



EDUCATIONAL GUIDE FOR TEACHERS & STUDENTS



THE NEW KID (LE NOUVEAU)

A TEENAGE COMEDY BY RUDI ROSENBERG

France, 2015 / San Sebastian International Film Festival Award Winner

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I. STORYLINE & GENRE

Synopsis

Benoît, 14, leaves the countryside for Paris. His first week at his new school does not go as planned, and he quickly becomes isolated. He's roughed up by Charles' gang, the "popular" kids, and the only pupils who welcome him with any kindness are the "nerds." Fortunately, there's Johanna, a pretty Swedish girl who Benoît makes friends with and whom he falls for. However, little by little she drifts away to join Charles' gang. On his uncle's advice, Benoît organizes a party and invites his entire class. It's his chance to become popular and get Johanna back...

Genre

The New Kid is a coming-of-age comedy. Like most American teenage comedies, it has a blunt sense of humor, skillfully blending rudeness and sensibility, and a tenderness for losers, with a sincere nostalgia for childhood and for foolish jokes. What makes the film typically French is its genuine realism and the feeling of it being an immersive experiment. The film's director, Rudi Rosenberg is like an entomologist observing (from inside) and diving in vivo into the life of a group of teenagers. He excels in grasping a universal truth, this unique and particular moment when teenagers aspire to become adult but still belong to childhood. As stated by Rosenberg: *"It's specifically 'the 4th year' [Grade 8 in U.S./Year 9 UK], which interests me. It's a transitional year when the contrast between the maturity of the pupils is the most obvious. Where, despite the age, we are not all in the same boat: there are those who are still clearly children, who suck their thumb, carry their schoolbag, and the others who have become real teenagers, who smoke, organize parties, and go out with girls. I thought that the confrontation between these two worlds would offer riches of comic territory."*

II. WHO IS RUDI ROSENBERG?

Rudi Rosenberg was born on August 6, 1979. From ages 14 to 24 he was an actor, but soon felt the need to get behind the camera and attended the directing program at the EICAR Film School. Prior to *The New Kid*, Rosenberg's first feature, he shot some 100 commercials and three shorts (including 2010's *Aglaé*, which was selected for more than 20 international festivals and received 15 awards).

Children are central to Rosenberg's work. Inspired by his own teenage years and stimulated by the natural acting skills of teenagers, he even cast his own childhood friend, the French comic Max Boublil in the film as Benoît's uncle. The spirit of American directors such as Todd Solondz, Judd Apatow, Greg Mottola, and the helmers of the New American Comedy seem to have infused this film. However, it was while watching Sophie Letourneur's *Manue Bolonaise* on French TV that Rosenberg decided to become a director. He also credits *La Boum*, the famous French blockbuster of the '80s, as an inspiration.

III. CHARACTERS ANALYSIS

Every film genre has its own codes and stereotypes. Most teenage movies have the nerd, the leader, the chubby boy that everyone makes fun of, the pretty girl... In *The New Kid*, Rudi Rosenberg plays with these ready-made prototypes and shapes them into a delicate and refined gallery of characters, and breathes fresh air into those pigeonholes.



BENOÎT, the awkward boy

Benoît is a typical intelligent and bashful boy. He moves to Paris' pretentious Left Bank, and lands in a new junior high school. When he arrives in his new class, Benoît finds that he doesn't have the social sophistication that he needs to be respected. Shy and socially awkward, he gets bullied by a group of malicious boys who aspire to be the leaders. Benoît will need learn how to assert himself, find his own way in life, and embrace his uniqueness.

JOSHUA, the quirky boy

Joshua is 14 years old. Always out of step with the others, his way of thinking bears the naïvety, creativity, and poetry of a seven year-old boy. Socially, Joshua is the biggest loner in the class, finding humor in eating food without using utensils or making funny faces. At home, we learn that life is not all fun and games for Joshua. He keeps a daily tally of all who have wronged him, and his parents provide him with little time and attention. A quirky character full of little idiosyncrasies, Joshua's ceaseless humor and unself-conscious openness becomes Benoît's saving grace.





CONSTANTIN, the model pupil

Constantin is a 40-year-old trapped in the body of a 13-year-old. Clad in striped shirts and high-waisted jeans, he wears glasses that are wonky and his braces makes speaking difficult. This doesn't, however, stop him from talking too much. Each year Constantin runs for class president with the idea of starting a school choir, but he has never won. Constantin has given himself the mission of doing good for others, but his awkwardness always seems to land him in embarrassing situations.

AGLAÉE, the tough girl

Aglaée is a newbie like Benoît but clearly more mature than the others. We imagine that physical challenges have forced her to grow up quicker. Aglaée is confident and is not visibly bothered by her physical differences or by stares from others. Constantin's attempts to protect her from immoral pupils are clearly pointless and embarrassing since no one dares to annoy her. The role of Aglaée was originated by actress Géraldine Martineau, in Rosenberg's short film, also named *Aglaée*. Aglaée is far from a victim, she is a tough character who is perfectly at ease with her body. Taking first steps with boys, Aglaée goes for what she wants and expects to get it. There are few examples of physically challenged youth characters in the history of cinema, and Aglaée overturns clichés in the depiction of this realistic, believable character.





CHARLES, the nasty cool boy

Charles is the enemy of the protagonist, Benoît. The typical malicious kid, Charles is wealthy, attractive, arrogant, mean enough to be a leader, and confident enough to be a young lady-killer. He and his gang are adored by the whole class, as they know how to liven things up. They ceaselessly tease each other and their classmates, and their most treasured victims are the outsiders. Indifferent to the damage they reap, the rule of Charles' gang is the bigger the humiliation, the bigger the laugh.

JOHANNA, the pretty foreign girl

Johanna is a pretty, timid, and sweet Swedish girl. New to the school, she is as lost as Benoît in the beginning. She struggles to integrate with the class, but the language barrier and being quite reserved makes fitting in a challenge. Naturally she becomes close with Benoît, as they both need someone to talk to. Benoît can't resist her innocent charm, her grace and beauty, which makes one think of a butterfly. But when he finally finds the courage to declare his love, she only wishes to remain a friend. Johanna goes on to enjoy many boyfriends, but Benoît will never be one of them, much to his great despair.



IV. MISE EN SCÈNE: THE ART OF DEPICTING THE REALITY OF TEENAGEHOOD

"Everyone has been the new kid at least once in their life..."

– Rudi Rosenberg

In this coming-of-age film, Rudi Rosenberg aims at grasping the reality of what it is to be 14. He says: "There are many films about a group of friends who are already together. With *The New Kid*, I focus on the moment just before and the creation of a group at its birth. I think that there is something beautiful at that age. Without knowing each other we become mates in five seconds and it can last for a week or an entire lifetime. The birth of friendship at that age and the spark that ignites is very powerful. There is something profound and free, of which the teenagers are obviously not aware. Making a friend when we've become an adult is also beautiful, but less spontaneous."

With that intention in mind, Rosenberg uses a cinematic style close to documentary filmmaking, which mixes scripted lines with improvisation and employs real people and locations. The choice of comedy as the genre captures the spirit of this formative age while immersing us in this universal teenage experience.



Casting

The actors in the film, except for Max Boublil (Benoît's Uncle), were nonprofessional. Casting played a central role and was a crucial stage in the preparation of the film. For nearly 10 months, Rudi Rosenberg looked for children who had never acted before but could carry these roles. To find these "rare pearls" he worked with over 30 people all over France, Sweden, and Belgium who were practically headhunters. Rosenberg insisted on auditioning the worst students, the ones at the bottom of the class, the marginalized, those who are often were in detention or excluded. He obtained authorization to go to schools and saw more than 5,000 youngsters.

In *The New Kid*, Rosenberg guides his cast with plenty of affection, though he doesn't shy away from the tougher moments of puberty (the swimming pool scene), or from the evil that teenagers can do (painful exclusion, constant taunts, humiliation). Throughout, Rosenberg shot 250 hours of footage of improvisation to obtain this authenticity. Neither violent nor transgressive like many teenage movies, *The New Kid* depicts the crude realism that comprise the rites of passage toward adulthood.

Location

The film was shot at the Montaigne school in Paris, in a neighborhood that specifically corresponds to the world of the characters: a place where social codes rule the world of teenagers and where pupils are excluded if they don't belong to the dominant socio-economic class. The movie extras were for the most part chosen from the school.

Timeless Dialogue

The film's natural and timeless dialogue is achieved through the eradication of all signs that link the characters to their current generation. Rosenberg stripped the dialogue of contemporary slang and there is no use of mobile phones, or recent music. In fact, only a Ray Charles song and a track by David Guetta from the 2000s were used in the film. What remains is the authentic need to be part of a group and the promise of love.



V. NARRATIVE BACKBONE AND PLOT ANALYSIS

From marginalization to integration, from oppression to freedom

The structure of *The New Kid* depicts a series of alliances, and a wide range of emotions, that unveils the teenage initiatory journey. The protagonist has to overcome a series of hardships to find happiness and balance. The script perfectly exemplifies the “coming-of-age” period when friendships define identity and when one’s personal ethics of popularity versus belonging are formed. In *The New Kid*, the narrative pattern espouses a variable geometry that perfectly symbolizes the uncertainties of teenagehood.

1. Opening credits

Even before the story starts, the credits function as an introduction expressing the grumpiness of adolescence; the semi-depressive state between the desire to become an adult and the feeling of still being trapped in childhood: the pink color, the pony stickers, the girlie hearts, and the morning dread when facing the day ahead.

2. Introduction scene: The family dinner

In these rare moments we see Benoît within the context of his family. It helps us to understand that Benoît is on his own with his problems, his timidity, his loneliness at school, and that adult solutions won’t be any help in his new world.



3. Life at school: Introduction of the main characters:

- Charles, the cool guy and the leader
- Johanna, the pretty, lonely Swedish girl
- Joshua, the plump, foolish guy in the schoolyard
- Constantin, the friendly kid with glasses, at the top of his class
- Aglaée, the confident physically challenged girl

As Benoît is faced with each obstacle, it becomes evident that he doesn't have the key to popularity: the chocolate box scene, Charles' gang at his home after school, being berated in the computer room, exclusion during lunchtime in the cafeteria, and the blatant disregard and leniency of the teachers.

Through the cruelty of the jokes, and the control that Charles and his gang has over others, the film authentically conveys the dark and brooding atmosphere of adolescence.

4. Nascent Friendship

Little by little, willingly or not, ties start to form between the outsiders, and, through adversity, characters find their social order. Benoît helps Johanna with her schoolwork, Constantin gets acquainted with Aglaée and Benoît, and Joshua begins to be tolerated by others.

The tone of the film changes while Johanna and Benoît's friendship blossoms: the atmosphere is lighter, as though Benoît is wearing new glasses and can see the world from a fresh perspective. This new complicity and connivance help Benoît to cope with adversity.



5. New obstacle: Inciting incident

The inciting incident of a script is the event that jolts the protagonist out of his routine, throws him off balance, and drives him to set an objective. The fact that Johanna grows closer to Charles' gang throws Benoît back into a state of loneliness. His only friend is Joshua, a childish but sensitive kid, whose parents are totally absent. This forces Benoît to get to know Joshua better and appreciate his openness and humor, despite Joshua's awkward behavior.

6. The party: Solidarity in loserdom

Benoît's uncle offers a new strategy for popularity: He advises Benoît to invite his whole class to a crazy party at his home. None of the popular gang show up and what begins as a disappointment brings the group of outcasts together. With lots of laughter, music, dancing, and silly jokes, the kids are free to be their authentic selves, and a bond is created among this new community of friends.

7. The loser becomes the winner

Benoît has come through being hurt and making friends, and now holds a new confidence. At school he turns into a popular kid and as his arrogance grows, so does his popularity. He gets invited to parties when Charles is not. But he forgets about his old friends and integrates himself at the expense of his friend Joshua. Being cool requires sacrifices...



8. The second party: The reunion of old friends (Climax)

The party is the critical plot point where the protagonist resolves his internal and external conflicts. Benoît witnesses the exclusion of his friend Joshua, and he defends him against the others who want to kick him out of the party and who don't understand his puerile sense of humor. In a delirious evening of silliness, the boys become close again and we have the feeling that it's a friendship that will last a lifetime. With his newfound confidence, Benoît summons the courage to declare his love to Johanna but finds that she only wants to be friends and ends up dating another boy.

9. Epilogue: When love takes over

The choral group Constantin was dreaming of finally takes shape. Joshua, Benoît, Constantin, and Aglaée, among a small group of other kids, awkwardly and joyfully sing together. Looks exchanged between Benoît and a sweet-faced girl with glasses and braces lead us to believe that a new love is about to blossom.



VI. COMEDY: THE REALM OF YOUTH AND FREEDOM

"I wanted to make a film with adolescents who did stupid stuff. My memories of being a teenager and having friends is of doing stuff that was completely idiotic." – Rudi Rosenberg

"Pure of heart and dim of wit." – The Farrelly Brothers (*The Three Stooges*)

The New Kid uses a classic comedic structure of the shy teenager transferring into a new school, where he has to learn the ropes, fight the bullies, and possibly get the girl. Yet Rudi Rosenberg refreshes this genre with his gritty use of humor.

Like the new trend of transgressive American comedies, *The New Kid* holds friendship as the highest value, has a tenderness for antiheroes and ugly ducklings, utilizes humor as the underdogs' best weapon, and has a high regard for believable acting and sincere performances.

Humor: A life buoy for the ostracized, and inseparable from teenagehood

Humor plays a major role in the film: laughter and wit are almost like a character in the story. Humor acts as a step in the initiation of adulthood. Integral to teenagehood adolescents, with humor, have their own language free from the censorship of adults. The humor in the film runs the gamut from nasty jokes, prank calls, to silly, idiotic goofiness.

The narrative pattern of the film shows how fun can be a social weapon in all possible senses, whether against the weak or the strong. At the beginning of the film, insults and laughter are used to make anyone who is different, branded as a pariah by the popular clique. After the first party, the misfits take hold of their enemies' weapon and use jibes to protect themselves.

Ultimately, the real victory for Benoît is that he frees himself from the judgment of others through learning how to laugh and to love.



VII. QUESTIONS AND REFLECTIONS TO STIMULATE DISCUSSIONS

BULLYING & EMPATHY

1. What does it mean to have empathy?
2. What is the perfect environment for bullying to occur?
In a bullying situation, there are three players:
The bully/bullies (2%), the victim (1%), and the bystanders (97%)
3. Which characters played the part of the bullies, the victim, and the bystanders?
4. How can empathy shut down a bullying environment?

IN THE FIRST PART OF THE MOVIE (before the party)

1. In the following examples, where was bullying allowed to occur?
2. In the following examples, did anyone act empathetically toward Benoît?
And how did this affect the bullying that he experienced?
 - At School – with the chocolates? In the computer lab?
 - After school – with Charles and his friends?
 - With Johanna?
 - At home – with his parents? With his uncle?

IN THE SECOND PART OF THE MOVIE (After Benoît's party)

1. In the following examples, what are some of the choices that Benoît made?
Did he participate as a bully, a bystander, or as an empathetic friend?
 - At Astrid's party?
 - On the phone with Johanna?
 - In the choir?
2. What choices would you have made?

CHARACTER POINT OF VIEW

1. Which character reminds you most of yourself?
2. Why do you think Charles and his two friends acted the way that they did?
3. Why do you think Johanna acted the way that she did?
4. What is the filmmaker trying to say? Do you agree?

TRACKS TO INTERACT WITH THE STUDENTS

FIND THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF JOKES IN THE FILM

(from the least to the most elaborate)

- a. Goofy and childish jokes (phone calls, apple tart, dress a dog...)
- b. Cruel pranks against gay or disabled persons
- c. Affectionate jokes between friends
- d. Defense weapon: lesson of diversion by the master (the uncle) during the party
- e. How did Benoît finally make friends ? Why do you believe that he kept these friends ? What would you have done ?

CAN WE LAUGH ABOUT EVERYTHING ?

Please choose your answer and defend your point of view:

1. Yes on the condition that it's funny! Why?
2. Not with everyone. Why?
3. Not if it hurts. Why?

THINK OF OTHER TEENAGE FILMS

How are these different or similar to *The New Kid*?

- i. In style of filmmaking, the acting, in the storyline, in believability?
- ii. What is your preference and why?

VIII. KEY CONCEPT & FILM REFERENCES

CINÉMA VÉRITÉ (*truthful cinema*)

A style of documentary filmmaking invented by French director Jean Rouch, inspired by Dziga Vertov's theory and influenced by Robert Flaherty's films. It combines improvisation with the use of the camera to unveil truth or highlight subjects hidden behind crude reality.

FRENCH AND US TEENAGE COMEDIES

La Boum by Claude Pinoteau (1980, France)

The Breakfast Club by John Hughes (1985, USA)

Dumb and Dumber by the Farrelly Brothers (1994, USA)

Welcome to the Dollhouse by Todd Solondz (1995, USA)

Freeks and Geeks NBC TV Series launched by Paul Feig (1999-2000, USA)

Undeclared TV Series by Judd Apatow (2001, USA)

Napoleon Dynamite by Jared Hess (2004, USA)

Juno by Jason Reitman (2007, USA)

Superbad by Greg Mottola (2007, USA)

The French Kissers by Riad Sattouf (2009, France)

Camille Rewinds by Noémie Lvovsky (2012, France)

Macaroni and Cheese by Sophie Letourneur (2012, France)



COMING-OF-AGE FILMS

Zero for Conduct by Jean Vigo (1933, France)
Rendezvous in July by Jacques Becker (1949, France)
Le Beau Serge by Claude Chabrol (1958, France)
The 400 Blows by François Truffaut (1959, France)
The Graduate by Mike Nichols (1967, USA)
Carrie by Brian De Palma (1976, USA)
Graduate First by Maurice Pialat (1979, France)
Dead Poets Society by Peter Weir (1989, USA)
The Disenchanted by Benoît Jacquot (1990, France)
Cold Water by Olivier Assayas (1994, France)
Kids by Larry Clark (1995, USA)
The Virgin Suicides by Sofia Coppola (1999, USA)
Spider-Man by Sam Raimi (2002, USA)
Let the Right One In by Tomas Alfredson (Sweden, 2008)
Scott Pilgrim vs. the World by Edgar Wright (2010, USA)
Blue Is the Warmest Color by Abdellatif Kechiche (2011, France)
Girlhood by Céline Sciamma (France, 2014)
Bang Gang (A Modern Love Story) by Eva Husson (France, 2015)
Mustang by Deniz Gamze Ergüven (France/Turkey, 2015)

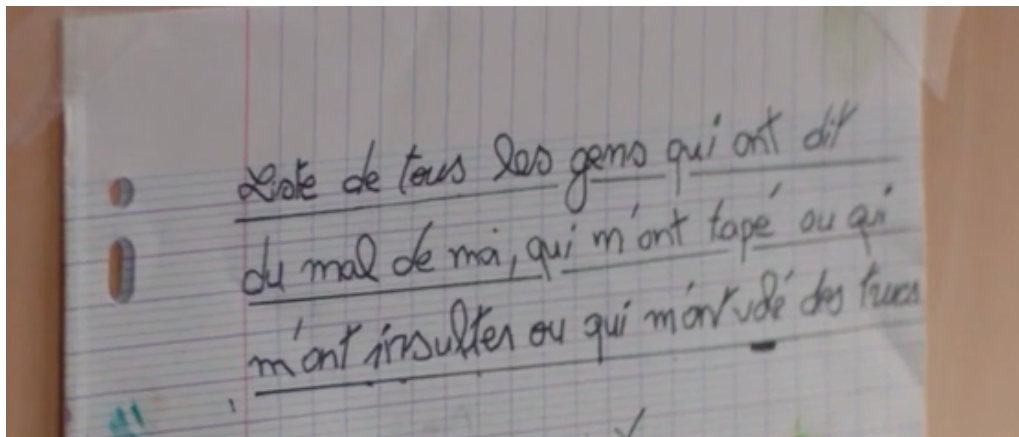
IX. BRUSH UP YOUR FRENCH!

Typical Teenage French expressions

Find these sentences in the film and the meaning of these expressions:

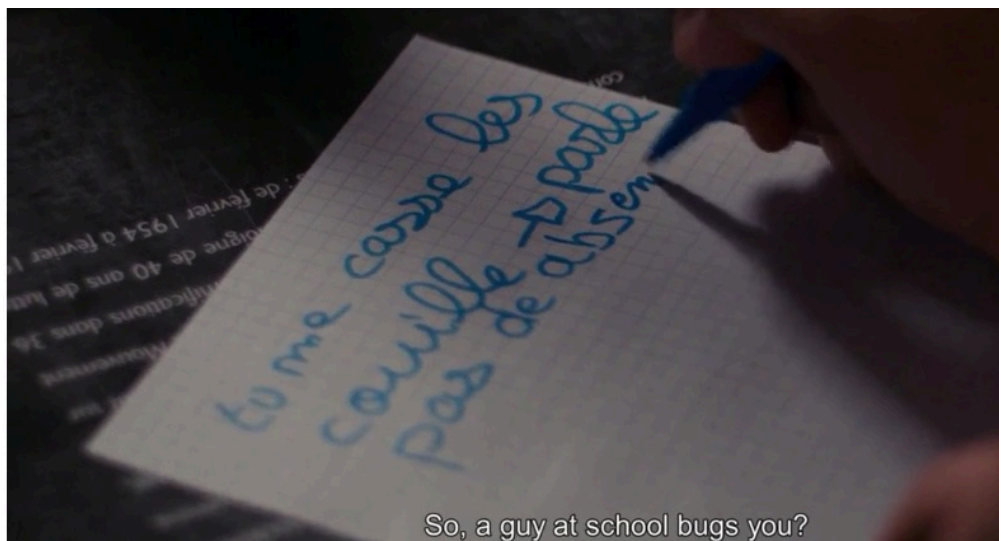
C'est bon là, arrêtez de me saouler !	= Get off my back
Tu crois que j'suis un bouffon ou quoi	= Think I'm a loser?
Tu kiffes Paris ?	= Do you dig Paris?
Ça va rouler	= It'll be ok
Connard	= Jerk
C'est pas mon genre de musique	= That's not my type of music
On va acheter de la tize et on va faire une énorme teuf	= We'll get some booze and throw a mega party
Bahut	= High School (slang)
J'suis chaud	= I'm up for it
C'est chaud	= It's risky
Invite des meufs	= Invite some chicks
Ca va être le bordel	= It will be chaos
T'en connais des vannes ?	= Do you know jokes?
Un nul	= A smirk
Tu veux me pécho ou quoi ?	= You'd like to pick me up?
<i>A perfect example of VERLAN – syllables that are usually in reverse order are the other way around in French slang: pécho = choper</i>	
Foutre la merde	= To mess around
Un tricard	= A social leper
Un blaireau	= A loser
Arrête tes conneries	= Cut the crap
Pote	= Buddy

1. Révise le participe-passé !



Liste de tous les gens qui ont dit du mal de moi, qui m'ont tapé ou qui m'ont insulté ou qui m'ont volé des trucs.

2. N'oublie pas le s en conjuguant à la deuxième personne du singulier, ni le s du pluriel !



Tu me casses les couilles

