

BILLY ELLIOT

MAJOR CHARACTERS

1	Billy Elliot				Eleven-year-old Billy is an aspiring ballet dancer who comes from a tough mining community in the North East of England. Billy is sensitive understanding and imaginative, even though he is surrounded by violence and difficulty. Sometimes the anger and violence that surrounds Billy bubbles up in him, and he can become enraged and destructive.
2	Jackie Elliot				Jackie is the archetypal Northern English working class man, a miner and a widow. He has explosive emotions that come out at inopportune moments, especially as he struggles to raise two boys and look after his aging mother.
3	Mrs Wilkinson				Mrs Wilkinson teaches a ballet class in the local gymnasium. She recognises talent in Billy immediately and encourages him to pursue dance seriously. While she believes in Billy, she never coddles him and is a tough critic, pushing him to be the best dancer he can be.
4	Tony Elliot				The older of the Elliot boys. He bullies his little brother, and bullies people at work, passionate and violent in his philosophies about the strike taking place. While he is initially horrified to learn that Billy likes ballet, he eventually comes around and supports his brother's talent, recognising that Billy has something special.
5	Grandma				Billy's grandmother lives with the Elliots. When we meet her, she is suffering with senility and loneliness, but in her youth she had dreams of becoming a dancer, just like Billy. She gives an insight into her 'miserable' marriage, saying upon reflection her life was 'over when she put on the ring.' She had to conform to a gender stereotype and be subservient to her husband.
6	Michael				Michael lives in Billy's neighbourhood and is his best friend. Early in the play, Billy sees him dressing up in women's clothing. Billy accepts him, and it does not hurt their friendship. In fact, Billy takes Michael to the ballet studio, gives him a tutu and shows him how to dance. He is one of Billy's champions and his closest friend.

EXTEND YOUR LEARNING

<a href="#">Billy Elliot: The Musical Website</a>	Lots of information about the production.
<a href="#">The Miners' Strike</a>	Lots of information about the play's context.

OVERVIEW

The community, in which the majority of men work in the coal industry, is suffering through a major strike to protest against Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's attempts to break the powerful coal miners' union. Billy Elliot's family are severely affected by the strike as both dad, Jackie and older brother, Tony are miners who are on strike. One storyline is about the strike and the tensions within the community between the miners and the authorities (represented by the police, who have been brought in from London to keep order.)

BILLY'S STORY

The second storyline is about eleven-year-old Billy himself. His dad (and indeed the society in which he lives) basically maintains that boys should be macho. So being tough and being able to defend one's self is basic. Billy, like his father and brother before him, is therefore enrolled in boxing classes at the Miners Welfare Hall – a community meeting place that also houses the dance classes of Mrs. Wilkinson. Billy really doesn't like the boxing classes. Mrs. Wilkinson, seeing the potential that Billy has as a dancer, works it out with Billy that she'll secretly give him lessons, with the goal that he'll eventually try out for the Royal Ballet School.

Later, after being accepted to the school, the story becomes very emotional as Billy leaves the community that has become very supportive of him to attend the prestigious dance school. The Ballet School will provide him with a way to break out of the depressing mode of trying to earn a living in a community supported by an industry on the decline. However, in doing so, he will have to say goodbye to his family and friends to start life anew.

