

Rebel Without a Cause

(Nicholas Ray, 1955)

Component 1: Key

Developments in US Film

Focus Areas: Genre, Narrative, Context.

PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

Opening Sequence <https://goo.gl/VkyUt2>

Family Argument <https://goo.gl/gvHVLu>

PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography (including Lighting) Opening

- The first pan around the station lingers on Plato in the foreground.
- A combination of a slow zoom into Judy as she cries and tells her story. The long take uncomfortably forces the audience to hear her painful story.
- The three ‘misfits’ are immediately bonded in this scene, often in the background of the shots.
- A very Low Angle shot is used when Jim stands to greet his parents, connoting his power over them.

Family

- A 180 degree vertical rotation POV shot of Jim’s mother descending the stairs towards him denotes that Jim’s world is ‘upside down’ following the death of Buzz.
- The camera tilts creating a ‘dutch’ angle as they argue on the stairs, this visualises Jim’s inner turmoil and confusion.
- Jim is usually placed in between his parents in a ‘3 shot’ as they both talk ‘at’ him, forcing the actor to turn this way and that, this adds a frantic motion to the scene that connotes Jim’s inner turmoil.

Mise-en-Scène Opening

- The police station is claustrophobic and oppressive, most of the windows are covered in venetian blinds connoting a sense of entrapment.
- At first, Dean’s performance is that of an adorable drunk, he giggles and wails and plays with his toy.
- Jim is identified as a father figure to Plato as he offers him his jacket. Jim and Judy are desperate for the attention and approval of their fathers. It is possible that the reason for their delinquency for all three of these juveniles is laid at the feet of the parents.
- Jim also tries out a tormented youth “You’re tearing me apart” persona and that of a tough guy when he attempts to punch the Juvenile Officer, resulting in a layered and much celebrated performance from Dean of a teenager searching for his identity.
- The monkey, firstly connotes Jim is still a child, but the monkey is a wind-up toy trapped in a cycle only able to clap the symbols, this is a metaphor for Jim, also trapped in his cycle of disruption.
- Judy is first seen in her striking red dress, a symbol of her womanhood.

1

Family

- Jim is from a ‘good’ family, we can see the home is suburban and reasonably wealthy from the use of props such as the TV.
- Costume: Jim’s red jacket is a visual link to Judy’s red outfit at the start, it symbolises danger. Jim’s parents blend into the background, their nightgowns the same hue as the walls.
- The TV simply shows static, this connotes Jim’s frustration, and he is not getting a ‘clear signal’ from his parents about how to behave.
- The staircase is a clear barrier, like prison bars.
- Jim’s father is ‘weak, a chicken’. This is Jim’s worst fear, turning into his cowardly father.

- Jim's final act of rebellion in this scene is to kick a hole in a family portrait.

Editing Opening

- The long take during the credits of Dean lying in the road playing with the toy monkey, this allows the audience to gaze at him,

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identifying him as an object of desire.

Sound Opening

- The opening score over the credits indicated that genre of 'drama'.

Family

- Music dramatically starts when Jim attacks his father, anchoring the drama for the audience.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts

Social

- The 1950's are considered **the birth of the teenager**, this social group had a new identity:
 - » Young people had more money (a disposable income); products such as music, film and fashion were targeted at this group. They were powerful consumers and therefore a powerful 'voice' in consumerist America.
 - » Better education, which led them to question the world.
 - » It was a time of peace, so young men were not at war, a confusing era for young men who could not identify with their war time fathers or have a war to fight and prove themselves.
 - » This new social group was considered by some as threatening, unruly and out of control, the film reflected and responded to this concern.
 - » This film was a sympathetic representation of teenagers, blaming the parents for their delinquency.
- James Dean and star power:
 - » Dean was a new kind of actor, (method) and became an icon, and the face of a generation.
 - » He appeared poetic, tormented and brooding, not the usual 'hero' type.

Historical

- This was the first major Studio (Warner Bros) to make a teen film; it had high production values, and 'hot' young stars.
- Crusade against communism /red scare, a recurring mood in many films of the 1950's was that of paranoia, which was a reflection of the climate of fear created by the mass hysteria of the McCarthy witch hunts. In this film, Jim does not know who to trust or listen to.
- Suburbs were growing in this era, this story focuses on the youths in a Los Angeles suburb, these new family homes

2

were desirable, but cold and lifeless, and there is little affection in these homes.

- More people speaking out against inequality civil rights in this time, the film demonstrated the desire for young people to do the right thing, Jim wants to confess and desires justice, it is the older generation that get in the way of this, and they do not listen.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS - Specialist

Focus: Genre, Narrative

Genre

- Tag lines for the film showed a confusion about how the film should be marketed, Teen Drama or 'B' movie:
- "Teenage terror torn from today's headlines"
- "The bad boy from a good family"
- It showed that films centred on teenagers could well be from the teenagers point of view, and appeal to teens.
- The film is from the male POV, girls are quite passive figures. Female led teen movies became more dominant in the 1990's.

Narrative

- 'The Outsider' is a typical narrative convention of teen genre, this trope allows the audience to experience the new school location & characters with the protagonist.
- It takes place over a 2 day period.
- Teen POV -a mistrust of authority figures, parents are overtly criticized for being too weak, or too dominant, they can't win at all. But this message clearly appeals to the target audience.