

KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER:

**Rebel Without A Cause (1955, Ray)**

**Context:**

- Set in a suburb of Los Angeles (on the outskirts of the city).
- Reflects contemporary society and its issues. (It is set at the time the film was made / released (mid 1950s).)
- This time period was considered the birth of the teenager as we understand them today.
- Set a decade after WW2. As a result, male adolescents struggled to identify with their fathers who had fought in the war or to prove themselves as they had no war to fight.
- Young people began to question and reject traditional values. This generated a distrust of parents and other authority figures.
- Adolescents were viewed as a threat to society and out of control.
- Inequality and the importance of equal rights was an important political movement of this time, especially for young people who wanted to do the right thing.
- The American economy had a post-war economic boom; it was the wealthiest country in the world at this time.
- For the first time, adolescents had their own disposable income. The media targeted this age group, giving them power and a voice.
- The film demonstrates a sympathetic viewpoint of adolescence: they are misunderstood by parents and other authority figures.
- James Dean, who plays Jim, was a cultural icon of the time and became the face of young people in America. He was killed in a car crash before the release of the film. Dean's death increased the public interest in the film and added to its success.
- The film was originally shot in black and white, but when Warner Brothers realised the star power of James Dean, they stopped production and reshot in the more expensive Cinemascope widescreen format to take advantage of this new teenage audience.

**Key characters and their roles:**

<p><b>Jim Stark</b> The story's protagonist. Fits the genre role of <u>The Outsider</u>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflects the struggles of post-war teens to find their place and prove themselves as a man.</li> <li>- Emphasises teenage stereotypes: he is a young rebel who fights with other trouble-makers and takes part in dangerous and illegal activities.</li> <li>- Represents people at the time who want to do the right thing (links to the civil rights movement)</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Judy</b></p> <p>Wants to fit in, so is initially a part of the bully group.</p> <p>Craves love and attention from her father.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflects how teens could not connect with post-war fathers.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Frank Stark</b></p> <p>Struggles to connect with his son.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subverts typical representations of men – shown as submissive and emasculated.</li> </ul> <p>Is unable to stand up for himself until the end.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Represents how fathers were not role models to their sons at the time, instead someone to mock and look down on.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Carol Stark</b></p> <p>Subverts typical representations of women – is dominant over her husband.</p> <p>Does not take any responsibility for Jim's unhappiness, instead blames Jim and Frank.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Suggests moving town when Jim gets into trouble – reflects the affluent perspectives of the time.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Plato</b></p> <p>Another outsider. Does not fit in or have any friends until he meets Jim and Judy.</p> <p>Has an absent father and his mother leaves for long periods – he craves family love and attention and acts out violently to try and get this.</p> <p>He clings to Jim as a father figure and idolises him.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflects how people turn to violence when they are desperate.</li> </ul>	

**Key Sequence 1: "You're tearing me apart!"**  
Takes place in the police station.

<p><b>Narrative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The film's exposition: We are introduced to the characters Jim, Judy and Plato.</li> <li>- Their <u>isolation</u> is established and we learn how they lack relationships with their parents.</li> <li>- We are shown their attempts at rebellion – Jim is drunk, Judy wears red lipstick and Plato is questioned about using a gun.</li> <li>- Establishes the fact that Plato has access to a gun which foreshadows the film's climax.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Cinematography and Lighting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A point of view shot of Jim looking through the keyhole at his parents arguing: he feels isolated from them, and this establishes the conflict between them.</li> <li>- Low angles are used throughout the scene to emphasise Jim's feelings of not having control over his life and feeling inferior.</li> </ul>	
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<p><b>Mise en scène</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jim removes his jacket, making him more exposed and vulnerable compared to his parents who are wearing coats.</li> <li>- His white shirt emphasises his innocence and allows the audience to sympathise with him.</li> <li>- The detective also removes his jacket in an attempt to connect with and empathise with Jim. The detective is the only male role model that Jim respects.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Editing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cross cutting between Jim and his parents in the opposite room highlight how disconnected their relationship is.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Sound</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The non-diegetic score becomes high-pitched and fast paced when Jim begins to beat the desk, reflecting Jim's anger and frustration.</li> </ul>	

**Key Sequence 2: Jim fights with his parents**

<p><b>Narrative</b></p> <p>This is part of the inciting incident. Throughout the film, Jim cannot connect with his parents. In this scene, he tries to communicate his feelings of frustration to them.</p>	
<p><b>Cinematography and Lighting</b></p> <p>A high angle of Jim highlights his lack of power in the scene.</p> <p>Note the similarity in character placement in this scene compared to the later scene in the abandoned house. However, this is a low angle: the characters are content and feel empowered together.</p>	 
<p><b>Mise en scène</b></p> <p>The placement of Jim's mother and father either side of Jim highlights their separation and the fact they cannot come together and support Jim. Jim is shown as stronger here compared to his hunched over father.</p>	
<p>Jim wears the red jacket here. The bright colour juxtaposes the beige surroundings of his house and his father's costume.</p>	

**Key Sequence 3: "I got the bullets!"**

<p><b>Narrative</b></p> <p>This is the film's <u>climax</u>. At the end of the scene, we see the start of the resolution / denouement – he is finally able to connect with his parents, particularly his father.</p>	
<p><b>Cinematography and Lighting</b></p> <p>The medium long shot shows all three characters in the frame. They are together and equal.</p>	
<p><b>Mise en scène</b></p> <p>This scene reflects the previous scene with Jim and his parents, but with Plato now positioned centrally. This contrasts the previous scene: Jim was isolated but Plato is supported.</p> <p>Jim gives Plato his red jacket. This jacket symbolises rebellion and confidence and he attempts to transfer this to Plato by giving him the jacket. In the police station scene, Jim offered Plato his jacket but he refused to take it; in this scene</p>	

<p>Plato asks to keep it, symbolising the connection and friendship between the two.</p> <p>Jim's removal of his jacket symbolises his character arc: he no longer feels he needs to rebel and represents how he has grown into adulthood.</p>
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**Motifs and symbols**

<p><b>The colour red.</b></p> <p>A motif that we see throughout the film, particularly in Judy, Jim and Plato's costume.</p> <p>It has different meanings for the characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Judy (beginning): represents her anger towards her father's coldness.</li> <li>- Jim (middle): signifies rebellion against his parents and society overall.</li> <li>- Plato (ending): symbolises peace and friendship.</li> </ul> <p>The three characters all wear red but at different points in the film, demonstrating the unity and connection between them.</p>	
<p><b>Cars</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cars reflect the independence that teenagers have as a result of the post-war economic boom.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>The observatory</b></p> <p>This is where Jim meets Plato for the first time and is where Plato goes back to at the end of the film and is where he is killed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The observatory links to stars, representing the idea of fate. The events of the film, and the tragic fate of Plato, could be seen as destined and inescapable for the characters.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Jim's costume</b></p> <p>Suit and tie: At the police station and as he leaves for his first day of school. Represents the influence that parents have on young people – he dresses like an adult. His formal suit for school contrasts with the other teenagers and represents how he does not fit in.</p> <p>Tie removed: He removes this on his way to school. Jim wants his peers to see him as an individual with his own personality. The fact he still wears the suit highlights how he has not found himself yet: he wants to please his parents but also tries to fit in. This costume represents the battle between individuality and tradition.</p> <p>Red jacket: A symbol of Jim's desire to rebel against authority and fit in with his peers. The rebellious look gives him confidence.</p> <p><b>Jim's father</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frank represents everything Jim hates: he is looking for an authority figure to respect, someone powerful and assertive.</li> <li>- The costume of the apron and the shot of Frank on the floor mirrors a traditional housewife: he is emasculated.</li> <li>- The positioning in front of the bars of the stairs, which look like prison bars, symbolically suggest that Frank is trapped and his position is inescapable.</li> </ul>	   