

Rebel Without A Cause

(Drama) (1955)

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Major Characters

Jim Stark.....James Dean

A confused and angry but shy and sincere teenager who is trying to survive life in his new home town of Los Angeles. His worst problems are the local tough boys who are out to make his life miserable, and his father and mother, who have never known how to be loving and supportive parents.

Plato.....Sal Mineo

A disturbed but gentle 13 year old who looks to Jim for friendship and family, in part because his own parents have never been around to take care of him.

Judy.....Natalie Wood

A lonely 16 year old girl who falls in love with Jim, who had earlier associated with the tough kids because she could not find love or support from her own family.

Jim's Father.....Jim Backus

A loving but weak and insecure parent for Jim, who is dominated by his wife.

Jim's Mother.....Ann Doran

An angry and frustrated person who insists that her family move to another city every time her family has problems.

Buzz.....Corey Allen

The leader of the tough kids in school who tries to make life as difficult as possible for Jim.

Crunch.....Frank Mazzola,

Moose.....Nick Adams

Goon.....Dennis Hopper

Three other tough kids who are part of Buzz's gang.

Ray.....Ed Platt

A concerned juvenile police officer who tries to help Jim and the other kids stay out of trouble.

Plot Summary

This is the story of 17 year old Jim Stark, a lonely and angry but gentle teenager who has just moved to Los Angeles. Jim is doing his best to deal with the constant pressures he faces as a new student, especially from other teenage kids who are part of the "cool" gang at Dawson High School. While trying to deal with the threats of these other teenagers, he continues to seek love and direction from his father, a good-hearted but weak parent who is dominated by Jim's mother, who is always forcing the family to move from one city to the next in hopes of escaping their various problems.

After Jim is forced into a dangerous game of "chicken" with Buzz, one of the local tough guys, he finds himself in serious danger with both the law and some of Buzz's friends. Fortunately, Jim finds the support of both Plato, a confused and gentle 13 year old who almost sees Jim as the father he never really knew, and Judy, a beautiful but also confused young teen who suffers from her own lack of parental love, and who soon realizes that Jim has much more to offer her than the violent punks with whom she had been.

A Note on the Title and the Movie: A "rebel" is a person who fights against various institutions or authorities, such as the school system or the police. A "cause" is a goal or a general struggle, and it often has a political connotation. In the 1960s, people found many causes, from the Civil Rights Movement to opposition against the War in Vietnam. Yet in the early 1950s, American youth had not yet become political, although this film does show that teenagers as a group had already formed their own subculture. *Rebel without A Cause* is considered a classic movie because it effectively captures so much of the anger and frustration of being young, and it hints at many of the problems that American culture would have to face in the following years.

Some Words and Expressions that You may not Know

Jim, Judy and Plato find themselves at the police station, all three in trouble with the law.

Mixed up in that beating on 12th street?

"To be mixed up" in something is to be involved in it. "To beat a person up" is to attack him, and a "beating" is a physical attack.

Drunkness.

The condition of being drunk, after having had too much liquor.

He's clean. Lean him up against something.

In a criminal context, "to be clean" means to be not involved or guilty of anything. "To lean" someone against a wall or other physical object is to physically support them with it.

He called me a dirty tramp. My own father!

A very dated expression referring to "a loose girl" or prostitute.

We were going to celebrate Easter, to catch a double bill. **A big deal**.

"Easter" is a major Christian holiday in Spring. A "double bill" is a dated term for when a theater offers two movies for the price of one.

"A big deal" is something significant or important.

He started rubbing off all of my lipstick!

"To rub off" is to remove by brushing back and forth.

Is that why you were wandering around at 1AM?

"To wander around" is to walk aimlessly with no destination.

Do you think you can get back at your dad that way?

"To get back at someone" is to treat them badly for how they have treated you. Not quite as strong as "to get revenge."

That's enough static out of you!

"Static" is the unpleasant noise a radio makes when the station is not coming in clearly.

Cut it out now! I'm warning you!

An interesting, classic and very common way to say "Stop it!"

You're shivering, John.

"To shiver" is to shake uncontrollably, often because you're cold.

Goodbye, Judy, take it easy.

A common way to say calm down, as well as goodbye or "see you later."

I got the fright of my life.

Another word for a scare. The verb is "to frighten."

Were you having a ball dad?

An old-fashioned way to say having a great time.

Do you have a nickname?

An informal name used to replace one's real name, such as Plato (for the Greek philosopher), which is the name Joe uses.

The boy ever talked to a psychiatrist? :: A head-shrinker?

"Head-shrinker" is a term for psychiatrist that is no longer used, although people still frequently refer to them as "shrinks."

He's a minor...and it looks like he's had more than a little drink.

A "minor" is a legal term that refers to those who are under 18.

Jim, don't hum.

"To hum" is to sing without opening the lips.

I cut pretty loose in my day, too.

A very dated way to say "I got pretty crazy when I was young."

He's just loaded.

A dated word for drunk. Smashed and bombed are much more current, since today, loaded implies rich!

You have to slam the door in my face?

"To slam" is a powerful word meaning to close violently.

We give you love and affection, don't we?

"Affection" is an emotional feeling of warmth and tenderness.

You know what kind of drunken brawls those parties turn into.

A "brawl" is a loud party or a fight, or often a party with fights!

You're tearing me apart!

"To tear apart" a person is another way to say rip them into pieces, and for both, it can mean either physically or, as here, emotionally.

Well, you know who he takes after.

"To take after someone" is to act just like them, as when children take after their parents.

Jim finds an unlikely friend with the Los Angeles Police.

You're a big tough character.

Someone who is "tough" is either mean or strong or both.

You don't kid me, Pal.

"To kid" someone is to tease or make fun of them, or in this case, to try and fool them. The word "pal" is used to mean friend, though as here, it is often used sarcastically.

Too bad you didn't connect. You could have gone to Juvenile Hall.

A "juvenile" is someone under 18, and "Juvenile Hall" is where most teenagers are sent when they get into trouble with the law.

You want to bug us until we have to lock you up?

"To bug" someone is a common way to say bother or annoy them.

"To lock up" someone often means to put them in jail or prison.

Oh come on, don't give me that!

"Come on" remains to this day the greatest, most versatile phrasal verb in English, meaning everything from "hurry up" to, as here, "be serious." The second sentence is what one would say who hears what they consider to be nonsense or a lie.

Mess that kid up?

"To mess up" someone is to hurt or confuse them, either physically or emotionally.

He called me chicken.

"Chicken" can be a strong insult meaning coward, though only common among teenagers and children. A key word for this movie!

And your folks didn't understand?

An old but still fairly common alternative word for parents.

What a zoo!

The place with animals, of course, but here Jim's way of describing his dysfunctional family.

If he had the guts to knock mom cold once, I bet she'd be happy.

"Guts" are literally intestines, but "to have the guts" to do something is to have the courage to do it. "To knock someone out cold" means to hit them so hard they lose consciousness.

I bet she'd stop picking on him.

"To pick on" someone is to harass or make fun of them.

They make mush out of him.

"Mush" is literally boiled cornmeal, or any soft food with that texture. When used for people, it implies weak and cowardly.

I bet you see right through me.

"To see through" someone is to know when they are lying or trying to mislead.

How can I grow up in a circus like that? :: **Beats me.**

"Beats me" is a curious colloquial way to say "I don't know."

If the pot starts boiling again, will you come and see me before you get yourself in a jam?

"To get in a jam" is to find oneself in a difficult situation with no easy solution.

Come on in and shoot the breeze.

"To shoot the breeze" is to discuss whatever is on a person's mind.

By golly, I couldn't even swallow until recess.

"By golly" is a very old-fashioned way to say "you know."

"Recess" is the time kids get to play sports between classes.

Meatloaf and Peanut butter sandwiches.

Yummy American food: Hamburger shaped like a loaf of bread.

Knock them dead, like your old man used to!

"To knock someone dead" generally means to impress them, not really kill them. "Old man" is silly slang for father.

Watch out when choosing your pals!

A "pal" is a somewhat old-fashioned word for friend.

***Jim goes off to his first day of school, and soon finds
Plato, Judy, the planets, and a gang of dangerous punks.***

I bet you're a real yo-yo.

Literally, the child's toy that spins on a string attached to a finger.

Slang for "crazy," but no longer used this way.

You stepped on the school insignia!

An official symbol or badge of a school or other organization.

Attention all Juniors and Seniors.

High School and College are four years:

Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and Senior.

Planetarium field trip---2PM sharp.

A "planetarium" is a building where people can study the stars and planets. A "field trip" is when students get to visit a location not on campus for educational purposes.

The great polar fields of the North and the South will rot and divide.
 The "polar fields" refer to the North and South Pole. "To rot" is a powerful verb meaning to grow old and decay.

The heavens and the familiar constellations that illuminate our night...
 "Constellations" are the various groups of stars that appear to resemble various things on earth, such as Orion the hunter, Gemini the twins, Taurus the bull, and Cancer the crab (They are the "signs" of astrology). "To illuminate" is to make bright.

Our planet's birth and its demise...
 "Demise" is a funny little word for death, or end.

Gehzunteit!
 The German word for "bless you" after someone sneezes, and for some strange reason, fairly common in English.

The flash of our beginning...has not yet been seen deep within the other galaxies.
 A "flash" is a burst of light. "Galaxy" is a critical word in astronomy and refers to large groups of related stars.

A burst of gas and fire.
 A "burst" is a violent opening or explosion. It can also be used as a verb.

Through the infinite reaches of space, the problems of man seen trivial and naive indeed.
 "Trivial" is unimportant, and "naive" is innocent or unsophisticated. "Indeed" is essentially a filler word meaning "certainly."

Man, existing alone, sees himself to be an episode of little consequence.
 An "episode" is a separate or individual part of a story. "Consequences" are the end result of a series of events, though in the singular, as here, it simply means "importance."

May I have your attention? Oh, what the heck.
 An old-fashioned and innocent version of "what the hell."

Certainly is a lot of switches :: They're quite intricate.
 "Switches" are the electronic devices that turn power on and off. "Intricate" means complex in design (Such as a computer chip).

Jim soon faces his first fight with Buzz.

He'd make a good pidgin.

A type of bird, of course, and here, a dated word for a victim.

We'll have his wardrobe.

The collection of clothes that a person has in their closet.

Relax, he'll figure it out.

"To figure out" something is a common way to say understand.

I told you not to fool with those guys.

Here, "to fool with" someone means to get involved with them, in such a way that there is a risk of creating problems for yourself.

It's a big mansion and we could sneak around.

A "mansion" is, by definition, a very big or huge house.

"To sneak around" is to go some place secretly.

You read too many comic books.

Books filled with cartoons. They are still popular with teens.

Hey, he's real abstract and he's real different.

"Abstract" is an important word meaning difficult to understand.

Are you always at ringside?

Boxing matches take place at a "ring," and thus

"ringside" is a good seat or place, right next to the match.

I thought only punks fought with knives.

A "punk" is a tough or mean person, although since the 1970s, the word also has a strong association with followers of "punk rock."

No sticking, just a little jabbing.

"To stick" with a knife means about the same thing as to stab, which despite the dialog, is basically what "to jab" means in this context.

Let's split :: For what, a couple of old poop heads?

"To split" is common slang meaning to leave. "Poop" is a gentler word for shit (literally), but "poop head" is no longer used.

The Millertown Bluff.

A "bluff" is a dangerous cliff, and a stupid place to race a car!

Why don't you get us some cars and we'll have us some kicks tonight.
 "To have some kicks" is an old-fashioned way to say have some fun.

You been on a chickie-run before?
 A dated, funny little expression for the very dangerous game of driving toward a cliff to see who will be the first "chicken" to jump out of the car. "To play chicken" may still be used.

Faced with a question of honor, Jim accepts a dangerous challenge.

I was getting mom some supper.
 An old-fashioned word for dinner.

You're too old for that kind of stuff, kiddo.
 A dated word for "kid," still occasionally used with affection.

I didn't kiss her and it's a big deal.
 "A big deal" is a very common way to describe any situation that the speaker feels is very important or significant.

Fish soufflé.
 A French word for a kind of baked dish made with eggs.

Girls your age don't do things like that!
 What conservative or "uptight" parents say to their kids.

It's just the age that nothing fits. :: The Atomic age!
 The "age that nothing fits" is a silly way to refer to the awkward teenage years. "The atomic age" is a dated term for the nuclear era.

Hey, can I ask you something? :: Shoot.
 In this context, a common way to say "Yes, go ahead."

It's a matter of honor.
 Another way to say "a question of pride." In many cultures, this is translated as "saving face."

Some kind of trick answer?
 A "trick" is something designed to mislead or deceive, and thus a "trick answer" is an unexpected one, perhaps because the question itself is misleading.

You can't make a hasty decision...nobody can make a snap decision.
Both "hasty" and "snap" decisions are ones that
are made in a hurry, without careful reflection.

We ought to consider all the pros and cons.
An important and common expression
meaning "the advantages and disadvantages."

We'll make a list, and if we're still stuck, we'll get some advice.
If you are "stuck," it can mean physically, or metaphorically,
meaning you can no longer decide how to move forward.

Chicken-little.
Like "chicken," another way to refer to a coward, though
this is much more dated and only used among the very young.

How did you get here? :: I hitched.
"To hitch" is short for "hitch hike," which is to get
a ride in a car by signaling to drivers with your thumb.

I bet you'd go to a hanging.
"I bet" is a common way to say "I'm sure that...", but
used almost exclusively in the first person. A "hanging" is
where criminals are killed by rope placed around their necks.

I guess it's my morbid personality.
An interesting word that is related to death or disease,
or an unhealthy obsession with such matters.

I got some goodies for you.
A good little colloquial word referring to small things or gifts.

He's sincere.
An important word meaning honest or true, used
to describe a person who means what he says.

Want to flip? :: Yeah, heads.
People will "flip" a coin to determine who goes first in any
kind of contest. The two sides of the coin are "heads and tails,"

I bet he won't be mad if I goof.
"To goof" an old-fashioned way to say screw-up, or make a mistake.

This is the edge, boy.
The "edge" is the pointed side of a knife, and the rim or end of a cliff.

Why are we doing this? :: You got to do *something*, don't you?
 An important exchange in the movie, that captures the feel and attitude of the characters, and the reason for the movie's title.

Line them up. Get these guys straightened out..

"To line up" a group of anything is to get them organized into straight lines or logical groups. In this case, referring to cars.

Hey Toreador, she signals, we head for the edge,
 and the first man who jumps is a chicken.

"Toreador" is Buzz's nickname for Jim, since his astrological sign is Taurus. "To signal" is to communicate by showing any type of sign, such as here, by using waving hands.

Hit your lights.

Noted here to show that "to hit" is frequently used to ask someone to turn on or off an electronic device.

Jim faces his greatest crisis, but his parents have no idea how to help.

Have you flipped or something?

"To flip" can mean to go crazy. Note that "or something" is frequently added to the end of sentences for stylish effect.

I have to pick up my scooter, anyway.

A very small motorcycle, especially popular in Europe.

Darling, sweetie, baby-pie, glamour-puss.

Four "terms of endearment" or affection, although the last two are extremely dated and stupid.

Get it off your chest, son.

"To get something off your chest" is to talk about something that is bothering you, or perhaps that is just difficult to discuss.

"I don't care?" Remember how I almost died giving birth to him?!

An interesting line from Jim's mom that is worth noticing.

I've been going around with my head in a sling for years.

A "sling" is a small strap or rope, found in a weapon called a "slingshot," which is used to throw rocks. Here, Jim's way of saying how his parents have left him feeling lost and aimless.

I don't want to drag you into this, but **I can't help it**.

"To drag someone into" something is to get them involved.

"I can't help it" is a very common way to say "I can't prevent it."

Far be it for me to tell you what to do, but...

A curious expression meaning "I realize that

I don't have the authority to [do something], but...."

Are you going to preach? Are we going to have to listen to a sermon?

"To preach" is to speak emotionally in order to convince someone of something, and it often has a religious connotation. A "sermon" is a religious speech, usually spoken in a church.

You can't be idealistic all your life.

An "idealistic" person believes that things can happen in an ideal or perfect way. A key adjective that can be political or philosophical.

Nobody thanks you for sticking your neck out.

"To stick one's neck out" is to take great risks.

Just don't volunteer! :: Just tell a little white lie?

A lie that is seen as unimportant or morally acceptable.

Why are we moving? :: Do I have to spell it out?

One way to ask "Do I have to explain everything?"

You use every other phony excuse!

"Phony" is a good word for fake or false or perhaps not genuine.

A foolish decision now could wreck your whole life.

"To wreck" is a powerful verb meaning to destroy.

Dad, stand up for me!

"To stand up for" someone is to support them, often in an argument.

***Jim finds support from Judy and Plato,
but they all must hide from growing dangers.***

This place appeal to you or something?

If something "appeals to" you, then you like it.

What's he going to pull?

A very colloquial way of saying "to do," especially if the person is trying to do something secret or possibly illegal.

We'll have some kicks and bring him down.
Old-fashioned slang for physically attack or harm.

What are you, out of your mind?
If someone is "out of their mind," they are crazy or insane.

What's the charge? :: Assault with a deadly weapon.
The legal term for attacking someone with a gun or knife.

You ever been booked before?
"To book" someone is to officially charge them with a crime.

He didn't have to hang up on him.
An interesting phrasal verb+preposition combination, and the words you need if one person ends a telephone conversation before the other person is finished speaking.

"Jamie?" Where did you get that?
An alternative and common way to ask "Who told you that?"

A new arrangement of a great oldie in rhythm and blues.
In music, an "arrangement" is a new way to play a previously performed piece. An "oldie" refers to any song that is more than a few years old, and "rhythm and blues" was a type of music popular among blacks that eventually led to rock'n'roll.

You still pretty upset? :: I'm just numb.
An important word meaning without the ability to feel, which can be used both in a physical and emotional context.

An old deserted mansion near the planetarium.
If something is "deserted," it is abandoned, or without people.

I'll scrimp and save.
"To scrimp" is to spend money extremely carefully.

Children are so terribly annoying when they cry.
"Annoying" is an alternative for irritating or bothersome.

Nursery.
A room set apart for children to play in, or, to sell plants!

Shut your mouth, before your guts run out.
"Guts" are intestines, but here means courage. If something "runs out," this means there is no longer any of it left.

I used to run away a lot, but they always took me back.

When teenagers talk of "running away," they mean running away from home in order to escape their parents.

I used to be in my crib and listen them to fight.

A "crib" is a small bed for babies with high sides to keep them in.

He was a hero in the China Sea :: You told me he was a big wheel in New York!

An old-fashioned way to say an "important person."

A more current slang expression would be a "big shot."

He might as well be dead.

A common and curious expression used when what *should be* and what *is* are very different. Plato's dad is actually alive, but he sees Plato so rarely that he might as well be dead....

Jim does all he can to save Plato, who had finally found a family.

Alert juvenile and stand by to send help!

"To alert" someone is to warn them. In this case, "juvenile" refers to those police who deal with juvenile crime. "To stand by" is to wait and be prepared for later instructions.

What did you run out on me for?

Another phrasal verb + preposition combination, in this case meaning to leave, or possibly abandon.

We got a cuckaboo in there with a gun.

A type of bird, and a never-used word for someone who is crazy. However, a "cuke" can still be used for a crazy person.

The Griffith Observatory.

A building for observing planets or other natural phenomena.

You cover the house, and I'll head them off.

In a police context, "to cover" means to watch or protect.

"To head someone off" is to intercept them as they try to escape.

Lieutenant says to seal them off.

A "lieutenant" is a rank or level in the police force or military.

"To seal someone off" is to surround them so they can't escape.

Got a speaker?

Another word for a microphone, to amplify a voice.

Clasp your hands and come outside.

"To clasp" is to hook or fasten together.

Hold your fire!

When referring to guns, a policeman's way to say "Don't shoot!"

Boy, I'm blind as a bat here.

A dated expression, but the one to use when you can't see anything.

I can't talk to you if I can't see you. That's all there is to it.

A common expression meaning "there is nothing more to say," or possibly to mean "there is no more reason to argue."

"Why?" Because they like you. :: Come on.

Noted here because in this case it means "Be serious and stop lying to me." A truly amazing phrasal verb.

Get the stretcher in here!

A bed or canvas support, placed over a frame, that is used to transport the sick, wounded or dead.

Rebel Without A Cause

Possible Questions for ESL Class Discussion

1. What does this movie say about the American family?
2. Are there teenagers like this in every generation? In every country?
3. What would you have done if you were in Jim's position when Buzz asked him to play chicken?
4. How would you describe Jim to a friend? What about Plato? Judy?
5. Many Americans were shocked by this movie when it came out in 1955; Why do you think so?
6. Many people still consider this film a true classic; Do you think it is? Does it have any serious weaknesses?
7. Are there any characters who you recognize in your own lives? Who, and why?
8. Have you ever felt like a rebel without a cause? A rebel *with* a cause?

