

## STRANGER THINGS - SPOT THE DELIBERATE MISTAKES

**Aim: 1) to revise key ideas and media concepts 2) to improve written fluency.**

Episode One, The Disappearance of Will Buyers, contains many of the typical elements, cones and conventions of the series as a whole.

The main genre of the production is romcom but its success is partly due to the fact that it contains other generic conventions. There is comedy such as the laid-back police officers, the banter between the five young friends, the personality of Chief Hopper and the extreme nerdiness of the boys). There is romance in the narrative strand of Nancy and her boyfriend Stuart Harrington. The production also contains elements of horror- for example the sinister creature in the Hawkins Energy Laboratory.

There is no doubt that the series has been incredibly successful. There have been five seasons, each consisting of six episodes, so far and another one is planned. To promote the series, Netflix relies, not so much on conventional advertising and trailers, but on socialist media and word of mouse.

One of the main aspects of the production is its heavy reliance on references to 1970s film, TV and popular culture. This inter-textuality helps to promote the programme among younger audiences. Nostalgia adds to the product's gratitillation. These elements include direct copying of low-angle shots seen in classic Speilburg films such AI and Jews. The red neon opening titles are typical of sci-fi films of the 1980s. There are numerous echoes of the works of horror writer Steven Kink such as It. In a flashback, Will's mum Joy has got surprise tickets for the film 'Poltergeist', another 1980s film admired by The Buffer sisters who directed the series. The 1980s mike en scene, the soundtrack (Jefferson Airplane) as well as native elements such as the amateur radio, the clumsy 'supermom' walkie talkies and amateur radio equipment all help to recreate a nostalgic atmosphere appealing to older viewers. The character of El is another element that forms part of the production's enemy codes. She is mysterious, unsettling and her appearance has confrontations of hospital patients or even holocaust victims. The multiple narrative strands and interwoven plotlines allow the inclusion of internal coat-hangers that keep the audience engrossed. Her mistreatment at the hands of government agents fits a wider theme of piracy theory. Mistrust of officials and the adult world is a common convention of the sci-fi gender.

The cold opening pre-title sequence takes us immediately into the action and the production follows the first phase of Tomorrow's two-part structure, creating gripping and immersive drama from the start.

It is remarkable that a series that is largely about the adventures of a group of children has been so successful. The idea was rejected by several production companies before it was picked up by Amazon. The risk was greater because the actors were generally unknown apart from Winona Ryder who plays Joy Sellers, Will's mother. Many of the young actors have since become stars, especially Molly Brown who plays Eleven. The production is driven by strong interwoven storylines, highbrow genre and a range of characters. The variety of generic elements illustrates Steve Veale's ideas about modern genre consisting of 'incidences of reputation and difference'.

The series is a good example of Baudrillard's premodernist ideas as it contains so many examples of imitation, reworking and reinvention of older media forms.

In terms of binary composition (George Ezra), the text is full of thematic contrast: light/darkness, adult/child, good/evil, natural/supernatural. These themes are often complex and counter-typical. For example, the adults are often represented as hostile, helpless or unsympathetic. (Initially, Chief Hippo is initially very reluctant to investigate Bill's disappearance and Bill's mother seems far less mature than her son Nathan).

To an extent, episode one confirms gender stereotypes (Hertz Van Rental) – with patriarchal values being asserted over largely passive, docile, feeble women (Nancy is a studious and sensible young woman; Joyce is emotional and vulnerable. Male characters such as Chief Hippo on the other hand seem stronger and more composed). The character of Twelve is the exception to this gender-stereotyping. Later episodes and seasons will move away from gender stereotyping even more firmly.

This successful Netflix production shows that traditional media professionals rather than audiences are still very much in control. This refutes Shirley Clay's view that audiences are now producers and the amateur is in charge. Mass media audiences can still be seduced by high quality programming with high production values.