

Grease Educational Resource

Teen Movies as a Genre

The teen film (also called teen movie or teenpic) is a film genre in which the plot is based upon the special interests of teenagers, such as coming of age, first love, rebellion, conflict with parents, teen angst and alienation. Films in this genre are often set in high schools, or contain characters that are of high school age. Sexual themes are also common, as are nudity and crude forms of humour. Not surprisingly, the genre is particularly popular with teenagers and young adults, who can better relate to the subject matter than an older audience.

The genre can trace its roots back to "beach films" of the 1950s and 60s, such as the Gidget series. The genre gained more credibility in the 1980s with the appearance of writer/director John Hughes. His legacy of teen films (which includes: *The Breakfast Club*, *Pretty in Pink*, and *Sixteen Candles*) proved to be popular not only with audiences, but with critics also.

Codes and conventions of the teen film genre include: prom, alcohol, illegal substances, high school, parties and all-night raves, losing one's virginity, relationships, social groups and cliques, and American pop-culture. Teen films also include actors, such as James Dean in the 50s, Annette Funicello and Hayley Mills in the 60s and 70s, members of the Brat Pack, a group of young movie actors in the 80s and early 90s, and Hilary Duff, Lindsay Lohan, and other teenage sensations in the later 90s and 00s, who are teens or in their early twenties at the time of the movies themselves.

Synopsis of Grease.

During a 1950s summer, good girl Sandy and greaser Danny fall in love until Sandy has to return home to Australia at the end of summer. By a twist of fate, Sandy moves back to the US and unknowingly attends the same high school as Danny. When her new friends introduce her to him again, he acts cool for his friends and makes her angry. The whole movie goes back and forth between him getting her back, and then losing her again, all leading up to when Danny, and his gang the T-birds, consisting of Sonny, Putzie, and his best friend, Kinickie, race Kinickie's car against "Crater-Face" from a rival gang, whoever wins gets the loser's car. Can Danny win both the race and Sandy's heart?



Grease and its placement in the genre of Teen Movies

Grease is a snapshot of America right before teen sexuality exploded, examining the early cracks in the armour of middle-class "respectability" and repression, the fantasy American Dream that never was but that came beaming into Americans' homes over the television airwaves. Movie star Sandra Dee becomes Grease's overarching metaphor for the artificiality of adult American life, a symbol that needed piercing.

Today, it may be hard to understand what Sandra Dee represented, but she was the poster girl for the big studios' attempts to make teen movies, a genre, which was up until that point, the exclusive territory of small, low-budget producers like the ubiquitous Roger Corman (The Little Shop of Horrors, Bucket of Blood, and others). But the studios' teen flicks were inevitably artificial in the extreme, creating a freakish – and clueless – adult imitation of the teen world, a kind of cultural Frankenstein, that teens could see right through.

Questions

1. How does Sandy typify a lead female in a teen movie?
2. How does Danny typify a lead male in a teen movie?
3. Why is the development of Sandy and Danny's relationship archetypal of a film of this Genre?
4. How do movies of this Genre made in the 21st century differ to Grease which is made in 1978?
5. Name five factors that make Grease a Teen Movie?
6. Why is it effective to set a Teen Movie in a high school?
7. How well do Musical Teen Movies work with an audience now?
8. How well do American Teen Movies translate to a British Audience?
9. Grease was set in 1959 and made in 1978. Why would the filmmakers choose to do this? How well does it work?

