STRANGER THINGS S1 E1 SUMMARY & KEY ALLUSIONS
THE VANISHING OF WILL BYERS

For more details, see
http://strangerthings.wikia.com/wiki/The_Vanishing_of_Will_Byers
http://strangerthings.wikia.com/wiki/Influences_%26_references

See page 11 for a quiz on Episode 1

Opening echoes Spielberg's ET; there are many other references in this episode.

The boys have been playing for 10 hours! D&D features in ET.

The police station has lots of narrative & cinematic parallels to 'Jaws'.

1 A caption informs us that it's November 6th 1983, Hawkins Indiana. Hawkins National Laboratory, a government Energy Laboratory. An alarm is ringing, lights flickering. A white-coated lab worker is running down a corridor in panic. He gets in a lift, but animal noises and sound effects continue even more intensely. He is pulled upwards by a mysterious force.

2 Cut to Mike's house, via a shot of the sprinkler system at night. The four young protagonists, Will, Dustin, Mike and Lucas, are playing Dungeons and Dragons. They encounter the terrifying Demogorgon when Mike's mum insists it's time for the others to go home.

3 It's night time. Will and Dustin race each other home on their bikes. If the Will wins, Dustin promises him his X-men comic. Will's lights flicker and cut out, he is scared by a mysterious figure in the road, veers off the road and falls.

4 Accompanied by the same eerie animal noises, Will runs home, which is empty apart from a barking dog. There seems to be something chasing him, Will tries to call 911, but only gets a static hissing noise. Something or someone is trying to get into the house. Will rushes to the backyard shed and grabs an air rifle. Strange gurgling sounds are heard. Light goes out and he disappears.

5 Fade out into retro title sequence. The episode title captions 'The Vanishing of Will Byers' and listing the minor actors are reminiscent of old cowboy films and wanted posters. They contrast with the more corporate modern Netflix style white on black captions listing the main actors.

6 We fade into a pan of Chief Hopper's room, showing signs of excessive drinking, smoking and general neglect. A TV tells us that power cuts have been widespread. Hopper half dressed goes onto his terrace and has his first cigarette of the day. Shower, pills, more cigarettes and a slow reveal of his position as tight close-ups show him putting on his police uniform.

7 Morning routine at the Byers house. Jonathan is making breakfast and his mother Joyce is about to go to work. She discovers that Will is not in his room. Joyce rings Mike Wheeler’s mum Karen who says he left the night before. The background scene of breakfast at the Wheeler's house is light-hearted with Mike and his sister Nancy bickering over the maple syrup.

8 Cut to Hawkins Middle School, Mike, Dustin and Lucas are a little surprised that they haven’t seen Will yet. They have a run in with bullies who call them freaks, before heading to class.

9 Cut to Hawkins High School, Nancy. Mike's sister, tells her friend Barb that her relationship with Steve Harrington is not serious, only to see a note in a her locker telling her to meet in the bathroom. Steve and she are in the bathroom and they make plans to meet up later in the evening.

10 The police station is a scene of macho sleepiness. An elderly receptionist informs Hopper that Joyce can't find her son. Hopper seems indifferent – 'Mornings are for coffee and contemplation'. An agitated Joyce implores Hopper to take Will's disappearance seriously. Hopper questions Joyce's claims and doesn't take her too seriously. He brushes her off with a reminder that this is a
town where garden gnome thievery is regarded as a major crime and an owl attacked someone’s head. Hopper’s first instinct is to question her ex-husband Lonnie, but Joyce insists that any potential involvement of his in Will’s disappearance is unlikely - nonetheless, she agrees to call him.

11 We see Dr Brenner and a group of government agents arriving at Hawkins Laboratory. Scientists and agents, including Brenner, suit up in protective suits before entering the underground subsystem. We again see the lift from the opening scene. Strange leaflike particles float in the air. There, they find strange biologic growth spreading - originating from a mysterious fracture in the wall. The same gurgling, rumbling sounds accompany their exploration. We find out that a girl is missing.

12 Cut to bare feet walking along a woodland floor. Camera tilts up to reveal a young child in a hospital gown. Her shaved hair makes it hard to make out if she is male or female. Her POV shows the back of Benny’s burger bar. She approaches, enters the kitchen and starts eating fries. Benny, a gentle giant, catches her as she tries to run away. At first he thinks she’s a boy.

13 Cut to a classroom in the Middle School. After class at Hawkins Middle, the boys become overwhelmed with excitement when their science teacher reveals that the Heathkit ham shack he ordered has been delivered. The boys are excited at the prospect of being able to contact Australia and start playing around with the radio, imitating Australian accents. However, the school principal and Chief Hopper interrupt them to question them about Will’s way home the previous night. He tells them to go straight home after school and to not go biking around looking for Will.

14 In a flashback scene, Joyce is in the woods at Castle Byers, Will’s woodland hide-out, surprising Will with tickets to see ‘Poltergeist’. Joyce also teases Will about a fear of clowns; (possibly a reference to Stephen King’s IT). In the present time, Joyce and Jonathan are at the fort, looking for Will.

15 Back at Benny’s burger bar, Benny feeds the mysterious girl burgers, gives her a T-shirt, and calls social services. Eleven, as the girl is known thanks to her strange "011" tattoo on her left fore-arm, uses her mind and powers of telekinesis to fix a noisy fan.

16 At 'Mirkwood', Hopper and his officers Powell and Callahan are out on the road where Will crashed his bike. They find it, tipped over and abandoned, by the trees on the side of the road.

17 Joyce tries to call her ex-husband Lonnie, but is hung up on by his girlfriend, Cynthia. The scene is ‘framed’ by surveillance officers who are listening in on the call. Jonathan tells his mum to keep calm. The police arrive with Will’s bike. Hopper inspects the house. The dog is in the yard barking agitatedly and looking out into the woods. Hopper is drawn to the shed. The light flickers, and he is startled by Ofofficer Callahan entering the shed. Hopper is spooked and tells his two officers to organize a search party.
18 Mike and his family sit around the dinner table. Mike wants to go looking for Will, but his mother says no. Nancy asks her mother if she can go and study at her friend Barb's house. The mother says that nobody leaves the house until Will is found. Nancy gets upset, and in an argument with Mike reveals that Steve is her new boyfriend. The father is amusingly passive and helpless during the animated discussions.

19 A search party is out in the woods at night looking for Will. Science teacher Scott Clarke tells Hopper that Will is a great student. It is revealed that Hopper's daughter died a few years back, although Hopper didn't say.

20 Lucas and Mike talk on their 'Supercoms', large walkie-talkies. They discuss how Will was willing to put himself in danger to help the group while playing D&D the night before, and agree to meet up to look for him. Mike spots Steve trying to sneak into Nancy's room.

21 Mike's older sister Nancy is making out with Steve Harrington. Steve has climbed into Nancy's room, calling himself 'Ninja'.

22 Benny is doing dishes in the kitchen and tells the girl that a smile looks good on her. A woman claiming to be from Social Services arrives to pick her up. Benny invites the woman into the diner, and when his back is turned, the woman shoots Benny. to the tune of Jefferson Airplane's 'White Rabbit' playing on the radio. Benny lies dead on the floor, while a number of agents (including Dr Brenner) arrive to collect the girl. Eleven manages to escape, using her special telekinetic powers.

23 The boys are out searching for Will, while Nancy and Steve are together in secret in her room. Steve tries to seduce Nancy, (music 'Africa' by Toto), but she rejects his advances. They return to study.

24 Joyce and Jonathan go through family photos. Jonathan breaks down, feeling guilty about his brother's disappearance. Joyce tells him it's not his fault, that Will is close, that she can feel it. They choose a picture for his "missing" flyers. Joyce receives an ominous, static call on her home phone. Joyce says to Jonathan that she can hear Will breathing. There's static, some growling, and the lights flicker. The phone surges with electricity, briefly electrocuting Joyce. Joyce is distraught.

25 While searching for Will in the rain, Dustin wants to turn back. Mike and Lucas disagree, going ahead with their plan. They hear rustling in the bushes and find the girl.

See page 11 for a quiz on Episode 1
STRANGER THINGS – HOW DOES EPISODE 1 GRAB AUDIENCES

The episode contains many codes & conventions that help to draw the audience into the narrative.

1) SUSPENSE

Internal cliff-hangers and questions (the research lab, the flickering lights, Eleven’s identity and gender).

Use of suspense and enigma codes.

- Eleven’s identity, ambiguous gender (looks like a boy), supernatural powers, number 011 tattooed on wrist

Give more examples:

2) NARRATIVE COMPLEXITY - MULTI-STRAND NARRATIVE

= the narrative has lots of different threads/storylines

Our interest is reinforced by the varied and numerous storylines:

- EL’s identity
- Disappearance Will Byers
- Chief Hopper life/ background character (the cinematography introducing Hopper is particularly intriguing – slow pan round his untidy living room suggesting loneliness, drinking, lack of respectability). He is a countertype.
- Science Research Lab (the lab technician who panics in the lift, the mystery of the men in bio-suits)
- the board game scenario
- love interest: Nancy & Steve
- Will’s mum & his brother Jonathan
- the children at school; bullying; science club

3) COLD OPENING = PRE-TITLE SEQUENCE – grabs the attention of the audience by throwing us straight into the action before the title sequence which is rather dull and retro. Just starting with the titles could put audiences off.

4) TODOROV’S 2ND PHASE IS GIVEN PROMINENCE – DISRUPTION/ DISEQUILIBRIUM

5) Visual codes – (MCESS)

- dark mise en scene (forest, suburban street, lots of action happens at night)
- interesting camerawork – e.g. the unusual overhead shot of the lab worker in the lift
- the way Hopper is introduced – slow pan round his living room; takes the audience by surprise when we see him putting on his sherriff’s uniform
- editing is traditional conventional straight cutting – occasional fades to black
- the use of SFX (special/ visual effects) is important effective and attention-grabbing
- e.g. flickering lights; strange floating objects in the lab
6) **Sound**: skilful use of **diegetic and non-diegetic** sound. Non-diegetic sound – e.g. theme music is used (as always) to heighten the emotion. Mostly the sound is diegetic with 80s music playing on a radio in background – also adding to the richness of the narrative. Plus lots of good sci-fi special effects to highlight the sense of horror. (e.g. mysterious phone calls to the Byers household)

7) **BINARY OPPOSITIONS** – e.g. natural/supernatural; interplay between ordinary/extraordinary adults vs children – the representation of children as more like adults.

Mother played by Winona Rider seems more vulnerable and childlike than some of the younger characters. This is reinforced by her clothes. Will’s brother Jonathan is generally strong, calm (composed), protective of his mother.

8) **INTERTEXTUALITY** – adds to the richness of the production and adds to the gratifications (pleasures) of the drama. E.T., Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Back to the Future, Ghostbusters, STAND BY ME are among the many films that are referred to. Sometimes shots are reproduced exactly. The series is a tribute to **‘auteur’ directors** such as Steven Spielberg. (An **auteur director** is someone who has full control of every aspect of the production and who producers allow the creative freedom to do what they want). There are also tributes and references to narratives by horror writer Stephen King, especially ‘IT’.

9) **RETRO / NOSTALGIA** – 80s décor, huge brick walkie-talkies. The old landline phone.

10) **HYBRID GENRE**: main genre is SCI-FI; plus elements of horror, romance, comedy, adventure, thriller, childhood ‘coming of age’ movie, crime police investigation.

11) **Strong characterization** – large cast; varied characters. Actors are largely unknown apart from Winona Ryder who plays Joyce Byers, Will’s mother. The boys for example are all very different, amusing, quirky. Dustin – goofy, Mike- thoughtful reflective and sensitive. Their banter imitates that of the adult world and reminds us of other films such as Stand by me.

Eleven, played by English actress **Millie Bobby Brown**, is very compelling (on casting, the directors were drawn to her magnetic qualities as a young 13 year old.)

12) **Humour? Watch the episode and see if you can find examples of humour. Who are the funniest characters? Are there amusing situations?**

All these aspects help to make the episode effective and attractive to a variety of audiences. 

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Stranger Things Study Booklet © Jon Meier

6
TARGET AUDIENCES – wider audiences, hybrid genres and skilful storytelling. All these aspects help to promote the Netflix brand

- Mainly sci fi fans
- Adults who grew up in the 80s (Intertextuality, retro, nostalgia)
- Female teenagers – rom com aspect – High School romance Nancy & Steve
- Children and Young teenagers – attracted by three main protagonists
- Older teenagers / students: cult following – builds up a strong young adult fan base

ACTIVITY A Research Netflix as a commercial operation. How does it make its money? Advertising? Global presence?

ACTIVITY B GENRES – a) Give examples from the narrative, visual and audio codes of the following: Lacey talks about each genre form having its own particular 'repertoire of elements.'

Sci Fi
Horror
Romance
Romcom
Children’s adventure
‘Coming of Age Movie’ (a film about a child whose experiences help him to come to terms with adult world)
Thriller
Alien abduction
Police investigation – (+ comedy around smalltown provincial cops who work in a place where nothing serious ever happens 'coffee & contemplation', garden gnomes & owl)
High School Drama

b) Which is the dominant genre? Describe some of the iconography that we would instantly associate with this genre.

c) Do you think ‘Stranger Things’ is a hybrid genre text or is it more unified than other long form TV dramas you have seen? What is the effect of hybridity?

d) To what extent is Steve Neale’s view of genre relevant to Stranger Things? ('Repetition and difference', 'repetition and variation').

e) Is there also a link to Postmodernism (imitation, replica etc)?
**ACTIVITY C** PRODUCTION DETAILS. RESEARCH THE SERIES USING IMDB AND OTHER SITES. TRY TO AVOID WIKIPEDIA.

Netflix as an organisation
How much did it cost to make?
How many episodes – commercial success or failure?
Locations
Actors - were they known?
Name of writers and directors – what was their aim?

**ACTIVITY D** STRANGER THINGS THEORY LINK

Choose 5 of the following a briefly write how the theories relate or do not relate to ‘Stranger Things’

- Neale – Genre Theory
- Fiske – fragmented audiences
- Auteur theory
- Postmodernism (Baudrillard) – replica & imitation
- Dyer Utopian Solutions
- Denotation & Connotation (Roland Barthes)
- Binary oppositions (Levi-Strauss)
- Gerbner – Mean World Syndrome
- Todorov
- Henry Jenkins - Fandom
- Butler – gender conditioning + Van Zoonen
- Hesmondhalgh: (MEDIA INDUSTRIES) repetition and mass production, recycling of successful formats & formulas; growing power of Netflix as a media player
- Clay Shirky ('many to many' model? The power of social media - digital conversation)
ACTIVITY E LINKS TO PROPP’S 8 CHARACTER TYPES
Revise Propp’s character types. List them and see if you can match any of them to the characters in Episode 1

ACTIVITY F Representations in Stranger Things Season 1 Episode 1
See http://strangerthings.wikia.com/wiki/Character_List

Try to get an overview so that you can analyse in more depth.

Pick 5 or 6 of the most interesting characters and analyse how they are constructed (actors, looks, costume, surroundings, behaviour, contribution to the narrative big picture). Who is the most interesting character and why?

Are they stereotypes? How do they appeal to different audience types? Do they fit in with Propp’s character types? How do the representations help to propel the narrative (conflict, enigma, romance etc). How do they appeal to global audiences?

| Authority figures e.g. police officers, chief Hopper, government scientists/agents | The children: Will Byers Dustin Mike Lucas Eleven Teenagers Nancy Wheeler Steve Harrington Jonathan Byers |
| Adults: Joyce Byers Sherriff Chief Hopper Police Government Scientists Science Teacher |

2) How are the Locations represented? Do the representations confirm or subvert our expectations?

Locations – how do they help the hybrid genre feel of the production? How are the locations filmed to add a sense of mystery? e.g. does home feel like home? Is the school a place of safety?

School Woods Homes Police station Research Lab
SOME KEY PRODUCTION FACTS

- 6m dollars per episode – 50 mins (cost rose to 8m per episode in Season 2) (similar to budgets for big Hollywood films)
- shows the financial strength of Netflix
- unlike normal TV there are no adverts
- most income from subscriptions – it is a global, worldwide company
- Pattern of viewing is changing away from cinema to home entertainment,
- The streaming model is now the preferred way to consume broadcast media
- But Netflix also allows users to download episodes – this is important in areas of the world where bandwidth is problematic (which leads to buffering issues).
- **Notable lack of merchandising and marketing** for Season 1 – slow burner- relies on word of mouth; viral aspect
- The series is set in the fictional town of Hawkins Indiana; set in 1983.
- Filmed in 2015 released in 2016

ACTIVITY G

Using these production details and those you have found in Activity C, make a revision handout for yourself or other classes. Make it visually attractive, using shapes and colours
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What year is it set?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Name of the fictional town in Indiana?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What comic does Dustin promise Will if he gets home first?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Which film frequently referenced in Episode 1 e.g. the Shed, the opening slow pan down from the sky?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Title of Episode 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mike's surname</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chief Hopper tells Flo his receptionist: mornings are for coffee and ......</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Name of the sinister doctor who seems to be leading the scientists at the lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>What country are the boys told they can contact with the amateur radio?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>What do the boys call an area where the road meets the woods?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Which book does the above name come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>In the flashback scene to Will's Castle Byers hideout, what film does his mother Joyce say she has got tickets for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>What is the name of the restaurant/diner where Eleven first appears?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>What do we call the energy to move objects by the power of thought?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Give the first names of Will's three friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Name of the two brothers who wrote and directed the show.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Name the (English) actress who plays Eleven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Name the board-game played by the boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Name the monster in the board-game who is summoned up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Year when the episode was first released</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STRANGER THINGS- MAIN THEMES

Levi-Strauss:
binary
oppositions

Political, social
and cultural
context

The supernatural; American Anxiety
1. Ordinary vs extraordinary
2. Natural vs supernatural
3. Rational vs irrational.
4. The power of the irrational, supernatural world
5. The hidden world that lies beneath the surface. The existence of mysterious extra dimensions 'the upside down'.
6. A growing interest in alien invasion narratives. (The X-Files was a big sci-fi TV hit of the 1980s). Perhaps accentuated by the experiences of two world wars and nuclear attacks on Hiroshima. A growing feeling that humanity, especially the US is not invincible and the world is a fragile place. Post- 9/11 insecurity. Anxiety about the future. Similar to cold-war anti Soviet nuclear war paranoia of the 1950s and 60s.

Inadequacy of adults
7. Corrupt, or at best, the indifferent nature of authority. (Hawkins police).
8. Powerlessness and weakness of trusted institutions. (police, government, social services)
9. Disillusion with the adult world and the security it is supposed to provide (as adults struggle with marital breakdown, selfishness, pressures of work, economic hardship). This generally goes alongside teenage 'coming of age' themes.

Inadequacy of religion and science to provide answers and reassurance
10. Growing mistrust of religion to provide answers and security.
11. Weakening of faith in science to solve the world's problems and make people happier.

Transition from childhood;
13. Loss of childhood innocence in a corrupt society run by shady adults (Government science lab).
14. Nostalgia for a past age of children being free to wander around and have adventures.
16. Teenage sexuality and guilt – a common theme in horror films where sexual awakening and puberty is reflected in disturbing external events. – a variation on the pathetic fallacy idea. See films like 'Carrie', The Exorcist
17. Existentialist preoccupation with 'The Other', The Outsider. Rejection of society's conventions, norms and expectations. A feeling of alienation linked with a rebellious refusal to conform.
STRANGER THINGS  QUESTIONS ON ARTICLES PAGES  15-21

A) Article 1  p15  Max: 25 marks
1) Give another word for ‘shortness’.
2) How many episodes in Season 1?
3) Which company was behind the production?
4) How was the series different in terms of advertising?
5) Name of the theorist behind the three-part narrative
6) What is the relevance of Clay Shirky’s ‘Many to many’ model?
8) Name 3 films that E1 refers to.

B) Article 2  p16  Max: 10 marks
1) What live event is described here?
2) Explain why live events seem to conflict with modern digital audiences
3) Explain the link to George Gerbner.

C) Article 3  p17, 18  Max: 30 marks
1) What do you think is meant by ‘localization’?
2) What 2 methods are used to make English-language programmes accessible to foreign audiences?
3) Explain how Netflix makes the work of translators easier.
4) Why is downloadable content more user-friendly for certain audiences?
5) What is meant by the ‘digital divide’
6) How does the article relate to Marshall McLuhan’s claim in the 1970s that the world was becoming a ‘global village’.
7) What else has Netflix done to extend its global reach? See p16 half way down.
8) What is meant by ‘its themes are universal’? Give examples
9) How does intertextuality help to boost the show’s success?
10) The article ends with an interesting point about Netflix power as a global commercial industry. Summarise the point using words like ‘range’ ‘programming’ and ‘global’

D) Article 4  Amazon & Netflix  p19  Max: 20 marks
1) What do Amazon and Netflix have in common?
2) Why is original content so important in a global market? There are at least 3 reasons – read to the end.
3) Explain the reference to 8 billion dollars
4) Why are users’ online behaviour tracked? What does Shoshana Zuboff call this process? Can you think of other examples of this?
5) Explain the link between the ideas in this article and David Hesmondhalgh’s view of corporate power.
E) Article 5  p20, 21  **Max: 20 marks**
1) Give at least 3 reasons why the show could have failed.
2) How would you use Dyer’s Utopian Solutions Model to explain ST’s success?
3) Why was the casting of Winona Ryder so important?
4) Which writer had a great effect on the Duffer brothers?
5) What is the normal assumption when a TV series stars children?
6) Who is Millie Bobby Brown? What made her stand out as an actress?
7) Why is it harder to make a second season?

F) General questions about globalization **Max: 25 marks**

a) What is meant by cultural imperialism? Clue: the dominance of a certain country and its values – which one?

b) Explain how ST could be accused of representing Western dominance and cultural imperialism

c) Do you think globalization is a good thing? What are the Pros and cons for media industries. Pros and cons for audiences.

d) Why do you think there is now a ‘post-colonial’ mood in the US of greater insecurity and uncertainty compared to the 20th century?

e) How does ST reflect this ‘post-colonial’ mood?
ARTICLE 1  REASONS FOR SUCCESS

Todorov – 3 part structure

It's also worth looking at Propp's 8 character types to see which fit

Clay Shirky – 'many to many model' vs Hesmondhalgh's views on corporate power.

Also – look at Henry Jenkins on Fandom

- Watched by some 15m in the US.
  96% rating on Rotten Tomatoes.
  Set in fictional Hawkins Indiana c 1983.
  Refers to many other films such as Poltergeist, ET, Stephen King's It, Stand by Me

Reasons for success

- Brevity - just eight one-hour episodes were produced in Season 1
- It also set up a thrilling conclusion, plus numerous cliff-hangers and internal cliff-hangers along the way.
- Creative control of the series is also centralised within a very small group; producer Shawn Levy, co-producer Dan Cohen and the Duffer brothers - Matt and Ross - who direct the episodes.

But perhaps the strongest asset - and what you might call Netflix's secret weapon - was to simply not market the series, confident that the absence of obvious commerce would create an aura of intrigue around the series. They were right.

"You will not see billboards, you won't see posters at bus stops," the show's producer Shawn Levy said. Netflix had tremendous faith in its viral potential.

They are also great believers in word of mouth. "The idea is to turn people on it a way that makes people tell their family and friends and we build organically from there," he said.

Levy said Netflix's greatest strength was a willingness to let them work without restraint.

"When we sold this, it had no pre-awareness title, no big star actor or show runner, just these young twin brothers with a crazy idea, vividly realised, and a movie director as the producer," Levy says. "They really empowered us and let us lead the way."

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1 Sydney Morning Herald – ST is a pop culture phenomenon
ARTICLE 2 Second season – live launch screening

The second season premiere is coming to market in very different circumstances, and with an enormous "pre-awareness" on the part of the audience. And a premiere at one of the world's iconic venues: the Sydney Opera House.

The free launch, open to those quick enough to register online, saw the building's foyer transformed into Hawkins, Indiana, complete with an infamous white Power & Light van out front and chillingly dead-eyed child actors, cycling about on vintage BMX bikes, filling in for the show's cast in photo-ops.

Billed as the premiere's "biggest fan event in the world", the screening hit capacity, with over 2000 people – largely teens and 20-somethings, garbed in all sorts of knick-knacks from their parents' wardrobe.

"This is for fans, by fans, which is the most important thing," said Harvey about the premiere.

"Television is a very important form of storytelling; it's where most people get their worldviews and entertainment from, and we really need to celebrate those artists in television who are doing a great job."

If that's not fan dedication, it's hard to know what is.

For the best article on all the inter-textual references and allusions (films, TV series, video games, comics) see
http://strangerthings.wikia.com/wiki/Influences_%26_references
Localization – the ability of a production to appeal to a local area

Shows like Stranger Things need to have a global appeal. Netflix has a presence in nearly 200 countries worldwide.

The show went viral first in Canada, and gradually spread to find enthusiasts around the world. In one month, Netflix users in 190 countries watched Stranger Things, and viewers in 70 of those nations became devoted fans.

Language issues
The streaming service needs to maintain a library that users will pay for year-round.
So, Netflix puts a lot of work and resources into subtitling and dubbing services, making sure they get it right for each local market.

"We think of the subtitles and dubs as enabling access to the story," says Denny Sheehan, the director of Netflix's content localization and quality control efforts. "Our goal is to really create culturally relevant and resonant translations for the continent that have a wide global appeal.”

Making movies or series that play well overseas depends to a certain extent on quality, of course, and Netflix has long maintained that geography is a poor indicator of what people will actually watch. But for a show like Stranger Things—which is an Emmy-nominated and critically-praised show in the US—to succeed abroad, Netflix has to translate its genius to as many markets as possible. Literally.

The world contains thousands of languages. Figuring out the proper translation for "Demogorgon" in each of them would be impractical. But for the 20 languages in which Netflix does provide subtitles—and the large number in which it dubs shows—it really makes the effort to do a good job.

Netflix crowd-sources from linguistic experts translations for some of the weirder Sci Fi & fantasy names e.g. Demogorgon. They looked at games like Dungeons and Dragons were translated throughout the world. Netflix then produces a Key names and Phrases (KNP) Tool "We need to make sure we are translating the same way that things were translated, say, 30 years ago," says Sheehan "We compile all of that into essentially a show bible, and we give that to all of our translators, all of our dub studios, so they can reference that."

Their approach is far less hegemonic, less post-colonial than traditional US

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1 Wired Magazine  https://www.wired.com/story/netflix-stranger-things-global/
Netflix's approach is pluralist and inclusive rather than hegemonic; no evidence of arrogant US dominance (cultural imperialism). More culturally sensitive. Do you agree?

Wider issues around localization
Todd Yellin, is in charge of product innovation for Netflix.

Before you localize it, you have the early adopters who speak English well enough that they can use the service in those countries," Yellin says. "But after you localize, you see substantially more growth in those countries."

The company has also advanced efforts in recent years to make its service more usable in emerging markets, countries where bandwidth may be limited or unreliable. That includes the recent introduction of downloadable content, which lets users grab an episode while on Wi-Fi to watch on the go.

"What we’re doing is trying to do things like, when people are watching over a cellular network, how to get better quality for fewer bits of data, how to avoid rebuffering in more challenging internet scenarios, like you often hit in India or Malaysia or the Philippines and so forth," says Yellin. "Those markets are very important for the expansion of Netflix."

People do need to want to watch the shows in the first place. Netflix has a multi-series deal with Marvel, whose stable of comic book characters has a huge international reputation. It has also invested heavily in anime-a genre that crosses geographical and social boundaries.

As a Spielberg-genre throwback, Stranger Things seems similarly built for international success. The stars and creators may have been relative unknowns before the series debuted, but its themes are universal. And it’s not just Spielberg; fans of David Lynch and Stand By Me will find familiar nuggets as well.

Its commercial success results from attracting several different audiences. All of the allusions make it a kind of interactive game as people ‘spot the references’, feel flattered by their ability to do so but also curious about those they realize they must be missing, and share them through social networking, together with speculation about what is going on and what the various clues might mean.

Stranger Things, too, is just one show. The process repeats itself across thousands of hours of content. Netflix already made shows based on what the world wanted to watch; the hard part, now, is presenting it in a way that people can understand, no matter where they live or what language they speak.
Hesmondhalgh – media industries remain as powerful as ever. Thanks to commercialization, globalization and vertical integration

This is relevant to Marshall McLuhan’s idea about the world becoming a ‘global village’.

Tracking user behaviour – surveillance capitalism (Shoshana Zuboff)

ARTICLE 4 Netflix and Amazon’s race for world domination of the broadcast market.¹

Netflix originals and Amazon Studios – mean that both companies can produce original content aimed at global markets (not relying on traditional Hollywood films)

Both companies are now present in around 200 countries (each had simultaneous launches across 130)

The challenge is to ensure that there are sufficient audiences abroad who are waiting to watch. This is only possible with original content.

This is also a way of getting around complex legal restrictions (e.g. in France you can't show a film on TV until 3 years after its cinema release). Netflix got into trouble when it bought and launched a whole set of Disney movies - Disney still had the rights and the films were only available for three to five years.

So it’s easier to show your own content. Netflix has a budget of around 8 billion dollars to produce original content. Amazon is similar.

Owning their own content also makes it easier for the companies to allow downloading – a cheaper alternative especially in countries where streaming is hard as Internet connections (bandwidth) is not so good. This offline viewing helps global expansion.

Globalization & the media industry

Owning their own content also helps to promote the Netflix/Amazon brand. Producers can trial pilots with their subscribers (Amazon Prime users have the opportunity to comment on new series)

Netflix tracks user behaviour to decide not just what shows it should invest in, but what sort of budget to allocate each movie and series. There’s maybe no better indication that this approach works than the exclusive four-picture deal Netflix signed with Adam Sandler in 2014. At the time, the move invited groans. The first of those movies, Ridiculous 6, became the service’s most-streamed movie ever after just 30 days of release.

With their own content, the companies can also control program formats and resolution so they can future-proof them as hi-resolution HD viewing comes along.

¹ Wired Magazine https://www.wired.com/2016/12/amazon-netflix-look-shows-key-world-domination/
By rights, Stranger Things should have failed. The show’s creators – the Duffer brothers, Matt and Ross – had no track record in TV beyond writing a handful of episodes of Fox sci-fi series Wayward Pines. The cast was unknown, with the exception of Winona Ryder. It was set in a fictional town in Indiana in 1983. Its ‘monster-from-the-other-side-hunting-young-teens’ plot mimicked unfashionable 80s horror movie tropes, and it starred a bunch of kids.

And yet it’s Netflix’s biggest hit to date.

What constitutes a hit for the streaming service is sometimes unclear – the company famously refuses to release viewing figures – but when they announced record third-quarter results for 2016, Stranger Things was one of the series credited, while leaked numbers appeared to show it outperforming Kevin Spacey in House of Cards. Series two was commissioned almost immediately.

“When we cast Winona Ryder back in 2015, she wasn’t doing a lot of movies and had never done television – I’m not sure she would have met with us otherwise,” explains Stranger Things producer Shawn Levy, in a drab office at the edge of the show’s Atlanta-based set. “Then, after season one, the Duffers and I got calls from a lot of very famous actors who wanted to be a part of season two, and well-known directors almost begging to direct an episode.”

Ryder certainly had a part to play in Stranger Things’s success – she was single mum Joyce Byers, whose search for her missing son Will reminded everyone how mesmerising she could be. “We met up with her for a cup of tea and ended up in this four-hour-long conversation – she had the fragility we needed,” Ross Duffer says. “The script was rewritten so the character was based on Winona herself, to a degree.”

Also significant is the imprint left on the brothers by the work of Steven Spielberg and Stephen King. “There was a very specific feeling I had when I was reading Stephen King books in my bedroom when I was a kid and we were trying to capture that and put it on screen,” says Matt. “We hung out with a group of nerdy friends playing games. There was this sense that if you went into the woods you’d find a treasure map and go on an adventure.”

To the surprise of Hollywood, if not the Stranger Things team, adults really loved the kids. “The conventional wisdom in film and TV is you can’t make something starring kids that isn’t for kids,” says Matt. “We saw over a thousand people for these parts because we really wanted kids who didn’t
feel that they belonged on television and felt authentic.”

**Finn Wolfhard, Gaten Matarazzo and Caleb McLaughlin** as Mike, Dustin and Lucas – the three nerds trying to find their missing friend Will, played by **Noah Schnapp** – all shone, but **British actor Millie Bobby Brown, 13**, utterly stole the show as the haunting Eleven. Brown’s family moved from Bournemouth to Florida when she was eight, and then on to LA after her drama teacher told Brown’s parents that she has “instincts you cannot teach” …..

Discussing the show’s success, for instance, she says, “Instagram followers started to go up, I started to get more messages, my friends that I hadn’t spoken to in three years started to text me again, and I was like, ‘Hmm, OK, I see where this is going…’” she smiles. “Eleven is a freak, an outcast, she’s got a shaved head and she embraces it all – and that’s why people just relate to her.”

Some traumatic scenes – being locked in a cell, running from her captors and battling a giant monster – look alarming to film, but she shrugs this off. “The Duffers are really sensitive and say, ‘We’re going to give you however long you need,’” she says. “But honestly? Sometimes I feel like the happy scenes are a bit boring for me. I love to cry in a scene and I like action scenes where stuff is happening.”

Asked about the risk of becoming a child star casualty, she rolls her eyes. “I don’t know if I’ll keep doing it or go off to college but all of us enjoy going on set every day. We’re not looking for longevity, we’re looking for the fun of it.” …..

The problem is, Matt points out, that following a breakthrough, unexpected hit isn’t easy. “When we were making this thing two years ago no one was paying attention,” he shrugs. “Doing season two with this expectation level is definitely daunting. We’ve had to avoid most social media, for a start.”
Sample Exam Questions – (Remember that in the exam you will need to refer to two long form TV dramas, Stranger Things plus a non-English language production)
For now, you can just limit your answers to ‘Stranger Things’

This is a synoptic question, (= bring together all aspects covered throughout the course). You will be rewarded for drawing together knowledge and understanding from your full course of study, including different areas theoretical framework and media contexts.

A) Why do long form television dramas from different countries offer different representations? [20]
In your answer you must:
• consider the contexts in which long form television dramas are produced and consumed
• explain how media contexts may have influenced representations in the set episodes of the two long form television dramas you have studied
• make judgements and reach conclusions about the reasons for the differences in representation between the two episodes.

B) Evaluate the relevance of Todorov’s theory of narratology to long form television drama.

C) Discuss the extent to which the long form television dramas you have studied challenge the conventions of genre. Your answer should make reference to both long form television dramas you have studied: one from List A and one from List B. [20]

D) Discuss the extent to which your chosen long form television dramas successfully target their audiences. Your answer should make reference to both long form television dramas you have studied: one from List A and one from List B [20]

E) Evaluate the usefulness of academic ideas and arguments in helping your understanding of how media language is used in one of the long form television dramas that you have studied. [10]

Extra questions and discussion points
1) How does the first episode draw the audience in?
2) How do long form TV dramas successfully target different audiences?
3) Discuss the representation of location in the dramas you have studied.
4) Compare and contrast the representations of certain groups in the dramas you have studied e.g. authority figures, police, children, women, villains, parents.
5) How does long form TV drama successfully cross national and cultural boundaries to gain foreign audiences.
6) Discuss the differences in style between the English language and the non English language TV drama you have studied.
7) Discuss the role of intertextuality and other postmodern conventions such as self-referencing, parody and pastiche in your chosen TV dramas.
8) How does the format of a long-form drama influence the structure of the narrative?
9) To what extent do the dramas you have studied reflect the cultural, social, economic and political context of the countries in which they were produced?
10) Which academic ideas, if any, could be useful in adding to an appreciation of the dramas you have studied?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What year is it set?</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Name of the fictional town in Indiana?</td>
<td>Hawkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What comic does Dustin promise Will if he gets home first?</td>
<td>X-Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Which film and director is frequently referenced in Episode 1 e.g.</td>
<td>Steven Spielberg's ET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Shed, the opening slow pan down from the sky?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Title of Episode 1</td>
<td>The Vanishing of Will Byers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Mike’s surname</td>
<td>Wheeler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Chief Hopper tells Flo his receptionist: mornings are for coffee</td>
<td>contemplation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and……</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Name of the sinister doctor who seems to be leading the scientists</td>
<td>Dr Brenner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at the lab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) What country are the boys told they can contact with the amateur</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>radio?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) What do the boys call an area where the road meets the woods?</td>
<td>Mirkwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Which book does the above name come from?</td>
<td>The Hobbit (by JRR Tolkein)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) In the flashback scene to Will’s 'Castle Byers' hideout, what film</td>
<td>Poltergeist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>does his mother Joyce say she has got tickets for?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) What is the name of the restaurant/diner where Eleven first appears?</td>
<td>Benny’s (Burger Bar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) What do we call the energy to move objects by the power of thought?</td>
<td>telekinesis; telekinetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) Give the first names of Will’s three friends.</td>
<td>Dustin, Mike and Lucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) Name of the two brothers who wrote and directed the show.</td>
<td>Matt &amp; Ross Duffer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) Name the (English) actress who plays Eleven.</td>
<td>Millie Bobby Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) Name the board-game played by the boys.</td>
<td>Dungeons &amp; Dragons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) Name the monster in the board-game who is summoned up.</td>
<td>Demogorgon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20) Year when the episode was first released.</td>
<td>(July) 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Use this booklet for Revision. It covers the following areas:

Page 1: Plot summary & notes
Page 5: How Episode 1 grabs the audience (12 points – how many can you remember)

Page 7: Who are the target audiences? (5 audience categories)
Page 7: Research Netflix activity
Page 7: Genre elements (10 types)

Page 8: Production details
Page 8: Theory links activity
Page 8: Propp’s character types activity

Page 10: A few key production facts
Page 11: Episode 1 Quiz

Page 12: Main themes (4 main categories)

Page 13 & 14: Questions about the articles on the following pages
Page 15: Article 1 – Evidence of its success and reasons for its success
Page 16: Article 2 - Importance of fandom as Season 2 launches
Page 17: Article 3 – Global success and localization
Page 19: Article 4 – Netflix and Amazon’s dominance
Page 20: Article 5 – ST’s success; adapted from Radio Times

Page 22: Sample exam questions and general questions
Page 23: Episode 1 quiz answers

Revision tip
Make sure you can write about 'Stranger Things’ in terms of:
- Media language (form, narrative, genre, codes & conventions)
- Media Audiences (include themes messages and ideologies)
- Media Industries
- Media Representations
Aim for 200-300 words in each section.