

OSCAR WINNER 1941:

Best Original Screenplay

TEACHERS' NOTES

This study guide is aimed at students of GCSE Media Studies, A'Level Film Studies and GNVO Media; Communication and Production (Intermediate and Advanced).

Areas of study covered by this guide include narrative structure, industry and institution and understanding the language of film.

Citizen Kane: Certificate U. Running Time 119 minutes.

MAJOR CREDITS FOR CITIZEN KANE

Citizen Kane 1941 (RKO/Mercury)

Producer:	Orson Welles
Director:	Orson Welles
Screenplay:	Herman J. Mankiewicz, Orson Welles [Joseph Cotten, John Housemani
Director of Photography:	Gregg Toland
Editor:	Robert Wise, [Mark Robson]
Music:	Bernard Herrmann
Art Directors:	Van Nest Polgiase, Perry Ferguson
Cast:	Orson Welles Joseph Cotten Everett Sloane Dorothy Comingore Agnes Moorehead Ray Collins Paul Stewart George Coulouris Ruth Warrick
Oscars 1941:	Best Original Screenplay

Oscar Nominations 1941: Best Picture
Best Director
Best Actor (Orson Welles)
Best B/W Cinematography
Best B/NV Art Direction
Best Editing
Best Scoring of a Dramatic Picture
Best Sound

INTRODUCTION BY DEREK MALCOLM

"Many filmmakers would say that there's no such thing as a movie capable of shaking the world. But some still attempt to make them. Those who succeed are rare, and the strange thing is that even the lucky ones don't appear to know they are doing it at the time. In fact, it sometimes takes years to realise what really is a great film or what may have looked wonderful at the time but was just a momentary flourish.

Most of the films on this particular list didn't so much shake the world as become memorable because, when you look back on them, they seem so much better than we may have thought at the time. But memories are short and the opportunity to see the full flowering of cinema history is denied to all but a few. So the list looks a little unbalanced to me, who has been luckier than most in looking further into the past and at world cinema rather than just Hollywood.

What we get here are films which were certainly important in their time, and still look good today movies that have remained in people's affections ever since they first saw them. If there aren't really enough from the first two-thirds of cinema history, no matter. It's good at least to know that some of the greatest directors in the world are represented and that their artistry, often the equivalent of any great playwright, painter, author or composer of the 20th century, continues to be appreciated. Most of these films will live longer than we do".

CITIZEN KANE

"Orson Welles' masterpiece, a debut made when he was only 25 years old, seems as astonishing a feat today as it did in 1941. The camera and editing alone showed filmmakers the way ahead, and facets of it are copied even today. Very few of the techniques of the past are left unused either, so this was a remarkable fusion of the old and the new. Yet the film is so tightly constructed that there is absolutely no slack in it, and the tale of Citizen Kane's life, moving from obscurity to fame, from birth to death, is a consistently fascinating treatise on how one life can influence others and how power corrupts. The fact that Welles played Kane as well as directing is astonishing, but the deep-focus cinematography of Greg Toland and the writing of Herman Mankiewicz were almost equally important. Filmmaking is a collaborative effort and we should always remember that, even when paying our respects to such a genius as Welles".

INTRODUCTION

Initially it was not Citizen Kane but its maker who shook the world - and the world he shook was the powerful, private and enclosed world of Hollywood. Orson Welles had been shaking people for many years with his original and unusual theatre productions - but it was actually a radio programme that brought him to Hollywood.

Welles began a career in radio in parallel to his work in the theatre. By 1938 he was a successful radio star with his Mercury Theatre of the Air, known for its radio adaptations of "classic" novels and plays. When they broadcast an adaptation of the science fiction novel *The War Of The Worlds*, partly scripted as alarming news flashes, many listeners were convinced that America had been invaded by Martians, and there was wide-spread panic.

Welles had been a celebrated child prodigy, a sensational juvenile actor in Dublin, had taken the New York theatre world by storm whilst becoming a leading radio star, but *The War Of The Worlds* made him internationally famous/infamous. Newspapers around the world gave Welles the credit or the blame for the incident and he happily accepted his new found fame, a fame that brought him to the attention of Hollywood.

Welles became interested in film when he made a short film, *Hearts Of Age*, for a drama festival at his old high school, and in 1938 he shot some footage for inclusion in one of his plays. He discovered then that filming was more enjoyable than directing a play.. but editing the film on a Moviola editing machine was the best fun of all. It was now only a matter of the right time and the right contract before Welles was lured to Hollywood.

George J. Schaefer eventually made Welles the offer he couldn't refuse. In 1938 Schaefer had become president of the almost bankrupt RKO, a Hollywood studio which enjoyed a freer atmosphere than the bigger studios, partly because Schaefer had instituted a policy of signing independent production companies to the studio, rather than relying on in-house unit producers. Schaefer was keen to establish an identity for RKO like the bigger studios such as MGM, Paramount and 20th Century Fox. MGM's tyrannical studio boss Louis B. Mayer had established the rules: "If it's an MGM film, it has to look like an MGM film." The studio 'look' was partly a sort of brand identification for the audiences but mostly a recognition of the financial advantages of using, wherever possible, the same contracted camera operators, art directors and actors, as well as stock sets and costumes on the studio's films.

Schaefer wanted an RKO 'look' and he wanted to build up a roster of talent at the studio. He was persuaded that the now notorious Orson Welles was just the person to help revive RKO's flagging fortunes. At first Schaefer offered Welles tempting film roles, but Welles resisted until the president of RKO offered Orson Welles and Mercury Productions a contract that shook Hollywood to its foundations.

What was remarkable about the contract was the control it gave Welles - as director, writer and star - over his own material. Welles' contract meant that he would receive the modest sum of \$150,000 for each film he produced, but the key line in Welles' contract has nothing to do with money: "The distributor shall be entitled to confer with the producer on the final cutting and editing of each of the pictures prior to the delivery thereof, but the control of such cutting shall vest in the producer."

Until the arrival of Welles - only Charlie Chaplin wrote, starred, directed and produced in Hollywood. Directors were lowly creatures whose work was interfered with on every level by the heads of the studios. Nowadays it is accepted that

directors of the stature of Spielberg or Scorsese will take responsibility for and exercise control over their creation from the beginning to the very end, but in the Hollywood of 1939 it was unheard of. Welles had never directed a Hollywood movie in his life. Now he had complete artistic control. And he was twenty-three years old!

PREPARATION FOR AN INITIAL VIEWING OF CITIZEN KANE

Task

The readers of Sight and Sound, the British Film Institute's monthly magazine, regularly vote for Citizen Kane as being the best film ever made. Write about your expectations of a film voted 'the best film ever made'. You will need to consider what qualities go to make a 'good' film. When you have seen Citizen Kane, look back at this piece of writing and see to what extent the film fulfilled your expectations.

SUGGESTIONS FOR VIEWING CITIZEN KANE

Task

Watch the opening sequence of Citizen Kane up to the point where the light in the window goes out. What is your initial impression of the film? What genre do you believe it to be? What do you expect the film to be about?

Task

Now fast forward to the end of the film. Watch the credit sequence in which we see the principal members of the cast in snippets of the film. What are your expectations of the film now? Have you revised any of the ideas gained from your initial viewing of the opening sequence? What part do you think each of these characters will play in the action of the film?

NEWS ON THE MARCH

Possibly the most impressive sequence in the whole film is the News On The March newsreel which tells the whole of Kane's story, though the film has scarcely begun. The newsreel was a parody of The March Of Time cinema newsreels and the scratchiness of some of the footage was achieved through two of Citizen Kane's editors dragging the film about the studio floor.

Task

Watch the film up to the conclusion of the newsreel. What do we learn from the newsreel about Kane? What effects do you notice in the newsreel that make it look as if it's a genuine newsreel? Channel 4 occasionally shows editions of 'The March of Time' and it is worth watching one of these to see how accurately Welles and his team have imitated the style of the documentary series.

Task

In 1965 Martin Scorsese made a film called 'It's Not Just You Murray', an attempt to imitate the techniques of the 'News on the March' sequence. Select a famous dead person and storyboard a brief newsreel sequence that would encapsulate this person's life as concisely and informatively as possible. You should use a variety of imaginary news and interview footage in your newsreel.

Task

To assist with your studies it will be worth carrying out an exercise which the director Alexander MacKendrick made one of his film students do as a video re-editing exercise, that is, put the events of the film in chronological order. The film is composed of nine sections, each told by a different narrator, all of whom also figure in some of the other flashbacks:

- * The introduction;
- * The newsreel and projection room;
- * Thompson's visit to Susan Alexander Kane;
- * Thompson's visit to the Thatcher Library;
- * Thompson's interview with Bernstein;
- * Thompson's interview with Le/and;
- * Thompson's interview with Susan Alexander Kane;
- * Thompson's conversation with Raymond;
- * The Finale.

The narrators are unreliable since they all relay information and permit us to see things that they could not have heard or witnessed. There is even a mystery about exactly who, apart from the audience, hears Kane's dying 'Rosebud'.

Task

Within each of these sections we are given flashbacks and there are frequent 'overlaps so that we see an event from different viewpoints, as well as different camera angles. Select one of these events -for example Susan's opera debut or her leaving of Kane - and say how we are presented with these different views and what effect the views have on our knowledge of Kane and other characters.

WHAT A PICTURE!

The RKO publicists made the most of Welles' youth and 'genius': "Just signed! Orson Welles... brilliant actor and director, to make one picture a year.. and WHAT a picture is planned for his first!" ran RKO's advertisement in the trade press. Unfortunately, Welles had no clear idea when he arrived in Hollywood what he could deliver to RKO and his contract stated that his first film had to be completed "no later than January 1st, 1940". Welles was under considerable pressure.

THE BEST ELECTRIC TRAIN SET

Welles has frequently been quoted as saying "A film studio is the best electric train set a boy ever had" but this obscures the fact that he was an inexperienced young man who knew that he had to learn as much as possible about filmmaking - and learn quickly. He repeatedly screened John Ford's new film, Stagecoach, in the company of RKO film technicians and bombarded these experts with questions about every aspect of the film and its construction.

Amalia Kent, an RKO continuity supervisor, briefed Welles on how to write a screenplay and Miriam Geiger (an RKO contract researcher) was taken on by Welles who asked her to supply him with the basic information about how films were made. According to her, Welles didn't even know what a medium shot was so, to make clearer to him what a camera angle was, Geiger went to the cutting department and got several kinds of' shots of film on 35mm, cut a hole their size in a piece of paper and pasted them over the hole so that the light could shine through. Underneath she wrote a description of' every shot and held the paper up in front of' Welles so he could see what each shot was, while she explained how it would be used.

Here are some of the explanations she gave Welles:

* A long shot would show the country, the city, the place where you might wish your story to begin. It would offer a long, wide view, preferably featuring a recognisable landmark: the USA would be shown by the Statue of Liberty; the Eiffel Tower would indicate Paris and Big Ben would show that we were in London.

*A medium shot is used to establish a closer view of the environment important to your story, i.e. the exterior of a house, an office building.

*A medium close-up shot gives a closer, clearer view of two or three of the people: the hero or heroine having a conversation or an argument important to the story.

*A close-up would let us see, perhaps, just the face of one of these characters reacting to one of the other characters.

* A very large (extreme) close-up would give us a particular, very important detail about the film.

Task

Select a sequence from *Citizen Kane* and describe the shots used within it. What effects are achieved by the particular framing of the shots?

THE MAKING OF CITIZEN KANE

Welles knew how he wanted the film to look and he worked closely with Perry Ferguson (the art director assigned by RKO to Welles) who diligently storyboarded every scene according to Welles' plan. It was essential that the settings of the film should be an integral part of the film's narrative; they should contribute to the film's action, not merely act as its background. For all his confidence in storyboarding striking scenes for *Citizen Kane*, Welles was aware that the look and - what is more important - the 'moving pictures' aspects of the film were eluding him. His problem was that he was still a foreigner in the cinema world and needed to learn how film communicates with its audience. As Welles explained in a 1960 BBC Monitor interview: "I thought you could do anything with a camera that the eye could do or the imagination could do...I didn't know there were things you couldn't do, so anything I could think up in my dreams I attempted to photograph."

He needed someone to teach him how to use the language of film and, in Hollywood, no-one was more fluent in this language than Gregg Toland. Toland had been the director of photography on John Ford's *The Grapes Of Wrath* and *The Long Voyage Home* and had won an Oscar for his work on the 1939 film of *Wuthering Heights*. Toland was totally dedicated to his craft and believed that a director of photography should be trained in every aspect of filmmaking.

When Hollywood's most celebrated cinematographer approached New York theatre's most celebrated actor/director and asked to work on his film, Welles told him that he didn't know anything about making movies. Toland was still enthusiastic. Like other Hollywood technicians, he saw that working with Welles presented a wonderful opportunity to break away from the creatively restricting methods of experienced directors. He told Welles "I think if you're left alone as much as possible we're going to have a movie that looks different. I'm tired of working with people who know too much about it."

A MOVIE THAT LOOKS DIFFERENT

According to Pauline Kael "Most big-studio movies were made in such a restrictive way that the crews were hostile and bored and the atmosphere was oppressive. The worst aspect of the factory system was that almost everybody worked beneath their capacity. Working on *Kane*, in an atmosphere of freedom, the designers and technicians came forth with ideas they'd been bottling up for years; they were all in on the creative process."

In order to realise Welles' vision of *Citizen Kane*, Toland worked tirelessly with new lenses, different film stocks and unconventional lighting and camera set-ups. Welles had meticulously planned the film in the same way as he used to plan his theatrical productions, but without considering the limitations of the camera. Now Toland ensured that the camera would go wherever it needed to and show whatever Welles wished.

See Further Reading sections on the last pages

DEEP FOCUS

Until Citizen Kane Hollywood films would often follow a formulaic structure, so that in a typical sequence of shots the audience would see a long shot to establish the location, followed by close-ups to show details. In order for objects in the foreground of the film to be in sharp focus it was accepted that objects in the background would be out of focus. The lighting would be a conventional mix of diffused lighting and soft focus and studio sets would be built without ceilings because they would hinder the location of cameras and lighting rigs.

Toland believe that to achieve a realistic effect every part of the image on screen had to be in sharp focus. Toland describes his intentions: Where the idea is to show an actor reading something, we don't show a close-up of the actor and then follow it with a cut to the reading matter 'insert'. We simply compose the shot with the actor's head on one side of the frame and the reading matter on the other. In one such case in the filming of Citizen Kane the actor's head was less than sixteen inches from the lens, the reading matter was about three feet away, and a group of men in the background were twelve to eighteen feet away. Yet all three components of this scene - actor in foreground, reading matter, and group - are sharp and clear to the audience." He was striving for, as he put it, "that illusion of roundness which - fully as important as depth of definition - is a necessity in conveying the illusion of three-dimensional reality in our two-dimensional pictures."

Toland used specially coated wide-angle lenses, super-speed film and powerful arc lights to increase the depth of field on screen. Deep-focus photography, as it was known, was not new to Hollywood cinema, but it was infrequently employed. Toland made it an integral element in the language of film through its use in Citizen Kane.

He was able to give an audience the illusion of perspective so that they could see all that there was to see in a single shot, without any editing to draw attention to details in a composition through closeups. In theory this meant that the audience was free to select what they concentrated upon in Citizen Kane's elaborate compositions. This 'filmic democracy' was another illusion for, though he largely avoids using close-ups in Citizen Kane, it's usually clear what Welles intends the audience to notice.

Task

Watch again the sequence in which Thatcher visits the Kanes to tell them of their son's good fortune. Grim-faced Mrs Kane and lawyer Thatcher dominate the scene, apparently, since they are the large figures in the foreground whilst Mr Kane hovers weakly to one side. But centre left of the screen is a light square, the window, through which we can see the young Kane playing happily in the snow and it is he, the smallest figure on the screen, who is, paradoxically, the most important character in the shot since all three characters are discussing his future. As the snow obscures him, his cries are ignored and eventually Mr Kane shuts the window on him. We witness Kane's happiness vanish in front of us, as we hear how his life will be changed forever.

Task

Imagine that Welles was unable to use deep-focus photography. Storyboard the above 'inheritance' sequence, this time making use of close-ups.

Task

Elsewhere in Citizen Kane Welles uses this 'frame within a frame' technique to reverse our initial impression of the importance of characters in relation to their surroundings. Now watch the sequence in which Kane delivers his speech about protecting ordinary people, whilst being watched by Jim Gettys. What effects are achieved here by the positioning of the characters?

Kane, in particular, is frequently shot from a low angle in order to make him appear larger and more powerful. To facilitate Toland's lighting and camera set-ups, holes were cut in the floors of the sets of Citizen Kane and ceilings were constructed on sets (sometimes of muslin so that sound and light could pass through them) to heighten reality or provide reflective surfaces.

Toland and Welles also made a virtue out of their lack of resources. As well as utilising many of RKO's existing sets, they concealed their lack of proper sets and props by shooting from unusual angles and casting shadows over areas which, in reality, were not there or were only partly constructed. During the editing Welles continually experimented with post-production techniques to make up for economies on the set.

THE OPTICAL PRINTER

Linwood Dunn was assigned by RKO to work on the film's optical effects. He introduced Welles to the optical printer, a device used to duplicate prints of a film. An optical printer is a vital post-production tool since it enables a filmmaker to manipulate the image within the frame, adjust the contrast of the film and add dissolves, wipes, matte shots and a whole range of other optical effects. It could also enlarge the image, bringing the viewer closer to it than the camera could have done. Welles used the optical printer "like a paint brush" claims Dunn. But Welles often demanded a great deal of Dunn. For example, in the Thatcher Library, Welles wanted to pan down the statue of Thatcher - even though they had no actual statue. "So I had a statue made, about two feet high. I made a straight shot of that and then on the optical printer I made a motorised pan down from it and then a pan from the scene of the girl and then matched it with a travelling split screen."

Dunn also talks about the famous shot where Susan is on stage and the camera travels up to the top of the theatre: "Welles said 'I want more travel; I want to go way, way up there'. So we built a miniature and made a split screen and panned onto the miniature and then off the miniature up to the scene above and fitted it in between."

Task

It is worth looking at this vertical travelling shot again in order to see if you can detect where the audience is watching a straight shot and where Welles has panned onto a miniature. Why do you think Welles decided that this scene required 'more travel'?

Many other 'tricks' were used in the film, perhaps the most celebrated being the swooping shot over the roof of the El Rancho nightclub which was achieved through a combination of complicated crane movements, flyaway scenery and optical effects concluded by a dissolve, disguised by a flash of lightning, which takes us straight through a skylight and into the club, which was an old RKO standing set.

Task

This sequence is repeated later in the film. What is different about the second sequence? What function does the repetition of this sequence serve in the film's structure?

LIGHT

Welles manipulated light with tremendous skill, and, though legend has it that Toland went round quietly after Welles and adjusted his set-ups, many of Welles' theatre designs for his 1936 *Macbeth* found their way into *Citizen Kane*, notably the lighting of the Thatcher Library, with its parallel bars of vertical light, and the side lighting in the Inquirers office which casts long gloomy shadows emphasising the depressing mood in the office after Kane's election defeat. Shadows were also used to frame characters so that, for example, only Leland is visible in the audience for Kane's political rally; the rest of the crowd are obscured by shadows.

TESTS

By the time RKO had given Welles the go-ahead to start filming *Kane* he had already completed several parts of the film under the pretence of shooting tests. Ralph Hoge, who was the grip (in charge of props) on Toland's camera team supplies an account of one of these tests, the scene in the projection room: "This was one of their projection rooms in the studio - we didn't build a set or anything. We left the film out of the projection machine and we cranked it at 48 frames per second- that's in camera so therefore you get the flickers of the light coming through... RKO management thought it was a test and in reality it was for the picture and was in the picture." This was how the scene was described in the second revised final shooting script: 'During this scene, nobody's face is really seen. Sections of their bodies are picked out by a table light, a silhouette is thrown onto the screen and their faces and their bodies are themselves thrown into silhouette against the brilliant slanting rays of light from the projection booth.'

Task

Look at this sequence again. What is its principal function in terms of the film's narrative? What effect do you think it has, coming directly after the newsreel?

MAKE-UP

Welles found Maurice Seiderman sweeping up hair in RKO's make-up department and was impressed by his claim that he could do what Welles needed for the character of Kane - age him from twenty-five to seventy in front of the cameras. Seiderman took an impression of Welles' head and worked on a variety of different types of make-up on this 'life mask'.

SOUND

During his time in radio, Welles had experimented with overlapping dialogue, different sound perspectives and a variety of other recording techniques. The sound engineers were delighted to discover that Welles and his team (nearly all radio veterans) cared about the sound of Citizen Kane and they seized the opportunity to show Welles what they could do. Welles uses sound to shock his audience throughout the film. After the slow camera movements and sinister music of the opening sequence at Xanadu, the sudden chord as the light is extinguished, is followed by the startlingly brash, loud music and opening announcement of the "News On The March" sequence. This jerks the audience to attention, much as the screeching parakeet that signals Susan's leaving of Kane both shocks the audience and prepares them for the dramatic wrecking of Susan's room.

Task

Watch the final sequence in Citizen Kane immediately before the burning of Rosebud where the reporters roam through Xanadu. What example(s) of Welles' use of sound to move from one shot to another can you find in this sequence?

Task

It is worth watching at least one section of the film with the sound turned off and then listening to the soundtrack with the picture off. The scene in Kane's tent as he quarrels with Susan has a remarkable soundtrack which contributes to the mood of this scene, quite as effectively as the visuals do. The huge shape of Kane casts menacing shadows over Susan but what are those extraordinary cries in the background?

Besides these 'shock' sound effects, Welles frequently uses 'lightning mixes', scenes linked by the soundtrack rather than by the images. For example, Thatcher wishes the young Kane a falsely cheerful "A Merry Christmas" but his greeting is concluded with an angry "and a prosperous New Year" addressed to Kane as a twenty-four year old. In a similar fashion, Kane's applause of Susan's parlour-room piano playing is linked to the applause of a small crowd for Leland's campaign speech for Kane's 1916 bid for governorship. This, in turn, leads to a scene with Kane addressing a much larger meeting.

Task

Look at this last sequence again. What narrative function does this piece of dramatic continuity fulfil?

EFFECTS

Welles frequently achieves his transition from one shot to another through dissolves. This often has the effect of concealing an absence of props or sets on the screen through a rich layering of different images. This layering was also created through using double exposures. A foreground figure would be filmed, the film would be re-threaded and the background figures would then be shot onto the same piece of film.

A number of the deep-focus effects that Toland had struggled to create in Citizen Kane were special effects created with the optical printer, rather than the products of wide-angle lenses and fast film. Many of the Xanadu shots were mattes - effectively complex double-exposure shots. Up to 50% of the footage in Citizen Kane was modified by Welles and Linwood Dunn on the optical printer -although several fade-ins and fade-outs, which could have been created with the optical printer, were brought about through simply dimming the lights on the set!

Task

The film opens with a series of forward tracking-shots, each of which dissolves into the next. Look at the opening of the film again and see how, through a series of dissolves and matte effects, Welles establishes Xanadu's atmosphere. What do we learn about Kane and his empire from the opening sequence? How does this sequence relate to the rest of the film?

Dissolves, because they may take several seconds to achieve, tend to slow down the pace of the film. In several sequences Welles speeds up the pace of the film, often when he wishes, as in Thatcher's Christmas speech, to rapidly jump across the years. The most famous example of this is the breakfast table sequence in which we observe, through six scenes linked by whip wipes', the decline of Kane's first marriage.

Task

Look at this sequence again. What do we learn from what we see, as well as what we hear, about the relationship between Kane and Emily? A dissolve permits two images to remain briefly on the screen at the same time but a wipe appears to obliterate the preceding image. Why do you think Welles selected wipes as a method of transition from one scene to the next in the breakfast table sequence?

MUSIC

Bernard Herrmann, another colleague from Welles' radio days, wrote Citizen Kane's complex musical score. He worked alongside Welles on the film, composing as the film was shot and cut, and Welles would often edit the film to **fit** the rhythm or length of Herrmann's compositions. Herrmann plundered RKO's musical archives and composed or adapted music to **fit** the mood of each sequence. For example, the background music whilst Thompson reads the Thatcher papers is reminiscent of the slow unrelenting tick of a clock.

Task

Look at the sequence in which Susan attempts suicide. How does Herrmann's music contribute to this scene?

ROSEBUD

In much of the film the audience sees the action over the left shoulder of the almost faceless investigating journalist Thompson. The intention was that Thompson was to be 'the enquirer of the audience' but many people suspected that the reporter was concealing his features for some complex reason - perhaps he was Rosebud? The revelation at the end of the film that Rosebud was young Charles Kane's sledge was Mankiewicz's idea, though it's worth mentioning that at Todd. Welles' old high school,

senior boys were always given a sledge which they kept as long as they attended the school. Welles dismissed the Rosebud device as “Dime store Freud”. Many critics have shared the view that Rosebud is merely a ‘McGuffin’, a term coined by Alfred Hitchcock to describe something (a case of mistaken identity or a missing/stolen item of value, for example) that initiates the action of the film but is essentially of little consequence once the plot is underway.

Task

Does the revelation that Rosebud is Kane's sledge actually illuminate Kane's character in any way? How does Welles hint at Rosebud's identity in the film? How satisfactory do you find the film's conclusion?

KANE IS HEARST?

Citizen Kane was scheduled to open on February 14, 1941 but word got out that Citizen Kane was an attack on the very influential newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst and the Hearst empire swung into action. The premi~re was cancelled. Despite vigorous denials by Welles, RKO studios found themselves threatened with litigation and many film theatres were reluctant to book Schaefer's new film.

Studio boss and friend of Hearst, Louis B. Mayer, offered to buy the film from Schaefer. He countered this offer by threatening a conspiracy suit against the major theatre chains, which were mostly owned by the big Hollywood studios, anxious not to offend the still-influential Hearst press. Schaefer claimed that the other studios had plotted to prevent Citizen Kane from gaining a showing and his threat of litigation proved more terrifying than some bad reviews from Hearst-owned papers. Mayer withdrew his offer and the theatre chains reluctantly agreed to a few showings of Citizen Kane.

Though no Hearst paper would mention Citizen Kane, Time magazine printed a favourable article and Newsweek told the public to demand that their local film theatres show Citizen Kane.

RELEASED

Eager to harass Welles in any way, the Hearst press attacked one of Welles' radio broadcasts as a piece of communist propaganda, but the ensuing publicity aroused such interest in Welles and his film that RKO decided to realise their investment in the young genius and released *Citizen Kane* at the beginning of May 1941.

The poster for the film which you can see on the front of this guide claimed simply "It's Terrific". RKO tried a wide variety of tactics to market *Citizen Kane*. They played up its controversial nature:

"The Film That Hit The Front Pages From Coast To Coast." They tried the romantic angle: "The love story that 'dared not be made.' Wife No. 1: society belle. He gave her everything but the one thing she wanted. Wife No. 2: shop girl. She scoffed at his \$60,000,000 - broke his heart." They went for the mystery element: "What was the fatal weakness of the world's richest man'?"

Task

Design two posters to market *Citizen Kane*, each of them concentrating upon what you see as being important aspects of the film.

Task

Recently a new print of *The Big Sleep* was released with a poster describing it as "Legendary" and featuring, as well as a portrait of the stars, Bogart and Bacall, a selection of favourable reviews. How would you go about marketing a re-release of *Citizen Kane*? Design a new poster and any supplementary promotional material - badges, T-shirt, baseball caps, etc. - to market *Citizen Kane*.

Task

Films as diverse as *Blow Up*, *Farewell My Lovely*, *Mutiny On The Bounty* and *The Getaway* have been remade. Many more films are remakes in all but name. Write a letter to a film company suggesting that *Citizen Kane* be remade - perhaps with a new title. In the letter you should give suggestions for casting, directing and screenplay writing, where possible. You should offer sound reasons - probably economic ones - to justify remaking a 'classic' movie. You may also wish to include proposals for marketing the remake.

THE VERDICT

Citizen Kane received some astoundingly adulatory reviews but some reviewers, aware of the ballyhoo which surrounded the film, sounded a note of caution: "...we are bound to conclude that this picture is not truly great, for its theme is basically vague and its significance depends on circumstances" stated Bosley Crowther, in The New York Times, two days after he had acclaimed the film as "the most sensational film ever made."

Despite all their publicity RKO were still hindered by the hostility of the Hearst organisation. Many theatres simply refused to run the film; some paid the rental for the film and then did not show it. Regional exhibitors had little success with Citizen Kane, though in big cities the film ran for a while, did good business - but then interest trailed away.

The film received Oscar nominations for Best Actor, Best Director and Best Picture but succeeded in winning only the Best Original Screenplay award which must have annoyed Welles since he had already tried to have Mankiewicz's name removed from the credits for Kane and now he had to share his only award.

THE END

By the end of 1941 Citizen Kane had closed everywhere and it was to be many years before it would ever be seen again in the cinema. Even its fiftieth anniversary release failed to make a profit. Yet it is the beginning of this film that the BBC have used to introduce films shown in their celebration of 100 Years of Cinema season. The dying Kane now murmurs "One hundred" as the glass globe drops from his hands to shatter on colourised steps.

In Francois Truffaut's Day For Night the child in the director's symbolic dream struggles to seize stills of Citizen Kane from a barred cinema foyer. Citizen Kane's reputation is still zealously guarded by readers of Sight and Sound and, in 1982, Steven Spielberg, whose Raiders of the Lost Ark contains a direct homage to Citizen Kane in its closing reel, paid \$60,500 for the original Rosebud. Directors as diverse as Martin Scorsese, Ridley Scott, John Schlesinger, Alexander MacKendrick and Fred Zinnemann have referred to the film's importance and its influence on their work.

When we watch Citizen Kane for the first time we may feel that we have seen it all before - and, of course, we have. For the past fifty or so years directors have been copying, parodying, emulating, imitating and sometimes celebrating this film. In

Citizen Kane narrative, characterisation, composition, lighting, soundtrack and mood are combined with consummate skill. The film's influence on the creative artists and technicians of the cinema industry cannot be overestimated and it is doubtful if we will ever again be fortunate enough to see a work for the cinema in which the look of the film and its content are so successfully blended.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESSAY QUESTIONS

1 "Many modern films demand that we marvel at their special effects. It is a mark of the brilliance of Citizen Kane that though the film is crammed with optical effects we are rarely aware of them." To what extent do you agree with this statement?

2 "I don't think there's a genuine emotion in the film and there's certainly not a genuine emotional exchange in it." How much do you agree with Ken Loach's opinion of Citizen Kane?

3 Francois Truffaut said that Citizen Kane is the film that "probably started the largest number of filmmakers on their careers." What aspects of Citizen Kane do you think would be attractive to an aspiring filmmaker?

4 Some critics feel Citizen Kane succeeds too well, for in completely integrating the form and content, they believe that Welles has created a film as empty and heartless as its central character. Do you feel that this is a valid criticism of the film?

5 Citizen Kane's impact on the 'look' of films in the 1940's can be particularly observed in the deep shadows and expressionist lighting of Hollywood's 'film noir'. Compare and contrast a sequence from a 'noir movie with a sequence from Kane.

6 Robert Skelton says of Kane "It enabled the spectator not only to look at a make-believe world, but to see once again, so to speak, the frame as a constructed image: to take delight not only from stories, but from the virtuosity and splendour of cinematic art." Discuss some of the ways in

which Citizen Kane makes us aware of "the frame as a constructed image."

See Further Reading section below

SUGGESTED FURTHER VIEWING

The Polygram Fiftieth Anniversary video release of Citizen Kane.

Contains a brief documentary about the film which contains comments from Robert Wise, Ruth Warrick, Martin Scorsese, Roger Corman, Brian De Palma, Richard Edlund and others

The Power And The Glory (1935), directed by William Howard.

It is interesting only as a comparison to Citizen Kane.

Mad Love (1935), directed by Dmitri Tomkin, director of photography Gregg Toland.

Worth watching for Toland's photography and for Peter Lorre's make-up.

Stagecoach (1940), directed by John Ford. *The definitive Western.*

Kitty Foyle (1940), directed by Victor Saville.

Uses a glass glove snow scene as a memory trigger just as Kane does.

The Long Voyage Home (1940), directed by John Ford, director of photography Gregg Toland.

Makes an excellent comparison with Kane, particularly regarding Toland's use of expressionist lighting and deep-focus photography.

The Lady In The Lake (1946), directed by and starring Robert Montgomery.

Rashomon (1955), directed by Akira Kurosawa.

Four different accounts are given of a violent incident...but the biggest liar is the director

Ashes and Diamonds (1958), **Man Of Marble** (1978), both directed by Andrzej Wajda.

These films make considerable use of deep-focus and long-take cinematography

Day For Night (La Nuit Americaine) (1973), directed by Francois Truffaut.

FURTHER READING

Orson Welles - The Road To Xanadu, Simon Callow (Jonathan Cape, 1955).

Focus On Citizen Kane, edited by Ronald Gottesman (Prentice Hall, 1971).
Contains critical essays on the film as well as articles and interviews with, among others, Welles, Toland and Herrmann.

The Citizen Kane Book, Pauline Kael (Atlantic-Little, 1971).

I Broke The Rules in Citizen Kane, Gregg Toland (Popular Photography 8, June 1941).

City Of Nets, Otto Friedrich (Headline, 1986).

The Cinema Book, edited by Pam Cook (BFI, 1985).

Film - An International History of The Medium, Robert Sklar (Thames & Hudson, 1993).

The Hollywood Story, Joel W. Finer (Mandarin, 1988).

How To Read A Film, James Monaco (OUP, 1977).

Pat Hobby and Orson Welles, short story by [K Scott Fitzgerald, The Pat Hobby Stories (Penguin, 1967).

Deals in part with Welles' arrival in Hollywood. Fitzgerald died before Kane was completed.