

## SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR DECISION

Under the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (FVPC Act)

### HEADNOTE

<b>Title of publication:</b>	Slumdog Millionaire
<b>Other known title(s):</b>	Not stated
<b>OFLC ref:</b>	0802511.000
<b>Medium:</b>	DVD
<b>Classification:</b>	Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 13 years.
<b>Descriptive note:</b>	Contains violence and offensive language.
<b>Display conditions:</b>	None

*Slumdog Millionaire* is classified "Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 13 years. Matters of sex, crime, cruelty and violence have been considered under s3(1) and s3(3). The main issues contributing to classification are the impact of two scenes of violence and cruelty that are considerably stronger than the overall level of this material. A small amount of highly offensive language has been considered under s3A. However, the classification prevents the exposure to the language of an age group that might be harmed by it. The material does not fall under the criteria of s3(2).

The feature is a United Kingdom/United States co-production, set in Mumbai and with a largely Indian cast. The majority of the dialogue is in English, although there are lengthy segments where characters speak in Hindi. Some, but not all, of this is subtitled in English.

The feature centres on Jamal, a poor boy from the slums of Mumbai, who enters the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Rather improbably, the "slumdog" answers the questions and becomes a national hero. The night before Jamal is set to return for a chance at the big prize, the police intervene, certain that he has cheated. In the opening scenes Jamal is tortured but maintains that he knew the answers. His gaolers then play a recording of the show and Jamal's story begins. His life until he is a young man and that of two other recurring characters: Salim, his older brother and Latika, the girl he loves, is told in flashbacks. Three actors, the youngest apparently from the Mumbai slums, are used for each of these characters. The boys are shown as exuberant survivors of slum life in the early scenes. Then their mother is killed by Hindu fanatics and they, and Latika, are taken in and exploited by a Fagan-like criminal who sends them out begging. Jamal and Salim escape and find themselves at the Taj Mahal, where they improvise

"guided" tours. Eventually they move up to working in a hotel kitchen, with Jamal eventually becoming a "chai-wallah" for a call centre.

Jamal and Salim's paths diverge when Salim reveals himself capable of violence and is taken up by a powerful mobster. Jamal's love for Latika (and guilt over leaving her) drives him to find her and it is the story of these star-crossed lovers that dominates the remainder of the feature. Flashbacks are intercut with scenes showing Jamal centre stage, confronting the condescending quiz show host while he answers the questions. There are periodic returns to the police station where, in spite of more harsh treatment, Jamal finally convinces his captors that he did not cheat. The movie ends with a Bollywood song-and-dance routine when Jamal and Latika are reunited.

There is very little sexual content. In one scene Jamal looks for Latika in a brothel and there are brief wide shot glimpses of people who, given the context, are presumably having sex. However, there is no nudity or any explicit detail. The story involves crimes such as murder and destruction, sexual enslavement, the exploitation of children and petty thievery. The two boys, Jamal and Salim, commit minor crimes in order to stay alive. As orphans they - and other children - fall into the hands of an exploitive criminal who feeds them, gives them somewhere to sleep and sends them out to beg on the streets. Latika is given a baby to carry and told to "Keep it crying and you'll earn triple". This criminal and his men make a practice of blinding children with acid so that they can be more effective beggars. Jamal and Salim escape. When they later search for Latika they find her in a brothel, still in the clutches of the same man. He taunts them: "Have you any idea how much this little virgin is worth?" Later in the story Salim becomes part of a powerful mobster's gang and Latika is a virtual prisoner in the mobster's house. Sexual slavery is implied: Latika is forcibly prevented from going with Jamal.

The young characters lead lives that are rife with cruelty and there is violence at intervals throughout. None of this material is very bloody but it is sometimes disturbing. As young boys Jamal and Salim are hounded by police. Security guards at the Taj Mahal discover they are imposters and beat them up. Salim, still only a young teenager but brutalised by his experiences, acquires a gun and shoots the man who made him watch a boy being blinded. In the end Salim helps Latika to escape and shoots the mobster who has had her in his power. He is riddled with bullets in his turn, but subsides into a bath full of money. The shootings rely a good deal on images of guns: there is little of blood or wounds to be seen. Images of the infliction of serious physical harm often also present as depictions of acts of significant cruelty. For instance, a horde of Hindu fanatics descends on the boys' slum village, killing Muslims and hurling Molotov cocktails. The boys watch as their mother is beaten to the ground and her body left floating in shallow water. Buildings are burnt, and a man becomes a flaming torch. None of this is shown in close-up, but loud, pounding music, shouting and running figures make it a scene from a nightmare.

The opening sequence has some of the feature's strongest images of violence and cruelty. Jamal is tortured. The opening images show a man blow smoke into his eyes and slap him hard. Tears run down his face. His head is pushed into water and held face down. When next seen, Jamal hangs from a rope that ties his wrists together, his feet off the floor. Electrodes are attached to his feet and shocks are administered that render him unconscious. There are sounds of pain and his feet are shown jerking. Short sequences from the quiz programme are intercut.

The scene where a young boy is rendered unconscious and then blinded is disturbing. The callous cruelty of the act is all the more horrible because it follows an extensive lead-in where the boy is led to expect some kind of reward or promotion. A pad with a stupefying agent is pressed over the boy's face and he is laid on a table. Liquid acid is heated, sizzling, in a spoon. There is a side-

on shot of a hand opening the boy's eye and the acid is tipped over it. Salim is watching, horrified, and vomits at this point.

The men see him and instruct him to bring Jamal, offering him the choice between being a slumdog or a man. Salim does so but suddenly grabs the bottle of acid and sprays it on the men. In darkness and confusion they escape. The scene does not dwell on horrific visual images but the idea of anyone performing such an unspeakable act on a child carries its own horrors.

The dominant effect of *Slumdog Millionaire* is joyful and uplifting. The feature has fresh, engaging characters and the headlong momentum of the narrative, often aided by driving music, is exhilarating. The visual style paints the hellish slums of Mumbai as a vibrant kaleidoscope and its children are exuberant survivors. There are moments of violence, heartbreak and tragedy but this is basically a romantic story with fairytale touches. The film has considerable artistic merit, recently recognised with a Golden Globe award for "Best film". However, the unrestricted availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good. The main issues considered are violence and cruelty. The content outlined above is mainly treated with restraint: even the shootings are not represented in bloody images. However, two scenes have a much stronger impact than others listed: the opening sequences where Jamal is tortured and the blinding of a boy in order to make him a better money-earner are both disturbing. Children watching these horrific scenarios are likely to be considerably distressed. Teenagers and adults, on the other hand, are more likely to be caught up in the excitement and exuberance of the unfolding story and in the delicious suspense of the quiz show. Scenes such as those described may well be disturbing to this older age group but are unlikely to have a lasting effect. A restriction to persons over the age of 13 years is sufficient to prevent injury to the public good.

**Note:**

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