

# “Never Mind The Subtitles”

Teaching Long-Form  
Foreign TV Drama



# Focus Texts

AQA: *Witnesses*

Comparison: *Blue Eyes, Diets*

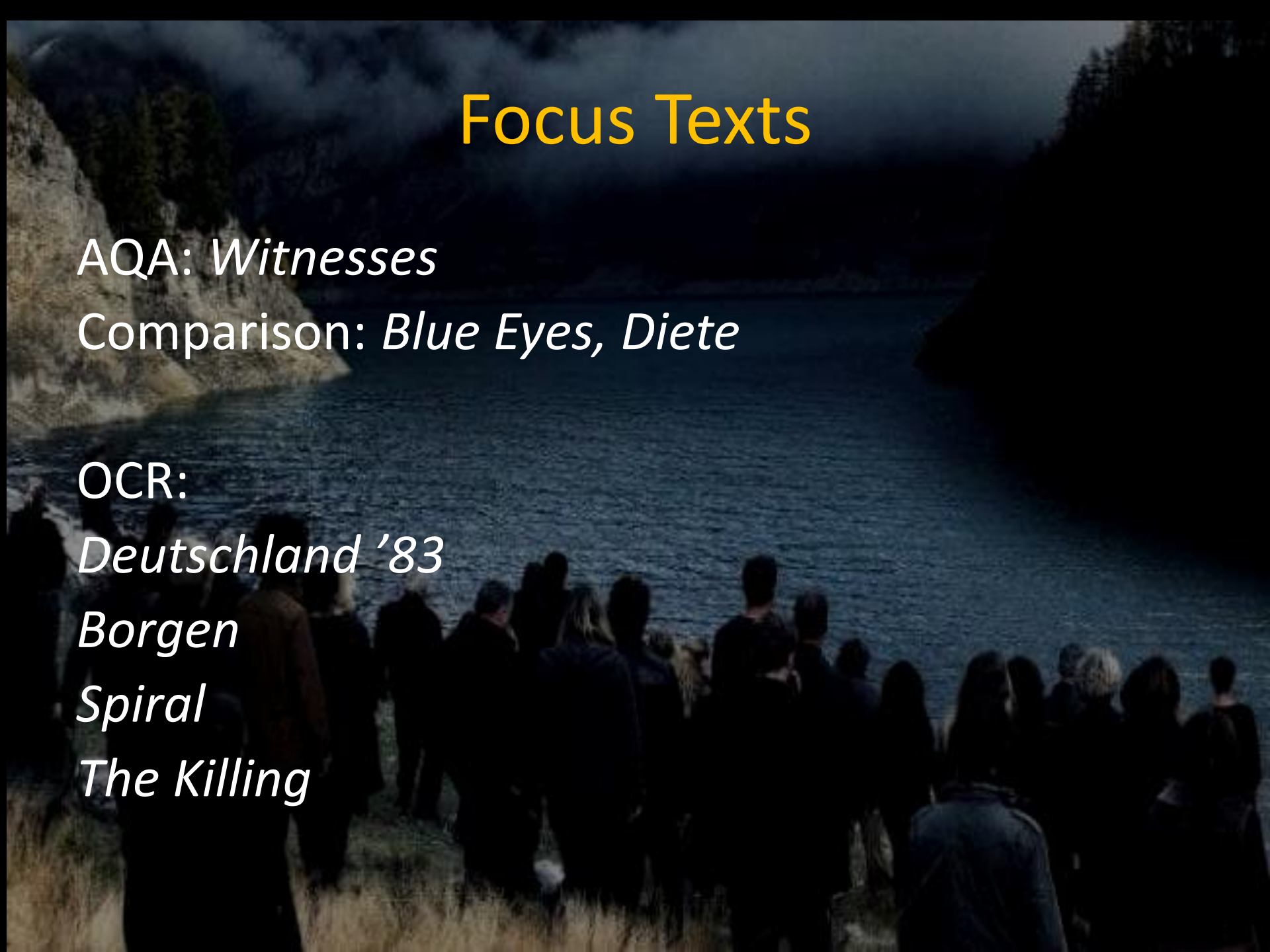
OCR:

*Deutschland '83*

*Borgen*

*Spiral*

*The Killing*



# Learning Objectives



- How to get students interested and engaged in foreign drama?
- Identifying audience pleasures
- Genre and narrative
- Institutions: digital platforms, international audiences and marketing, participatory media



# Starter

A man with a grey beard and a woman with long blonde hair are standing outdoors in winter clothing. The man is wearing a heavy jacket and a sweater, and the woman is wearing a long coat. They are both looking towards the right. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a car and some outdoor furniture.

How do I get my students interested in non-English drama?

Obstacles? Why wouldn't they be interested in:

- Mature drama / serious issues
- Political thriller
- Subtitled TV

Other challenges in teaching this topic?

Write on post-its!

# Engaging Students – step 1

- What's your favourite English-language TV drama?
- What do you like about it?
- What (English-language) TV dramas do your students like?
- What do they like about them?

## Engaging Students – step 2

- What's your favourite non-English language TV drama?
- Why do you like it?
- What similarities are there between this drama and what your students like?

# Raise the level of the discourse...

- What USES and GRATIFICATIONS are being provided?





# Engaging Students - 3

- Why do people like political dramas?
- Relevance – learn about and explore real life social issues
- ‘Behind the scenes’ – close-up view of how power works
- Everyone has personal politics – ethical dilemmas



# Institutions

- How many of you watch TV on a TV set?
- How many on-line?
- Which 'channels' /platforms?
- How many talk about foreign TV drama with friends?
- How many at work?
- How many have commented on social media?
- How many have posted a clip/trailer or recommended on social media?
- How many regularly contribute in on-line fan forums?
- Why would a TV institution buy and distribute foreign drama?

(You've just started discussing institutions, marketing, national vs global audiences, digital platforms, and participatory media!)

# *Deutschland '83*



Audience Pleasures and  
Genre





# Watch trailers for *Deutschland '83*

Channel 4:

- What audience pleasures / U+Gs do they offer?
- Why would a UK audience like this?

Sundance TV

- Why might a US audience like this?



# Deutschland '83 and genre

- Name some spy dramas / films
- What are conventions of spy dramas?
- Why do audiences like these?
- Deborah Knight: satisfaction of having *expectations* fulfilled
- Steve Neale: “repetition and difference”, enjoyment from the subtle deviations and innovations of what is expected.
- David Chandler: ‘interpretive community’ – using tastes to create collective identity

# *Deutschland '83* and genre



Where could you see genre conventions being fulfilled? (Knight)

What was unique or unusual? (Neale)



# *Blue Eyes*

Formal Conventions of  
Long-Form Drama and  
Narrative Theory



# Formal Conventions

A man in a checkered shirt and a woman in a white sweater are walking in a hallway. The man is on the left, looking towards the woman on the right. They are both looking down, possibly at something in their hands. The background is a dimly lit hallway with a door and some framed pictures on the wall.

- What makes long form different to other TV dramas?
- Novelistic – multiple storylines and characters that stretch over a number of episodes and seasons
- Why do audiences like this?
- Why do producers/creatives like this?
- Cinematic – high quality writing, direction, acting, production design etc
- Institutions – why does long-form drama suit subscription channels (HBO, Showtime, FX) and on-line platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime) rather than ‘commercial’ TV?

# Formal Conventions

A man and a woman are walking in a hallway. The man is on the left, wearing a checkered shirt and dark trousers, looking towards the woman. The woman is on the right, wearing a white long-sleeved top and dark trousers, looking down. The background is a dimly lit hallway with a white door and a framed picture on the wall.

- Large cast of characters means opportunity for diversity (age, race, social class, gender)
- Lengthy narrative strands means characters can be portrayed in complex and challenging ways
- Long story arcs = complex character development
- Long attention spans of viewers mean serious issues can be explored in full complexity (long term consequences)
- Ambitious themes - 'State of the Nation' narratives
- Often 'binge-watched' – like a massive long film

# *Blue Eyes and Narrative Theory*

- Enigmas (Roland Barthes) – questions audience need answering
- Maintains audience engagement over many episodes and seasons
- Suspense – emotional engagement minute-to-minute



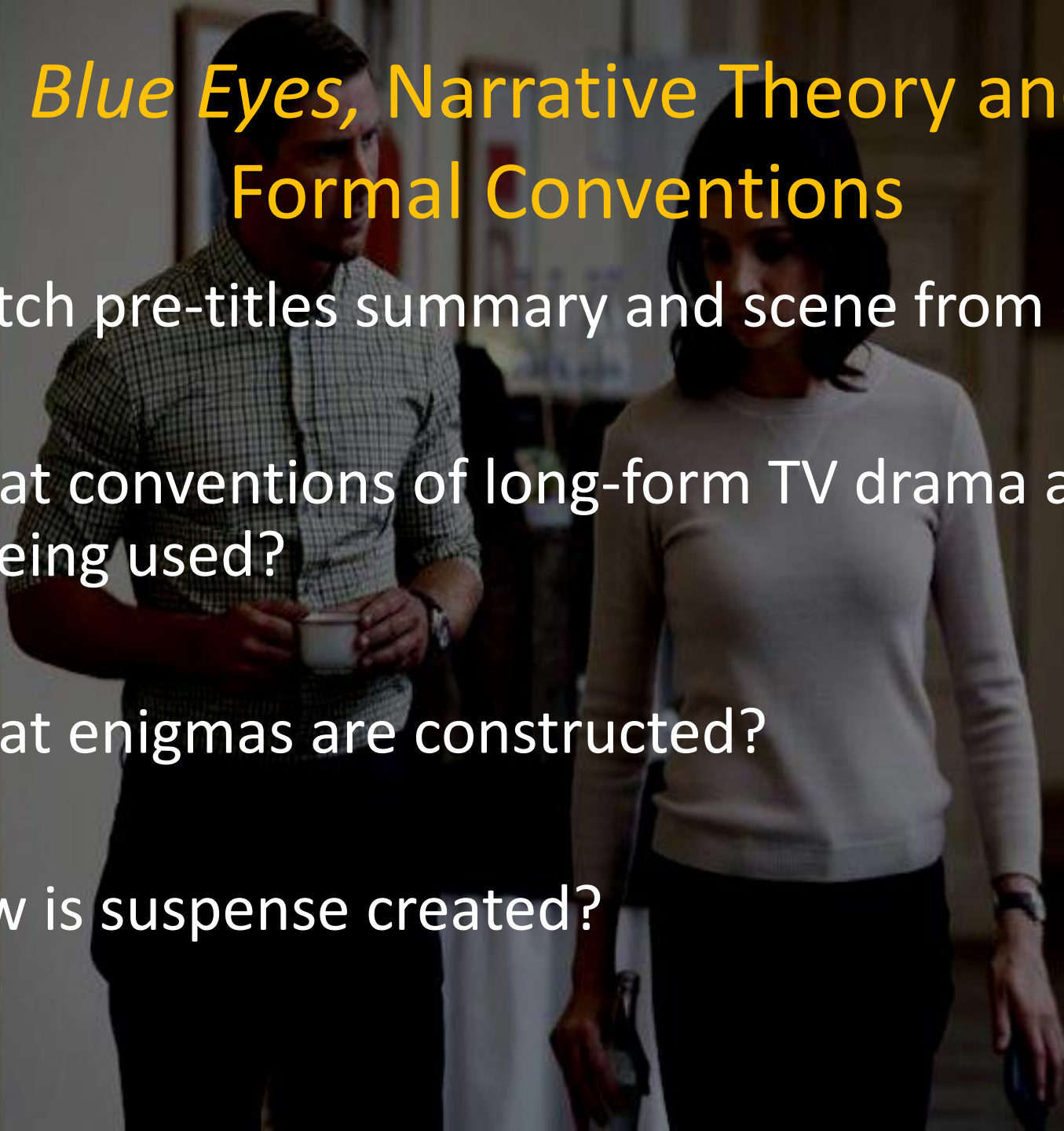
# *Blue Eyes*, Narrative Theory and Formal Conventions

Watch pre-titles summary and scene from ep 2.

What conventions of long-form TV drama are being used?

What enigmas are constructed?

How is suspense created?



# *Borgen*

Political drama, Moral Dilemmas  
and Audience

What would you do, if you were PM?

# Engaging Students - 4



What challenges do politicians face? Why is it a difficult job?

e.g. Conflict between public and personal lives

Moral dilemma role play:

- Left wing political journalist having an affair with a married right wing spin doctor – what problems could this cause?
- Watch clip – what dilemmas can we identify?





# Moral Dilemmas

Clip 2: lover dies in bed... Advised to flee the scene...

- What might the consequences of staying?
- What might the be consequences of fleeing?

Clip 3: Incriminating document could finish political rival – do you release it to the press?

- Arguments for?
- Arguments against?

# *Borgen* and Representation

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a dark blazer, is shown in profile from the chest up, looking towards the right. The background is a blurred whiteboard with some faint lines and text. The overall lighting is soft and professional.

How are the following represented?

- Men
- Women
- Families
- Politicians
- Journalists

# Participatory Media

- *Borgen* fan fiction
- [https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Borgen%20\(TV\)/works](https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Borgen%20(TV)/works)
- Why do people create fan fiction?

What would you do, if you were PM?



A man with short brown hair, wearing a red t-shirt with a white graphic, blue jeans, and white sneakers, stands in the center of a grocery store aisle. He is looking slightly to his right. The aisle is filled with shelves of various products, including canned goods and packaged snacks. The background shows a produce section with green and yellow items. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a dark overlay on the image.

# Plenary

Challenges with teaching long-form foreign TV drama?

Have we addressed them?