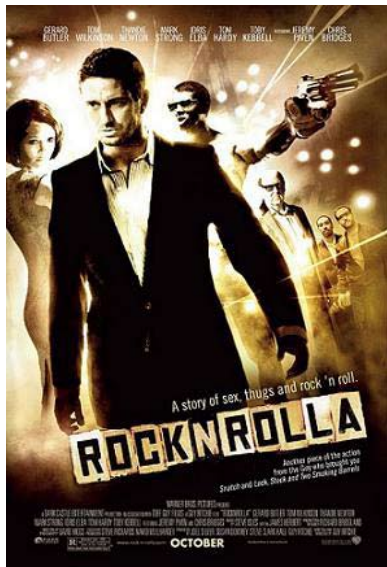


# Study Guide

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## RockNRolla



Feature movies are a medium, an art and a business. Each of these elements plays a role. As a medium, movies represent ideas through the codes and conventions of sound and moving image. As art, they make personal and cultural statements to their audiences. As businesses, they create work for their creators and profits for their investors.

This guide, which extends the ideas presented in the *RockNRolla* episode of *Beyond the Screen*, may be used by teachers as they support their students, by parents who want to discuss the movie with their children, or by serious viewers who want to think beyond the screen.

**Plot Synopsis** One-Two and Mumbles, two small-time crooks, borrow money from Lenny, an organized crime boss, to purchase and flip a London property. Lenny has to retrieve a stolen painting loaned to him by a wealthy Russian billionaire. Lenny cons One-Two and Mumbles out of the property and still demands that they repay the two million pound loan. They steal seven million Euros from the Russian billionaire—twice—and get themselves and everyone else into a great deal of trouble.

### A. Graphic novel codes and conventions

Many comic books and graphic novels have been adapted as feature movies, with *The Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* as timely examples. *RockNRolla* was not adapted from a graphic novel; it was conceived of as a movie. Yet *RockNRolla* seems to use many graphic novel codes and conventions. Its opening titles include graphics in the style of graphic novels. It begins with a narrative voice that returns at frequent intervals. During the dance scene between One-Two and Stella, titles appear inside boxes that match the dancers' dialogue, e.g., "I sense a bit of competition."

Do these conventions make the movie more entertaining and easier to understand, or do they distract the audience and make the movie less entertaining? Why?

What other graphic novel conventions did you notice?

How did the graphic novel conventions add entertainment to the viewers' experience?

### B. Narration

Viewers frequently hear a narrator's voice during the movie. Eventually, we realize that it is Archy's voice.

Does Archy's voice-over mean that he is telling the story?

Was Archy present for all of the events, or were there some that he would not have known about, and therefore could not tell about?

Who is the main character in *RockNRolla*?

Is it appropriate to ask that question, or is this a movie that tells many stories about many main characters?

If *RockNRolla* is telling many stories, would the movie have been easier to understand if there had been several narrators?

Do you think a narrator's voice was needed, or could viewers have made sense of the story without it?

Does a narrator's voice make it harder to get lost in a story, or can viewers still enjoy the story as much as if there were no narrator?

Is the narration a graphic novel convention?

## C. Change of Social Order

Archy tells Lenny that the world is changing, and that the new gangsters don't behave in expected ways. Lenny's retort is that "there's no school like the old school, and I'm the f\*\*\*ing headmaster."

How does the story of *RockNRolla* mirror the events that are occurring in London and other parts of Europe?

Do the events of *RockNRolla* reflect the experiences of England's entrance into the European Union?

What might Lenny's experiences tell viewers about the old school (traditional ways)?

## D. Humour

*RockNRolla* is filled with violence and intrigue, yet it also contains some funny moments. *RockNRolla* comedy comes from the acting, writing, camera movement and the use of music.

1. The acting is funny when One-Two and his Russian pursuer exchange sign language at the end of the chase.
2. The writing is funny when One-Two forgets to steal the keys and has to ask his victim how to shift a Mercedes into reverse.
3. As Lenny tells Archy that he has hung Uri's lucky picture on his wall, the camera slowly tilts up to reveal that the picture is gone.
4. When the Russians are preparing to torture and kill One-Two, loud Russian rock is playing on the stereo.

Where else did you see acting, writing, camera movement and music used to create humour?

Why might Guy Ritchie add humour to a story of brutality and intrigue?

Why might the audience appreciate the humour?

Why might someone object to the humour in the movie?

Is the humour in *RockNRolla* consistent with its connections to graphic novel conventions? Why?

## E. RockNRolla Vocabulary

*RockNRolla* contains a vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to many viewers. What new East Ender words do viewers need to know to fully understand the dialogue between the characters?

What are the *RockNRolla* meanings of *large*, *bugle*, *grass*, *catch a cold*, and *poof*?

Why is it important for viewers to understand the *RockNRolla* meanings of *catch a cold* and, especially, *grass*?

## F. Music

Music is used very purposefully in *RockNRolla*. Sometimes it is used as part of the setting, sometimes to enhance the viewers' visual experience, sometimes as a contrast to events and sometimes to advance the story.

The composer chose sophisticated strings as a background to Tank's discussion of the Whistler painting in Lenny's office.

He used a traditional string arrangement in the flashback scene when Archy picks young John up at his private school.

The composer chose Russian instruments and musical forms to accompany many of the scenes that involved Uri and his associates.

When was Russian music used in a non-Russian scene to create humour?

## Music and Storytelling

Music is aggressively modified by characters on three occasions. The first time, Roman and Mickey are listening to a song in their studio on their headphones, and Lenny and Archy enter without their knowing and pull out the headphone plug. The second time, One-Two is listening to music on headphones in his bed, and two Russians enter his home without his hearing them, then change the headphone setting to room setting. The third time, Archy and his crew enter One-Two's house unheard because the Russians are playing music loud on the speaker system, which they turn off.

How do these character-driven changes in music help to tell the story?

Do the changes all have the same narrative effect, or are there significant differences in their uses?

How is the function of the music different in each situation? (E.g., the music in the third case is Russian rock and roll and is being used as a soundtrack to One-Two's impending torture and murder.)

## G. Editing

Both visual and sound editing are used purposefully in *RockNRolla*.

1. Some viewers may find the scene in which Johnny beats up a bouncer to be very violent. Might editing and sound be used to enhance the violence of their experience?

When Johnny is attacking the bouncer, the assault scene is intercut with a scene in which Roman is pleading with Archy to let him keep his club open and a scene inside Roman's club where musicians are playing loud music. Viewers hear the loud music continuously, but it gets louder and softer to match the cuts between the interior office, the club, and the exterior street. The shots of Roman are continuous, but the shots in the club are short and involve camera and lens movement, and the shots of the assault vary from hand-held to stationary.

Might the rapid cross-cutting of the scenes, the camera moves and the sudden changes in the volume of the music make the violence of the attack seem more intense? Why?

Imagine the assault on the bouncer without the other scenes.

Imagine the assault with a constant musical volume.

What conclusion do you come to?

2. When Victor breaks Lenny's legs with a golf club, the assault is cross-cut with Johnny's explanation to Pete as to why he cannot return the lucky painting. Johnny is playing a slow tune on a piano and speaking in a steady voice. How might the piano and voice influence the viewers' responses to the assault? At one point, viewers hear Lenny's screams while seeing the scene of Johnny and Pete in the bar. I.e., the sound from one scene has invaded the sound of another scene.

Why might Guy Ritchie have placed Lenny's golf course screams in the bar?

Does this combination of sound and image make the assault more or less horrible? Why?

Is this a graphic novel convention?

3. When One-Two describes the robbery and subsequent chase to Stella, the chase scenes are presented as a flashback intercut with their lunch in a high-end restaurant.

What is the effect of seeing the chase scenes alternating with a quiet conversation?

How do the sounds of the chase contrast with the sounds in the restaurant?

Does the cross-cutting add to the humour of the events?

Does the cross-cutting make the chase less or more exciting? Why?

4. As Johnny is describing his and their imminent murders to Roman and Mickey, we see his description enacted as a voice-over flash-forward. Guy Ritchie provides a visualization of the murders as Johnny predicts them.

What is the effect of seeing events that are soon to happen?

Does the flash-forward add or detract from the entertainment value of the movie?

5. Stella arrives unannounced at One-Two's house and they have sex. The sex scenes are presented as a series of half-second moments and the entire encounter takes only a few seconds to show.

There is no music and only a few grunts and oohs as sound.

Do the sex scenes seem sexier because they are brief?

Does the brevity of the shots add to the humour of the movie?

Is this presentation of brief moments—snapshots—a graphic novel convention?

## H. Cinematography

*RockNRolla* was photographed with digital video, not film, technology. The images were then transferred to film for distribution and exhibition. Digital photography allows for extensive manipulation of colour and detail.

### I. Desaturation

One manipulation used by the cinematographer involved colour. The colours were desaturated, or reduced, so that scenes did not contain any vibrant natural colours.

How might this graying of the scenery and actors influence viewers' experience of the events?

## 2. Backlighting

The cinematographer also used backlighting on several occasions. Backlighting involves placing the brightest part of a scene behind the action, so that the actors are in partial or full shadow. Viewers cannot see shadow details easily, so have to strain to understand all the action, or depend on the sound to make sense of a scene.

Backlighting is used when Lenny is charging Roman and Mickey with finding Johnny in their studio.

It is also used on Johnny when he is doing drugs in his apartment. The backlighting in Johnny's apartment is enhanced by the extensive use of smoke particles in the air, which reveal shafts of light streaming from the curtains on the background windows.

How might backlighting influence viewers' responses to the action in these scenes?

Where else did you notice the effective use of backlighting?

## 3. Focus

The cinematographer occasionally used shots that began out-of-focus, then came into focus as they progressed. One of these occurred when Johnny told Pete to get rid of his new junky friends.

How might viewers interpret the meaning of these shots?

## I. Intertextuality

Intertextuality occurs when one media text makes reference to other media texts. Often, the references are used to add meaning to the message and/or make it more entertaining. Tank, the ticket scalper, watches *Remains of the Day* and *Pride and Prejudice* while conversing with Archy. One-Two's gang is known as The Wild Bunch. These might be meaningful intertextual references.

*Remains of the Day* is about a loyal butler. *Pride and Prejudice* is about the foibles of five lower-middle-class daughters trying to marry well. *The Wild Bunch* is a 1968 Sam Peckinpah western about a gang of outlaws operating during a time of social changes.

How might the theme of *Remains of the Day* connect to Archy and his relationship with Lenny?

How might the theme of *Pride and Prejudice* connect to the relationship between Lenny and Johnny?

How might the theme of *The Wild Bunch* connect to Lenny's attempts to control Johnny, One-Two, Mumbles and Archy?

What other connections between these movies and *RockNRolla* do you notice?

## J. The Lucky Painting

At the detox clinic, Archie presents Johnny with a coming-home gift: the lucky painting that he loves, and tells him that it had cost a Russian an arm and a leg. The last time viewers saw the painting, Uri was admiring it in Stella's townhouse and called Victor to join them. What series of events might have occurred to place the painting in Archie's possession?

Why might Ritchie have used camera positions to deliberately hide the painting from viewers?

What do you think was in the painting that made Uri, Stella and Johnny like it?

## K. Sequel: *The Real RockNRolla*

The last scene of the movie tells viewers that there will be a sequel, and that Johnny Quid will be the Real RockNRolla.

What are the benefits and the risks of informing viewers of a sequel at the end of *RockNRolla*?

Based on the fact that Lenny, many of his crew and the Russians are gone, but that One-Two and the others in the Speiler will be around, what might the story of the Real RockNRolla involve?

What role might the Lucky Painting play in *The Real RockNRolla*?

For more information on RockNRolla visit [www.rocknrolla.warnerbros.com](http://www.rocknrolla.warnerbros.com)