Examples of Imagery and Symbolism in *Billy Elliot*

**Shoes & feet and gloves**

- Seen frequently – dancing and otherwise
- The ballet shoes come to symbolise to Billy his love of dance, his opportunity
- The gloves belonged to Billy’s grandfather = the old male tradition he must escape

**The piano**

- Belonged to Billy’s Mum so to him symbolises her and the chances she would have offered him: “Our Mum would have let us.”
- He tries to play it but hasn’t the skill
- When it is chopped up for firewood, Jacky cries (for the first time?)

**Cages**

- In the hall: Jacky watches thorough the cage,
- The boxing ring is a sort of a cage
- Billy dances within the tight confines of the red-brick backyard, the corrugated iron fence
- The miners go back to work in a cage
- Billy watches the ballet girls at the end from the other side – he is now outside
- Symbolic of the society Billy is part of, and that will confine him if he does not get away from it.

**Mirrors**

- Mirrors are traditional symbols of identity, helping us to see ourselves.
- Ballet is usually practised with mirrors so dancers can see what they are doing.
- Billy practises in front of the bathroom mirror
- There is a lovely moment when he catches sight of himself in the mirror in the school changing room and immediately holds himself like a dancer.

**Swans**

- The wallpaper at the Wilkinsons’
- The feathers in pillow fight
- The story of Swan Lake
- Billy dances it at the end
- Just as the ugly duckling becomes a beautiful swan, so too does Billy go from being an outcast attempting to dance to a graceful expert by the end of the film.

**The little girl in blue**

- Symbolic of the average child of the area – seems to do nothing but look at life.
- Represents what Billy is escaping from.
- She is present at Billy’s farewell before he gets on the bus (her only dialogue is to say “Goodbye Billy”) – Billy is not going to be a normal mining child, but rather will go on to achieve great things.
Police and police vans
- constant presence – children take them for granted, ignore them
- never shown in close up unless hidden by shields and riot gear = threatening and not comforting image

Sailing boats
- A lone sailing boat is seen on the wall of Billy’s room
- A lone boat appears in the harbour when there are shots overlooking the sea.
- It represents the isolation that Billy must contend with if he is to achieve his dream, and the need for him to ‘chart his own course’.

Hills
- There are many shots of Billy walking/running uphill (e.g. when looking for his grandmother).
- There are several shots looking uphill, with Billy foregrounded at the bottom of the hill (e.g. when sneaking away from the cross country race with Michael).
- These represent the uphill journey and the challenges that Billy needs to overcome.