

Rebel Without A Cause (Nicholas Ray, 1955)

Knowledge Organiser

Institutional information	
Director:	Nicholas Ray
Release:	October 27, 1955
Production company:	Warner Brothers
Country of production:	USA
Starring:	James Dean, Natalie Wood
Genres:	Drama; teen drama; coming-of age.
Other information:	James Dean died in a car crash before the release of the film. Both James Dean & Natalie Wood were in their 20s during filming.
Award nominations:	3 Academy Award nominations, 2 BAFTA Award nominations.

Context:
Set in a suburb of Los Angeles in the early 1950s.
1950s; considered the birth of the 'teenager' as we recognise them today.
It was a time of peace meaning that young men were not at War. This was a confusing era for young men who could not identify with their war-time fathers. It also prevented them from having a war to fight that allowed them to prove themselves.
This new social group were seen as unruly, threatening and out of control .
The film offers a broadly sympathetic representation of teenagers, with blame for their parents in not understanding and engaging with the needs of teenagers and their delinquency.
More people were speaking out against inequality and for civil and equal rights at this time. The film demonstrates how young people like Jim have a desire to do the right thing & seek justice.

Narrative (The method and means by which you construct the events of a story into a plot)	
Narrative structure:	Five Act structure
Narrative viewpoint:	Teen POV.
Production company:	Warner Brothers
Country of production:	USA
Binary oppositions:	Create conflict. Key oppositions are children vs. their parents and teenagers vs. adults.

Characters	
Jim Stark:	Protagonist; 'The Outsider'. Struggles to find his place in the world. Wants to do the right thing.
Judy:	Craves love and affection from father. Falls in love with Jim.
John 'Plato' Crawford:	Another 'outsider'. Bullied and alone. Has an absent father and mother leaves him for long periods. He too craves love and affection. First gay teenager in film? His sexuality is only ever inferred.
Buzz:	Antagonist: The bully, a classic archetype. Provides opposition to Jim.
Frank Stark:	Unable to connect with his Son. Unable to stand up for himself throughout the film until the ending.

Key Elements of Film Form (Micro elements)	
Clothing (mise-en-scene):	The colour red used throughout: Judy's lipstick and dress at the start of the film symbolise her desire to be noticed. Jim's jacket later in the film does likewise, as well as suggesting danger or offering a warning sign; Plato later wears the jacket and dies. The colour red also contrasts with the clothes worn by the adults in the film, suggesting differences and conflict and anger.
Props (mise-en-scene):	Cars are used to highlight independence and individuality; freedom. Knives not only denote violence but are symbolic in marking out the teenage characters and for some, their desire for conflict.
Low-key lighting (cinematography):	Teenagers conversing with adults, often in conflict, are seen mostly indoors/at night. The use of low-key lighting helps to establish a dark and sombre mood and allows drama to be developed through a visual tone.
Blocking/camera angles:	Characters and their position on screen often suggests relationships and emotions, especially in key scenes. Note where/how Jim is sitting compared to his family in the police station scene or the scene where he's arguing with his parents about going to the police.
Soundtrack:	Classic Hollywood' style orchestral soundtrack is used to define and highlight the emotional response in key moments. See the "I got the bullets" key scene for an example.
POV (cinematography):	Many scenes are shot from (sometimes literally) the POV of the teenage characters. Editing helps to make clear where, for example Jim is, in contrast to the adults, with camera angles emphasising the relationship/the teenage perspective.

Themes/issues.	
Conflict:	Seen all the way through the film, conflict is key.
Parents vs. children:	Not just with Jim and his parents, there is a tension between parents & children throughout the film with each of the main characters.
Adults vs. teenagers:	Most notably seen as a generational conflict, note how adults and teenagers approach the same situation in different ways.
Authority:	Police, teachers, security guards, parents; authority figures are seen throughout the film often causing generational conflict.
Rebellion:	Teenagers are seen rebelling in a wide variety of ways.
Peer pressure:	The need to conform drives the teenagers motivations and the peer pressure from others often creates conflict.

Key quotes:	
"You're tearing me apart!" - Jim	A significant line in the film. Shows the impact that his relationship with his parents is having on him. Highlights key themes of the film in terms of conformity and conflict.
"How can you grow up in a circus like that?" - Jim	Jim is talking to Ray (police officer) at the start of the film and gives the audience an insight into his family life.
"What does he know about man alone?" - Plato	A line which gives the audience an insight into how Plato feels. He also feels alone and isolated, abandoned by his parents and craving love and affection.
"Don't I buy you everything you want?" - Frank Stark	Shows the audience how Jim's Dad associates material possessions with being a good parent. Also demonstrates how he does not fully understand Jim's frustrations.
"If only you could've been my dad" - Plato	Plato sees Jim as a replacement father figure; as someone who looks out for him and is kind to him. This further supports the film's themes of parent/child relationships.
"You, you say one thing, he says another, and everybody changes back again." - Jim	Emphasises how Jim is conflicted and confused by his parents constant disagreeing and how he needs communication from them; he needs to understand what they mean, what they want and the truth when needed.
"She'll outgrow it dear. It's just the age. ...it's the age when nothing fits." - Judy's mother	Along with Police Officer Ray, this is as close as any adult in the film comes to understanding the teenagers in the film and therefore, metaphorically, society in general.
"One thing I know is that I never want to be like him." - Jim	Jim is angry with his father. He doesn't feel a connection with him and doesn't look up to him as an example of how to live his life. His worst fear is turning into him.

Key scenes	
The Police Station: (bit.ly/RWACKS1)	The opening scene and a crucial one; we're introduced to the characters and their various situations. We learn how isolated they are and how they lack the relationships with many adults, especially their parents. We gain an insight into their 'rebellious' natures-how Judy, Plato and Jim do not conform with societal expectations. The film also establishes how certain elements of film form are key to this film in the use of costume, camera angles and soundtrack. (Note, the linked scene is just one small section from this opening scene.
Jim first day at school: (bit.ly/RWACKS2)	A clear example of how Jim's home/family life contrasts wildly with the 'outside world' and the life he craves with his peers. A key aspect here is how Jim alters his clothing in an attempt to fit in and impress Judy and how Judy lights a cigarette to mark her out as rebellious. Notice how the raucous nature of the teenagers contrasts wildly with the sedate nature of Jim's relatives at home. The soundtrack is another key aspect of this scene and influences the mood of the scene.
The knife fight: (bit.ly/RWACKS3)	On a narrative level, we see the literal example of Jim wanting to do what is right but struggling to fit in and be accepted by his peers. His white shirt connotes an innocence compared to the other teenagers. Props are also key, especially in Jim throwing away or rejecting weapons and symbolically, violence. The soundtrack helps to establish drama and action with camera angles and blocking establishing that Jim is isolated and trapped literally and metaphorically.
Jim fights with his parents: (bit.ly/RWACKS4)	A very important scene. Jim verbalises his issues on a personal level, his feelings about his parents and his relationship with them. We see how each of them handles the situation differently with Jim again showing how he wants to do the right thing. Camera angles and blocking here are key; pay attention to where Jim is and how he is closed in by his parents position or how the camera angles give him a general lack of 'power'. Clothing too is important for all characters.
"I got the bullets": (bit.ly/RWACKS5)	One of the final scenes in the film and it emphasises the difference between teenagers and adults, themes of justice and conflict and how the POV here is still with the teenagers. The red jacket is a vital aspect of the film and certainly in this scene is key. We also see the development of Jim's relationship with his father and get another example of Jim's desire to reject violence and conflict where he can with the classic line "I got the bullets!"