaged in a deadly ‘game’ with each other. After one insurgent is killed in the shoot-out James even says “Thank you for playing”. This suggest that war is like a computer game and the soldiers have become de-sensitised by media and their experience. Maybe the director is commenting that ‘Call of Duty’ is the real ‘effective recruiting tool’</p> |