

Stranger Things - Exemplar essay - Hopper - Mixed feelings

The Netflix series, Stranger Things, is a Science Fiction Horror, written and directed by the Duffer Brothers. In episode one, we are introduced to one of the main character's Hopper, chief of police, who we have mixed feelings about. The directors make good use of camera techniques, editing and dialogue to show Hopper's character.

In episode one, we learn that a boy, named Will Byers, has gone missing. We get the impression very early on in the episode that there are strange, otherworldly things taking place and the rest of the series is about the strange things that happen as everyone looks for Will. Hopper, the character we have mixed feelings about, is really important in the search for Will, but at first we don't think much of him.

The first time we see Hopper, the directors use editing and camera techniques particularly well. Just before we see Hopper, the camera zooms in on a child's drawing of a family, which leads us to believe we are in a family home. But the picture is old and tattered, making us think that perhaps the children have grown up. Next, the camera pans round the living room, showing a table, which is covered in overflowing ashtrays, empty beer cans and dirty plates. This is in complete contrast to our first impression about a nice family home. The camera then gives us a mid-shot of a man sleeping half-naked on the couch. We immediately think this man is a slob and someone without any responsibility. We think this man is a slob. He then wakes up suddenly (he is woken by the sound of a dog) and he seems to panic, which gives the impression he is late for something – perhaps work?

Next we are given a montage of Hopper getting ready. We see him shower, brush his teeth and put on deodorant, which makes us think maybe he's not as bad as we think. But then he starts smoking, while still in the bathroom, which disgusts us. And then he takes lots of tablets, which he washes down with beer. This makes us think he is perhaps ill. After seeing the way he lives his life, we get the impression he may have mental health problems. The next shot is one of Hopper getting dressed and we are surprised to see him putting on a uniform, so he must have a job with some responsibility. At the end of this scene we are shocked to see a close-up of him strapping on a gun and putting on a badge, which says: "Hawkins Chief of Police". At this point we realise that he is going to be critical in the search for the missing boy, Will, and we are worried for his safety as Hopper doesn't even look like he can take good care of himself.

The next time we see Hopper is when he arrives at work. Here the director's use dialogue to develop his character and continue to give us mixed feelings about him. We already know he is late for work, and we are first shown a car park full of cars to show his colleagues are already there. The first time he speaks is to the receptionist and other police officers when he says: "Morning Flo. Morning fellas" in a casual manner, as if he doesn't see anything wrong with being late for work. We were expecting him to apologise and give his excuses. He then makes

an inappropriate joke about sleeping with one of his colleague's wives. We can see that he has a sense of humour and he seems like a friendly man, but clearly he doesn't take his job seriously. The camera then follows him walking away from Flo who is trying to tell him about the missing boy. Instead of listening he puts a doughnut in his mouth and says: "Mornings are for coffee and contemplation". He comes across as selfish and again we are worried about Will's safety, when even the Chief of Police is interested in finding him.

But this all changes when later on we see Hopper at the house of the missing boy and we finally see him start to do his job properly and take charge of the situation. When he goes to look in the shed, where Will mysteriously disappeared, the music and lighting show that Hopper just seems to get a bad feeling, and he suddenly starts giving orders to the other police, such as: "I want you to get a search party together, all right?" In this scene we are shown a different side to Hopper and we know that he does take his job seriously and we actually start to admire him and we have a bit of hope that Will will be found.

The last time we see Hopper in this episode, our feelings for him completely change. The Duffer Brothers use dialogue and lighting to make us feel sorry for Hopper. We see him taking charge of a search party in the Woods near Will's house. It is dark but there is light coming from the moon and from torches. The clever use of lighting makes us feel on edge. At this point, Hopper seems really focused and determined to find Will, which we admire. Then in a conversation with one of Will's school teachers, Hopper tells him his daughter "lives with her mum in the city" and he walks off quickly, but immediately after we discover from another volunteer that she "died a few years back". This makes us feel immediate pity for Hopper. When we see Hopper in the dark, we see him as a tragic figure. And we suddenly understand all the clues we were given at the start: the kid's drawing on the wall, the living conditions, the alcohol, the medication. But it also makes us realise that Hopper will do everything in his power to help save another child as he knows what it's like to lose one. At this point we feel very sad for Hopper but very hopeful for Will as we think he has the best person possible to look for him.

In conclusion, the Duffer Brothers have done an excellent job of showing us a character who we have mixed feelings about, through their use of camera shots, editing, dialogue and lighting.