

3

The romanticisation of gambling in film

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Activity introduction

Quick summary

Students will examine the representation of gamblers in films in this lesson, seeking to identify and understand the romantic perspective films convey regarding problematic and pathological gambling. Students will consider why such a representation of gambling could be problematic for young people.

Learning intentions

Students will:

- Watch short clips from a range of films that include a reference to gambling.
- Explain how gamblers are represented in Hollywood films and why they are represented in this way for dramatic effect.
- Compare and contrast different representations.
- Compare the film representation of James Bond versus Ian Fleming's character in order to understand how gambling stereotypes can be represented in different ways.

21st-century skills

Communicating

Critical thinking

Digital literacy

Empathy

NSW Syllabus outcomes

- **EN11-2** uses and evaluates processes, skills and knowledge required to effectively respond to and compose texts in different modes, media and technologies
- **EN11-6** investigates and explains the relationships between texts
- **EN12-2** uses, evaluates and justifies processes, skills and knowledge required to effectively respond to and compose texts in different modes, media and technologies
- **EN12-6** investigates and explains the relationships between texts

General capabilities

Literacy

Critical and creative thinking

Personal and social capability

Ethical understanding

Stage 6 Syllabus objectives

Objective A

Through responding to and composing a wide range of texts and through the close study of texts, students develop knowledge, understanding and skills in order to:

- communicate through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

Objective C

Through responding to and composing a wide range of texts and through the close study of texts, students develop knowledge, understanding and skills in order to:

- think in ways that are imaginative, creative, interpretive and critical.

Topic

The romanticisation of gambling in film

Unit of work

Stage 6 English

Time required

60 minutes

Level of teacher scaffolding

Medium – teacher will need to facilitate class discussion.

Resources required

- A device capable of presenting a video to the class
- The opening scene to *Rounders*. Please note, there is some brief profanity in this clip, the film is rated MA15+
- Appendix A: Student worksheet
- Appendix B: Student worksheet
- Appendix C: Student worksheet

Keywords

Gambling representation in film, rounders, Casino Royale, James Bond, Ian Fleming, stereotypes, gamblers, men in film, gambling in film, Hollywood, book vs film, book vs movie, who did it best?, spy film, spy novel, Rounders.

Teacher worksheet

Teacher preparation

Gambling can be a high-risk activity and is a priority concern for young people. Therefore, before conducting the lesson on gambling, it is recommended that teachers and parents read the Facilitator pack. The pack provides teachers and parents with essential information about gambling harm amongst young people and clarifies the nature of gambling-related behaviours and how to approach sensitive topics.

Learning intention

Students will:

- watch short clips from a range of films that include a reference to gambling.
- reflect on the representation of gamblers in Hollywood films.
- compare and contrast different representations focusing on stereotypes.
- compare the film representation of James Bond to Ian Fleming's character in the literature.

Success criteria

Students can:

- identify stereotypes and tropes about gambling in film.
- explain how gambling is represented in film and the dramatic / social reasons for this representation.
- justify their views on how gambling is represented in film.

Teaching sequence

15 minutes - Part A: Introduction to gambling in film

20 minutes - Part B: Student inquiry

15 minutes - Part C: Reading Bond: Casino Royale

10 minutes - Reflection

Lesson introduction

Work through this resource material in the following sequence:

Part A:

Introduction to gambling in film

Step 1

Show students the opening scene to *Rounders*. Please note, there is some brief profanity in this clip, the film is rated MA15+.

[Rounders – Opening poker scene](#)

Link: [youtube.com/watch?v=YdYQyIjiOyU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdYQyIjiOyU)

Step 2

Ask students to note down their initial reactions to the clip, and how they think gambling is represented, based on a first watch. They are also to jot down particular adjectives or nouns that stood out to them whilst watching. Students are also to predict what they think will happen to the protagonist so that the reading of the story will have an initial point of comparison.

Step 3

Distribute Appendix A: *Rounders* summary. Ask students to read through the summary and consider whether this matched their initial thoughts. What was predictable from the opening sequence and what was surprising for them?

Step 4

Distribute two copies of Appendix B: Gambling analysis worksheet. Ask students to analyse the film *Rounders* based on this sheet and consider how gambling is depicted. Is the representation of gambling positive or negative in this instance?

Part B:

Student inquiry

Step 1

Ask students to brainstorm films they have seen themselves, or they know of, that represent gambling in some way. Encourage them to search online for a plot summary of the film.

If students are having difficulty thinking of a film, they might like to consider *Ocean's Eleven*, (or the more recent *Ocean's Eight*), *Molly's Game*, *The House*, or *Casino Royale*.

Step 2

Students are to use their chosen film to examine and provide clear examples of how language, props and music are used to represent gambling in their film.

Step 3

Ask students to form small groups to compare responses - ideally with each student having analysed a different film. Facilitate a class discussion to ascertain similarities and differences between the films chosen. While there is no particular correct response in this context, generally students should be finding that there are stereotypes and tropes evident in films focused on gambling.

Part C:

Reading Bond –

Casino Royale

Step 1

Distribute a copy of Appendix C to students and read the article as a class. Students should be reading with a highlighter in their hands, looking for points of connection between the article and how gambling is generally represented in film.

Step 2

Based on this article, students should complete a Connect, Extend, Challenge analysis:

The Bond brand is very famous and synonymous with spies, drama and beautiful women worldwide. Before watching, students should consider what they would expect from a Bond film/ novel before they begin. Does Bond typically embody stereotypes? Or is *Casino Royale* more likely to play with stereotypes of gambling or subvert them entirely?

Connect: How are the ideas and information presented **connected** to what you already know about gambling representation in film?

Extend: What new ideas or information did you learn that **extended** or pushed your thinking in new directions?

Challenge: What information/topic remains **challenging** or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions do you have?

Students should then consider what effect they think the director's choices had on the Bond character and the representation of gambling in the article.

Step 3

Allow students some time in pairs or small groups to share their connections, extensions and challenges. Bring the class together to discuss any questions they might have about the reading.

Reflection

Ask students to return to their initiation reactions to the *Rounders* clip at the beginning of the lesson, and reflect on how their thinking has developed using the sentence prompts: *I used to think ... But now I think ...*

Based on what they have learned in this lesson, they can choose which of the following statements they most believe and construct a justification as to why.

1. The purpose of a movie is to provide fantasy, rather than education, so gambling representations should not matter.
2. Producers and distributors of films are responsible for their content, and the unrealistic portrayals of gambling are dangerous and problematic for society.

Differentiation

Tasks throughout the lesson provide students the opportunity to interact with their peers and discuss views and opinions about topics before and during the tasks. Some students may benefit from watching the film *Rounders* before the lesson.

Students may require additional help with regards to stereotypes, choice of film and use of cinematic techniques as they work.

Extension

- The information about the representation of gambling in film is from a journal article cited below. Students may like to read the article in its entirety to develop their understanding of representation in film.
 - Turner, N., Fritz, B. and Zangeneh, M., 2007. Images of gambling in film. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/253432587_Images_of_gambling_in_film
 - Students may like to watch the film *Rounders* in its entirety.
 - Students can examine a selected section of the film and conduct an in-depth analysis of the effect of a variety of cinematic techniques on the representation of gambling in the film.
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Teacher reflection

Take this opportunity to reflect on your own teaching:

What did you learn about your teaching today?

What worked well?

What didn't work so well?

What would you share?

Where to next?

How are you going to get there?

Appendix A

Rounders summary

New York City law student and gifted poker player Mike McDermott (Matt Damon) dreams of winning the World Series of Poker. At an underground Texas hold 'em game run by Russian mobster Teddy "KGB" (John Malkovich), an overconfident Mike loses his entire \$30,000 bankroll in a single hand. Shaken, he promises his girlfriend and fellow student Jo (Gretchen Mol) he has quit poker, and concentrates on law school. His mentor Joey Knish (John Turturro) offers to stake him to rebuild his bankroll but Mike declines, and instead accepts a part-time job to make ends meet.

Several months pass and Mike stays true to his promise until his childhood friend Lester "Worm" Murphy (Edward Norton) is released from prison. While Mike is an honest player, Worm is a hustler and unapologetic cheat. To help Worm pay off a debt, Mike sets him up with games across town, and reluctantly sits in on a game, interfering with his studies and his relationship with Jo. Mike allows Worm to play on his credit at the Chesterfield Club; however, Worm takes out \$10,000 and begins a tab in Mike's name. Worm runs into Grama (Michael Rispoli), a dangerous pimp, who has bought Worm's debt – Worm now owes \$25,000 directly to Grama, who is working for KGB. Grama takes Worm's \$10,000, threatening him to pay the rest. As Mike returns to his poker lifestyle and friends, Jo ends their relationship.

Mike learns from Petra (Famke Janssen) at the Chesterfield that Worm has racked up a \$6,000 debt in Mike's name. In Atlantic City, Worm tells Mike about his debt to Grama but withholds that he is working for KGB. Mike proposes to Grama that Worm pay weekly installments; Grama considers the offer but also mocks Worm for his inability to pay him. Worm responds by insulting Grama and as the two nearly come to blows, Mike defuses the situation by agreeing to vouch for Worm and an angry Grama gives them five days to pay the remaining \$15,000. Mike decides to help Worm win the money by playing in several games in and around the city.

On a winning streak, Mike earns \$7,200 in three days, but still needs to double it in 48 hours. Worm directs Mike to an out-of-town game hosted by New York state troopers, where he wins almost the full \$15,000 before Worm unexpectedly joins the game. The officers catch Worm base-dealing to help Mike; they are beaten up and relieved of their entire bankroll. Worm finally confesses that Grama is working for KGB. With their lives in danger, Worm decides to flee, but Mike returns to the city, cutting ties with Worm.

Mike asks Grama for more time, to no avail. Mike asks Knish for the money but is refused out of principle. During the conversation with Knish, Mike reveals his motivation for taking the ill-fated risk at KGB's club and why he thinks he can compete and possibly win the World Series of Poker. He even quotes Worm saying that Knish "sees all the angles but doesn't have the stones to play any" after Knish had already refused to help financially. Desperate, Mike asks his law school professor Petrovsky (Martin Landau), who loans him \$10,000. Mike challenges KGB to a second heads-up, No-Limit Texas Hold'em game for the remaining debt, with winner-take-all stakes, which KGB accepts. Mike beats KGB in the first session, winning \$20,000. KGB offers to let Mike's winnings "ride" and continue the game, but Mike – with enough to pay off most of his debts – declines. As he is about to leave, KGB taunts Mike that he is paying him with the money he lost to KGB from their previous game. Mike changes his mind and decides to continue playing.

Appendix A

Mike doubles the blinds at the risk of losing everything to KGB again, and possibly his life. As the night wears on, Mike spots KGB's tell and folds, deducing KGB has a better hand. Irate at the missed chance to win it all, KGB begins to play on "tilt". In the final hand, Mike baits a boastful KGB into going all-in, and defeats him with a nut straight. KGB throws a tantrum at having been lured into a mistake. Despite Grama's urging, KGB, rattled, calls off his goons and admits Mike won fairly, allowing him to leave with his winnings.

With over \$60,000, Mike settles Worm's \$15,000 debt to Grama, the Chesterfield's \$6,000 credit, Petrovsky's \$10,000 loan, and restores his original bankroll of "three stacks of high society." Mike drops out of law school, says goodbye to Jo, and leaves New York for Las Vegas to play in the World Series of Poker.

Appendix B

Gambling analysis worksheet

Film Name:	
Directed by:	
Scene selected:	
What sort of gambling does the film depict? i.e. poker, horse betting, hustling, etc.	
How is gambling depicted? Check as many as apply:	
<p><input type="checkbox"/> There is a depiction of pathological gambling –where gambling becomes problematic. <i>For example, in Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas, Fred Flintstone becomes hooked on gambling and nearly loses everything, including Wilma.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is a professional gambler with an almost magical skill. <i>For example, very accurate card counting, pool hustling etc.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Miraculous win as happy endings. <i>For example, in Vegas Vacation the protagonist loses all his money, but then is given a winning keno ticket from a dying man.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Gamblers are depicted as ‘suckers’. <i>A negative attitude towards ordinary gamblers, seeing all who play as addicts.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is cheating in gambling. <i>For example, films that show people have to cheat, to win. Sometimes, it is the casino who cheats.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Gambling is run by organised crime. <i>Films that link casinos and organised crime –a stereotyped view.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Characters steal from a casino. <i>A casino heist movie is a popular genre, where thieves become heroes.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Gambling locations used as a backdrop or setting. <i>For example, Las Vegas or Atlantic City being used as a glamorous setting.</i></p> <p>Other –please describe:</p>	

Appendix B

Give examples from the film to support your view on how gambling is represented:
1.
2.
3.
Is there a particular character that epitomizes your viewpoint on gambling? Who are they and how do they do this?
Overall, is gambling depicted in a positive or negative light? (Justify your opinion).

Based on: Images of gambling in film.

Based on: Turner, N., Fritz, B. and Zangeneh, M., 2007. Images of gambling in film. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/253432587_Images_of_gambling_in_film

Appendix C

Reading Bond: *Casino Royale*

Examining 007's inky origins

By Chris Wright

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gearpatrol.com/archive/a68717/reading-bond-casino-royale

I've gaped at car chases, grinned from ear to ear over sly one-liners and left theaters flushed with the gory glory of Daniel Craig's stone-faced massacres. No arguments here: theatrical James Bond is the perfect feel-good character for a whole sect of males. Cars, women, subterfuge and wit — that's not a hard pill to swallow.

I never gave much thought to the root of it all: Ian Fleming's books (sorry, Guv'na). When I first devised to read *Casino Royale*, Fleming's first Bond book of twelve, I imagined opened pages with scrolling images of seduced ladies, brutal gun battles and evil, slightly disfigured bad guys. This is not the case, however. What Fleming's Bond taught me, and entertained me thoroughly with, is a whole different world with a whole different Bond, and one that more men should experience.

The old rule in writing is "show, don't tell". In film, we take for granted that we're being shown James Bond for who he is, what he does; in prose, though, this description reaches an entirely different level. We get to hear 007's thoughts, his cool, calculated manner — and we get a glimpse of his humanity and fallibility.

After the initial, knee-jerk discomfort (it does feel alien after watching 007 only through cinematic portrayal), seeing Bond's thoughts along with Fleming's clipped, British narration is both comfortable and enjoyable. The prose is beautiful, flowing smoothly and with a grim demeanor that mirrors the story's leading man. Fleming is insightful and purposeful in his description of gambling, the elite rich and, especially, the world of the secret service agent. Given Fleming's real-life history with the British Secret Service, this shouldn't be that surprising.

The scent and smoke and sweat of a casino are nauseating at three in the morning. Then the soul-erosion produced by high gambling — a compost of greed and fear and nervous tension — becomes unbearable and the senses awake and revolt from it. — *Casino Royale*



Appendix C

Before we draw a bead on things Bond is not, it's worthwhile to note what he still is. Suave. Stylish. Dashing. A slightly womanizing lady killer ("Women were for recreation. On a job, they got in the way and fogged things up with sex and hurt feelings and all the emotional baggage they carried around"). The man is not emasculated, that's for sure.

But Bond is — and this is another sudden and shocking realization — only a pawn, playing out a tiny role in a big war. If he fails, the world won't be destroyed. The British government will lose a chunk of money and an opportunity at a juicy target. They leave this up to Bond's largely inflexible role as a gambler in a game of chance. This is Baccarat, not Texas Hold'em; Fleming explicitly shows that the cards, and not Bond's wife, are the deciding factor in the mission's main exercise.

What's more, 007 is not a killing machine. He doesn't use extraordinary gadgets. He's not even sure if he wants to keep being a spy. The Bond story that we see is more about real subterfuge, trickery and dumb luck than shootouts and epic car chases (ok, there is a decent car chase, but it's nothing like the explosion-happy epics that grace just about every Bond flick).

Bond is cerebral; he certainly has that cold calculation that anchors his character in the films. But with Bond's main attribute, in fact, the center of the book's theme, being his thoughts rather than his actions, there's a fundamental shift in how we perceive 007. We see him think through every situation thoroughly before it happens. This is the actual drawn-out preparation process, not the snap decisions that make us want to fist pump in every Bond film ever. In fact, if one really squints, it's almost possible to see Bond as a very cool nerd. Whoa.

He's also a philosopher. Check out this tumble of perceptions as Bond describes his first two double-oh kills to Mathis and his ensuing confusion over the book's bad guy, Le Chiffre:

"The hero kills two villains, but when the hero Le Chiffre starts to kill the villain Bond and the villain Bond knows he isn't a villain at all, you see the other side of the medal. The villains and heroes get mixed up."

That doesn't sound like something Connery would spout with a cool Scottish drawl.

To be sure, Fleming's first book, just like its movie remake in 2006, is a creation story. The Bond that exits stage left is a very different man than the confident but non-standout player the curtain rises on.

But these differences, which seem disappointing when compared to the dashing film Bond, actually carry weight as a boon to male readers looking (consciously or otherwise) for a role model figure. Fleming's Bond is actually accessible. He makes glaring errors. He gets through by luck, the help of his friends and his well-measured actions. And yes; he loves.

The suave, sleek, panache-filled movie Bonds present an immensely enjoyable foundation for a pedestal figure. Enjoying *Casino Royale* won't take away my passion for that. But seeing the different angle on a character we all know and love, one who's less of a God, one who we can identify with because, well, he has shortfalls too — that creates an entirely different relationship with the character. If you think you know Bond, take the plunge. One of our favorite heroes deserves to be fully understood.