

DEV  
PATEL

Academy Award® Nominee\*

ROONEY  
MARA

DAVID  
WENHAM

Academy Award® Winner\*

and NICOLE  
KIDMAN

# LION



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**A Study Guide By  
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“Lion starts strong and finishes on a teary high...”  
- Matt Neal, ABC Radio.

“A deeply empathetic performance from Dev Patel and an unflinching view of child poverty on the streets of Calcutta provide a winning edge to Lion.”  
- Kevin Maher, Times UK.

“Natural and real. Those are the words to describe Lion.”  
- Dan Scully

“It’s hard not to feel a tingle down your spine as the film’s reaches its climax.”  
- Matthew Toomey, ABC radio Brisbane

“Lion’s undeniably uplifting story and talented cast make it a moving journey that transcends the typical cliches of its genre.”  
- Rotten Tomatoes



## The Purpose of a Study Guide

Study guides are tools to better understand and further your knowledge on a film or novel, they are made on the basis that you have already consumed an understanding of the product and are only an extra insight into the construction of the media form. For a film they are an excellent way to further understand the narrative, locations, actors, the director(s) and other interesting concepts of the film.

This study guide is constructed around the Australian film, Lion (2016) and is aimed at VCE students that wish to study past students’ work. Throughout the guide conventions of narrative and codes will be explored as well as an insight into the Director Garth Davis who has only just started his career in feature films. furthermore a breakdown of society’s reception of the film, both past and present.

## Why Study Australian cinema?

Australian cinema can be dated back to the first decades of the twentieth century where small documentaries were made of day to day life and other such things such as slideshows and backdrops for plays, however the first feature film to grace the eyes of Australians was ‘the story of the kelly gang’ in 1906. Since then Australian cinema has produced many films many of which have traveled internationally and won many awards around the world, such as The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the desert (1994), Babe (1995) and even We’re a Weird Mob (1966) which shares similarities with Lion (2016) with themes of immigration and love.

According to Screen Australia 91% of Australians that were surveyed said that it is quite or very important that Australian productions are created about local content, with only 9% saying that it is not very to not at all important. The main theme was that Australians don’t want to be over dominated by the American culture and that is why Australian cinema is so important.

## Synopsis

Lion (2016) is a film directed by Australian Garth Davis and is based on the true story of Saroo Brierley, a 5 year old Indian boy who loses his family during a work exploit with his brother Guddu at a train station. Saroo searches blindly for his family and ends up 1600 kilometers from home after falling asleep on a cargo train. He is later adopted by an Australian family and after 25 years he starts the search for his family, and finally finds them via google earth.

**Genre:** Biography, Drama



# KEY MEDIA TERMINOLOGY

## Narrative

In VCE Media, narrative is used to describe the selection, sequencing and construction of the relevant events from a story, whether it be fictional or non-fictional. In narratives, the term ‘story’ refers to both the explicit and implicit events that contribute to the understanding of narrative.

## Codes

Codes are technical, symbolic and written tools used to structure and suggest meaning in a media text. Drawn from the study of constructivist semiotics, codes function as the building blocks of meaning. They can be either be:

### Symbolic

Symbols are signs, shapes or objects that are used to represent something else. In film these are often associated with the mise en scene in terms of the use of colour, props, costume and performance (facial expressions and body language).

### Technical

Technical codes encompass anything about the technical craft of creating a media product. For film, this often involves the use of camera, performance (the acting craft such as accents, etc.), mise en scene, editing techniques, lighting design, sound design.

### Written

Any written aspects of the media product that conveys meaning. In film, this often includes the title sequence (font, colour), credits, any title cards used throughout, and dialogue spoken by characters.

## Conventions

Conventions are rules or commonly accepted ways of constructing a media text/product to suggest meaning. These rules may be related to the media products:

### Form

Conventions of form are the technical characteristics common to a medium, such as the use of hyperlinks in web pages and the allocation of rewards to encourage players to move through a video game. In feature films, this relates to the aspect ratio, duration of screen time, editing, etc.

### Genre

Conventions of genre include any sequence of codes that are common to a particular genre, and are often used to identify a film as belonging to a particular genre. Most recently in contemporary cinema, conventions often associated with genres are subverted and played around with, establishing genre hybrids such as the film The Host (Bong Joon-ho, 2006).

### Narrative

Conventions of narrative can be understood as the fundamental building blocks and principles of storytelling that span across media forms such as literature, radio dramas, films and video games. Narrative conventions span the cause and effect sequencing of events; the opening, development and resolution of narrative arcs; the point of view from which the narrative is experienced from; whether the narrative has multiple storyline; the establishment and development of characters; the use of setting to convey meaning; the structuring (or rather re-structuring) of time.

## Narrative structure

The structure of Lion (2016) is linear and follows the events of Saroo Brierly (Dev Patel, Sunny Pawar) from a 5-year-old Indian boy who lives with his mum, brother and sister in a small house in Ganesh Talai. All the way through Sarro’s traumatic separation with his family and his slow journey home that takes over 25 years. The opening of the film is somewhat fast paced as within the first 10 minutes the inciting incident occurs where Saroo loses his brother at a train station, leading him to look for him and eventually fall asleep on a nearby train. Saroo wakes to find himself travelling on a cargo train with no idea where he is. The story then sets off on the journey of Saroo (Sunny Pawar).

The development of the film is full of plot twists and anticipation, however Saroo finally finds himself in the care of an Australian family with parents Sue Brierley (Nikole Kidman) and John Brierley (David Wenham). 25 years pass and Saroo (Dev Patel) is desperate to find his biological mother and family, he uses google earth to search India and finally finds a lead. The film rises to a climax when Saroo at long last finds his mother in the small town of Ganesh Talai, and they embrace in the view of the whole town. The resolution follows shortly after when Saroo calls his Australian parents and insures them that they are still family and he will always love them.

### Opening

The opening of Lion (2016) is full of montages of the vast Indian landscape to really put into perspective how big the land is compared to little Saroo (sunny Pawar). In just the first minutes we see that Saroo is a small boy who wonders for the world around him. We also see that he is from a poor family and he and his brother Guddu (Abhishek Bharate) steal coal for money and buy mik with it.





# Inciting Incident

The inciting incident of a film is when an incident occurs that essentially supports the whole film's narrative. For Lion, this occurs when Saroo asks to accompany his older brother Guddu (Abhishek Bharate) on a night job. The incident proceeds when Saroo is too tired and Guddu leaves him on a train station bench and tells him to wait; he never comes back. We can see that Saroo appears extremely small in the frame reminding us that he is only 5 years old and that he has no means of getting home.



## Technical codes

The wide shot of Saroo at the empty train station emphasizes just how small and young he is as the shot slowly pans from his spot on the chair to standing at the edge of the platform calling his brother's name.

## Symbolic codes

The yellow water tank in the corner is a key symbolic code as a regular landmark in Saroo's later search to find his home.

## Written codes

The minimalist words that Saroo says "Guddu" and the diegetic sounds of the nightlife create an eariness to the scene.



# Climax

The setting of the climax is in Saroo's hometown, Ganesh Talai of which he could not pronounce as a 5 year old resulting in him never being able to tell anyone the correct name as a kid. The moment is emotional and the crowd that forms around them creates atmosphere and makes the mood happy and relieving. The camera used handheld techniques to create a natural and a more raw feeling to the overall scene mostly consisting of close ups of Saroo and his Mother.



## Technical codes

The shallow depth of field and the close up of Saroo's mother, Kamla allows the audience to see the emotion in the 25 years reunion of mother and son.

## Symbolic codes

The clothes that Saroo wears are normal everyday Australian clothes and this makes him stand out in the Indian town. This symbolizes that Saroo is out of place and shows that he's been lost to the culture and not just his family.

## Written codes

The quiet voice of kamla in shock seeing what she almost thinks is the ghost of her son and Saroo's "Mummy" makes the reunion a shock to both son and mother, and emphasizes their disbelief that they finally found each other.





# Resolution

The resolution of Lion concludes with Saroo explaining to his non-biological parents that he still regards them as his parents, and still loves them very much. The last scenes show Saroo walking onto the train tracks that he played on with his older brother Guddu over 25 years previously. There he sees memories of himself and his brother, where he happily follows, ending the movie and suggesting that he has found his brother's spirit.

## Technical codes

The use of low lighting and a blue light makes the scene of John and Sue appear to be during the early morning as they have only just woken up and the medium aperture used allows both people to be in focus.

## Symbolic codes

The use having Saroo go back to the train tracks in which the movie begins and is set around. Brings an aesthetic quality to the resolution that allows Saroo to see his older brother once more and bring peace to the railway.

## Written codes

Saroo's phone call to his non biological parents after finding his family, saying "I found her, but that doesn't change who you are" harmonizes the two sides of Saroo's story and brings the movie to a happy and emotional close.



## Train Station, Khandwa

Train stations are heavily themed throughout the film, the opening scene of Lion (2016) is based on a Khandwa railway where Saroo is helping his older brother Guddu steal coal for money. Trains could be a link to Sunny's attachment with his brother Guddu (Abhishek Bharate) as he is always around his brother at stations and the ending to the movie is finished with a resolution of finding his brother's memory on the train track. However, the main station that is focused on is in Khandwa and is where Saroo is left to sleep on a train station bench while his brother is out collecting coal.



## Hobart, Australia

Hobart is where Saroo Brierley (Dev Patel) grows up from a young boy to a mature aged young man, loved and cared for by his parents Sue Brierley (Nikole Kidman) and John Brierley (David Wenham). Hobart is shown as a beautiful expansive city that is surrounded by ocean and stunning coastal bays, the houses are small and cabin-like however the exterior is vast and scenic. Saroo Brierley (Dev Patel)

is first shown as a man 25 years after his immigration to Australia in the water, enjoying the ocean and symbolizing freedom. The solitude of the landscape allows him to further focus on finding his way home, along with many long nights spending his time searching google earth for answers.

## Calcutta, West Bangel

Calcutta is the first place that Saroo is finally set free from the train but as the saying goes, "out of the frying pan into the fire" so too does Saroo face new extreme dangers such as child slave traders and the need for food. Calcutta (now Kolkata) is important as it is where Saroo later says he is from because of his loss of identity and is also where Saroo finds people that help him find a new family.



## Ganesh Talai, Khandwa

Ganesh Talai is Saroo's (Sunny Pawar) childhood home as a five year old with his brother, sisters and mother. Ganesh Talia is constantly portrayed as Saroo's happy place and throughout the film there are many flashbacks to the dusty streets of his hometown. The town is small and poor however has a beauty to it and the land surrounding is full of rolling dirt hills and local rivers where children swim and play.





### Garth Davis

Garth Davis is a well renowned Australian film, television and commercials director he is most well known for his films Lion (2016) and Mary Magdalene (2018) as well as his co-directing in the well known series Top of the Lake (2013) directed by Jane Campion. Apart from his feature films Garth is mostly known from his place at Exit films creating TV commercials and shorts for companies such as Sony, Schweppes, Cocacola, Budweiser and others. Garth's eye for detail is incredible and his professional commercial work is shown in his later feature film work, some of his commercials such as Play fearlessly for Playstation and Morning Run for Lincoln, have common conventions in them as Lion

**Filmography:**  
 lion (2016)  
 Mary Magdalene (2018)  
 Top of the Lake (2013)  
 ARI - Westpac  
 STAR WARS JEDI: FALLEN ORDER - XBOX  
 Play Fearlessly - Playstation  
 Morning Run - Lincoln  
 Arrive Boldly - Smirnoff  
 Collective Energy - Budweiser  
 Nocturnal Migration - Tooheys  
 Burn - Coca Cola  
 Ninja Kitten - TOYOTA  
 Henri's Hands - Herringbone



Characters	
Sunny Pawar	Saroo
Dev Patel	Saroo Brierley (adult)
Abhishek Bharate	Guddu
Khushi Solanki	Young Shekila
Rohini Kargaiya	Shekila
Priyanka Bose	Kamla
David Wenham	John Brierley
Nicole Kidman	Sue Brierley
Rooney Mara	Lucy
Divian Ladwa	Montosh Brierley



# Societies Reception of the Film

The drama *Lion* (2016) has been loved by many and has successfully captured the true story of Saroo Brierley. The film has received much appreciation from both critics and audiences for capturing the realism and full on nature of India through the perspective of a 5 year old boy. 'Lion starts strong and finishes on a teary high' (Matt Nearl, ABC Radio), however others thought the structure and film were not to standard, 'There are some structural problems with Lion' (PJ Nabarro) and only receiving a solid 85% Rotten Tomato rating.

The movie since its release in early January 2017 has made over 51 million in the Box office and 140 million internationally, a victory considering the budget the film was made with 12 million.

*Lion* was praised and was even nominated for six Oscars in 2017 in particular highlighting actors Nicole Kidman and Dev Patel nominated for best supporting actress and actor. The movie was released four years after the Saroo Brierley's released his own book 'A Long Way From Home' inspiring Luke Davies and Garth Davis to adapt their own take. The world was compelled to watch the true story of the boy who found his home 25 years after losing it, a story that was so special that the book was not enough, and luckily the movie did it justice.

Now the film is found on netflix and other streaming sites and continues to amaze viewers globally. The story of an orphaned child who lost his home is compelling and emotional, and in the story of Saroo Brierley it is a happy ending. However, the themes and ideas behind the movie such as orphans and slave traders are still very real in today's society, studies show that there are over 30 million orphans in India right now. To make matters worse only 500,000 of these have proper institutional care, despite this there are great organizations such as NGOs around the world that help kids like Saroo find parents so they can have a chance at a better life.



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