

Billy Elliot Synopsis

ACT ONE

It's 1984 in County Durham, England, where coal mines are a large source of employment and pride. But with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher attempting to shut down the mines and take power away from the unions, times are hard for the coal miners. At a local hall, the announcement is made—the coal miners are going on strike. Two sons of miners, Billy Elliot and his best friend Michael, don't understand the politics, but say they'll see each other at their boxing class later.

At Billy's house, his coal miner father Jackie tries to keep it all together. Between Billy, Billy's hotheaded older brother, Tony, and his slightly dotty grandma, there's chaos – and an unspoken awareness that things were much easier before Billy's mother died. She still appears to Billy, helping him through the day.

After another comically unsuccessful boxing class (Billy and Michael just don't see the point of punching each other, infuriating their tough miner teacher), Billy is left to deliver keys to the next class in the room – ballet. While trying to get the keys to the teacher, Mrs. Wilkinson, Billy becomes part of the dance. She tells him she'll see him next week, but Billy is unconvinced—boys don't dance ballet.

At home, Billy finds his grandmother a bit confused, and he helps her. She sings about her husband, whom she hated but loved to dance with.

Having been assured by another student in the class that not all male ballet dancers are gay, Billy returns to class. As the weeks pass, Billy learns the basics of ballet, while the police and striking miners clash at the picket line. The movement of the two groups interacts and overlaps. Jackie learns that Billy hasn't been going to boxing and shows up at ballet, livid. He bans Billy from ballet classes.

Undaunted by this, Mrs. Wilkinson tells Billy that auditions for the Royal Ballet School are in a few weeks and that he should audition. Billy is skeptical and heads to Michael's house, where he finds Michael

wearing a dress. While Michael dresses Billy up too, Billy tells Michael about the ballet classes and the audition. Michael thinks Billy's nuts, but as they sing a song celebrating being who you are, he changes his mind.

While tensions between Jackie and Tony increase over Tony's desire to fight back at the picket line, Billy brings some personal items to Mrs. Wilkinson to make a dance for the audition. One of them is the letter his mother wrote to him, which Billy can recite by heart—a beautiful message telling Billy to be himself and that she will always be with him. Mrs. Wilkinson explains that dance is about releasing your feelings as much as technique. He gets it, and soon enough it's time for the audition.

As Billy tries to sneak out, he runs into his father and Tony, who has been injured in the increasingly violent clashes between strikers and police. Jackie forbids Billy from leaving the house. Mrs. Wilkinson comes in and tells Jackie about the audition and the private lessons she has been giving to Billy. She says that Billy is exceptionally talented. The miners don't understand, and Tony confronts her, but their fight is interrupted by news that the police are coming. The miners run, and Mrs. Wilkinson tells Billy she's sorry but that he has no hope of pursuing dance with a family like this. He channels his anger into a dance as a riot begins outside.

ACT TWO

Act two begins at the miners' Christmas show. After a jaunty tune of hatred for Margaret Thatcher, Jackie sings an old folk song that was a favorite of his wife's. While drinking a beer outside, Michael tells Billy he would have missed him if we went away to ballet school and kisses him. Billy gently rebuffs Michael and tells him he isn't gay but promises to keep Michael's secret. Left alone, Billy dances by himself, and Jackie sees him.

Jackie goes to Mrs. Wilkinson's house to ask how much the school will cost and whether Billy has missed his

chance. She tells him they might be able to make the audition in London, but Jackie balks at the cost and says he won't accept charity. She tells him to get over his pride—Billy has real talent, there's nothing left in this town, and he should let her help. Jackie says it's his responsibility and leaves.

At the picket line, the “scabs”—miners who are willing to break the strike to work—have a new addition: Jackie. Tony and the other miners are horrified, but Jackie tells them that he has to do this for Billy. A fight ensues, and Billy is knocked down. The miners realize they've lost sight of what's important, and they all give money to Jackie for Billy's trip to London. It's not enough, though, until a scab comes in with a stack of bills for Billy. Tony angrily refuses the money, but Jackie accepts it.

As they wait in the fancy London school, Billy and Jackie feel hugely out of place. Jackie encounters a masculine Scottish dancer who tells Jackie to support his son, as his own father never did. Meanwhile, Billy, frustrated by the speed of the audition, starts a fight with another boy. Jackie and

Billy are called before the final audition panel, and Billy is curt and surly with his answers, while Jackie tries to support him. Finally, one of the panelists asks Billy what it feels like when he's dancing, and Billy's explanation becomes a dance.

Back at home, everyone is eagerly awaiting news from the school. Finally a letter comes, and Billy tells his nervous family he got in. They're thrilled, but it doesn't last long, as news comes in that the strike is over and the miners have lost.

Billy goes back to ballet class to thank Mrs. Wilkinson and to say that he'll visit. She tells him to leave the town and not to look back—he is very special. Billy packs his suitcase as the miners descend into the ground, with the knowledge that the days of British coal mining are coming to an end. Finally, Billy says goodbye to the ghost of his mother, to whom he's written his own letter. With a last goodbye to Michael, Billy heads off to his new life.

Age Rating: PG-13 for mature themes, harsh language, and some violence.

Language Warning: Please note that due to the authors need to honestly portray the tough people of the Northern England mining community where our story takes place, as well as the extremely hard times they are going through, the published version of this script, which we have licensed, contains some harsh language, including some profanity.