

Unit 3:

Teen Comedies

A Warm up

1. Match the teen comedy character stereotypes with the correct photos.

- a) the class clown b) the cheerleader c) the girl-next-door d) the jock e) the nerd f) the rebel
g) the stoner



B Vocabulary

1. Match the words with their definitions.

- | | | |
|----------------|-----|---|
| a) adolescents | ___ | the feeling of worry or nervousness about your life |
| b) angst | ___ | dealing with sex in a way that is shocking |
| c) resort to | ___ | refusing to obey rules |
| d) nerds | ___ | a dance used to celebrate the end of the school year |
| e) profanity | ___ | young people |
| f) raunchy | ___ | use (unnecessarily) |
| g) rebelling | ___ | a person who lacks social skills and studies too much |
| h) prom | ___ | swearing; bad language |

Teen comedy conventions:

- Settings: high school, university campus, house parties, dances (especially proms)
- Characters: many stereotypes, for example jocks, nerds (jocks are usually mean to nerds)
- Dumb, naive or "evil" adult characters
- Stories often involve teen boys trying to lose their virginity
- Themes include young love, teen angst

C While Reading

Complete the following exercises while reading the article on the next page.

1. Fill in the blanks with the words from the vocabulary exercise.
2. How many teen comedies are mentioned in the article by name?

Teen Comedies: Raunchiness vs Tameness

Teen movies started to turn up after World War II as young people had more free time and more money to spend. At first moviemakers produced films that appealed to young people's sense of rebellion, for example *Rebel Without a Cause* with James Dean (1955). Teen movies started to get funnier over the years, perhaps thanks to the John Travolta musicals *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and *Grease* (1978).

_____ teen comedies took off in the early 80s. It was a period of sexy teen comedies with lots of

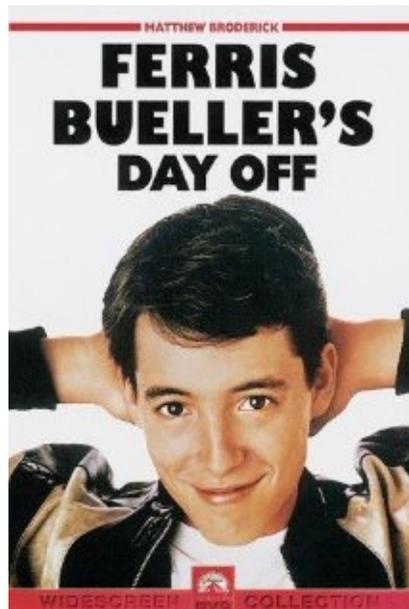
_____ and nudity, designed for students (usually boys) with active fantasy lives who were looking for chances to see naked girls. Movies indicative of this time are *Porky's* (1982) and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982).

Balancing out these teen-sex comedies were some of writer-producer-director John Hughes' films which took a more gentle look at _____ issues. *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Pretty in Pink* (1986) and *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987) were all successful teen films that didn't _____ raunchy scenes.

In the late 80's to early 90's, teen comedies continued to give up some of their raunchiness so they could be seen by a wider audience. Cameron Crowe's films *Say Anything* (1989) and *Almost Famous* (2000)

are good examples from this period. But recent years have seen teen comedies get raunchier and raunchier again with the *American Pie* (1999 -) series and Judd Apatow directed comedies such as *Superbad* (2007).

Of course the most common characteristic of a teen comedy is that the main characters are teenagers (usually high school or university students). The settings for these movies are often at school, with house parties, sports games and the school _____ being other familiar settings for the story.



Teen comedies often use stereotypical characters, with jocks and _____ being the most recognisable of these stereotypes. There are few adult roles in teen movies, and quite often adult characters are naive, dumb or they play "the bad guy".

Teen _____ is a common theme, in both the raunchy and "tame" teen comedies. Most of these movies involve young people _____ against their parents or authority figures. These movies often deal with the feelings of loneliness and social awkwardness that many young people have.

Some of today's biggest stars got their start in teen comedies. Check out Tom Cruise in *Risky Business* (a raunchy 1983 teen comedy) or Keanu Reeves in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (a tame 1989 teen comedy).

D Check Your Understanding

Answer the following questions about the article on the previous page.

1. Were teen movies originally funny?
2. Who are three famous directors of teen comedies mentioned in the article?
3. What are some typical settings for teen comedies?
4. What stereotypical characters are common in teen comedies?
5. Who are two famous actors who got their start in teen comedies?

E Iconic Scene



1. Watch the following scene from the teen comedy *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1987).

In this scene, two high school boys (Ferris and Cameron) are trying to reset the odometer on Cameron's father's car after stealing it for an afternoon of fun. Unfortunately, they discover that simply putting the car in reverse does not set back the odometer.

F: Ferris, **C:** Cameron

F: We'll just have to crack open the odometer and roll it back by hand.

C: No, forget it. Forget it! I gotta take a stand. I'm bullshit... I put up with everything. My old man pushes me around... I never say anything! Well, he's not the problem; I'm the problem. I gotta take a stand. I gotta take a stand against him. I am not going to sit on my ass as the events that effect me unfold to determine the course of my life. I'm going to defend it. Right or wrong, I'm going to defend it.

I am so sick of this shit! I can't stand him and I hate this goddamn car! Who do you love?! You love a car! Son of a bitch.

(Cameron starts kicking the car and denting it)

Shit. I dented the shit out of it. Good! My father will come home and he'll see what I did. I can't hide this. He'll

come home, he'll see what I did and he'll have to deal with me. I don't care; I really don't. I'm just tired of being afraid. The hell with it - I can't wait to see the look on the bastard's face...

(Cameron leans on the car, and the jack tips over, allowing the back wheels to hit the floor. The car reverses and flies through a window into the canyon below. He looks in disbelief.)

C: What did I do?... What did I do?

F: You killed the car.

2. Ask a partner the following questions.

1. Was the scene funny or not? Why do you think so?
2. What do you think will happen to Cameron?

F Conversation

1. Use words and expressions from the Natural Conversation box below to complete the conversation:



It's Friday night! Hey, let's _____ a bottle of wine and enjoy a good movie on television this evening. I'm _____ going out to the dance club every weekend. Let's enjoy each other's company.

But I want to go out! I don't want to stay at home and _____ on a Friday night. I want to go out and meet people and have fun! _____ hit the dance floor tonight!



_____ ! We always do what you want to do. I'm going to _____ and make my own decision for once. I'm staying home and watching a movie!

I am so _____ you acting like a child every time you don't get your way. I'm going out without you!

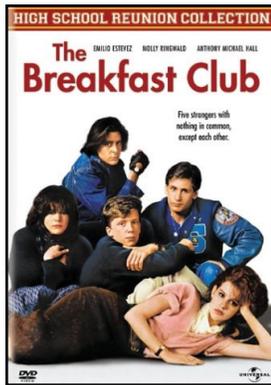


Natural conversation:
crack open
Forget it!
take a stand
(be) sick of (something)
(be) tired of (something)
I can't wait to...
sit on my ass

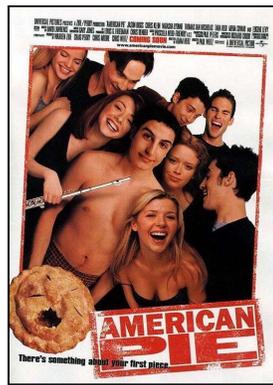
G Film Focus (see next page)

TEEN COMEDIES

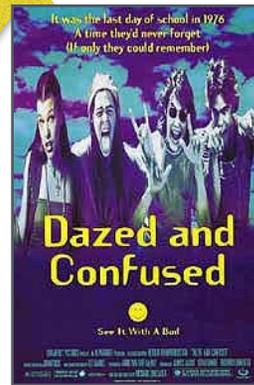
1. Have you seen any of the “must-see” teen comedies listed below? Which ones?



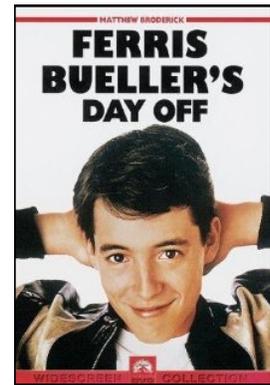
1985
John Hughes



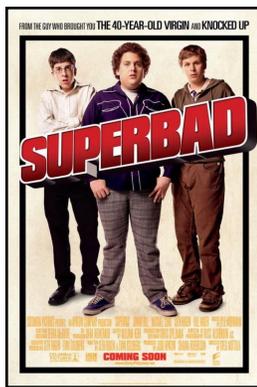
1999
Paul Weitz



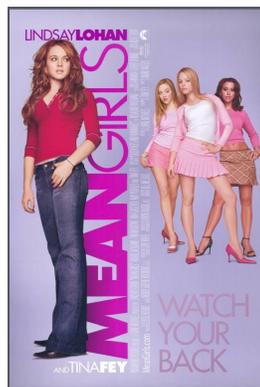
1993
Richard Linklater



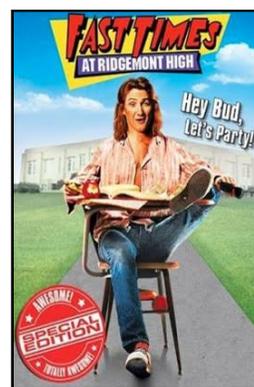
1986
John Hughes



2007
Greg Mottola



2005
Mark Waters



1982
Amy Heckerling



1989
Stephen Herek

2. Match the one line synopses with the movie posters above.

- A popular high school student skips school for the day, despite his principal trying to catch him.
- Two seemingly dumb teens struggle to prepare a history presentation with the help of a time machine.
- A new girl at school makes the mistake of falling for the ex-boyfriend of the most popular girl in school.
- A group of high school students are enjoying their most important subjects: sex, drugs and rock n' roll.
- Two high school best friends try to buy alcohol for a party.
- Four teenage boys enter a pact to lose their virginity by prom night.
- The adventures of high school and junior high students on the last day of school in May 1976.
- Five students, all different stereotypes, meet in detention, where they discover they have a lot in common.