

## THE SCHOOL OF ROCK (2003)

“Those who can’t do, teach.”

-- George Bernard Shaw

“Those who cannot teach, teach gym.”

--Woody Allen

### Major Credits:

Director: Richard Linklater

Screenplay: Mike White

Cast: Jack Black (Dewey Finn); Joan Cuzack (Rosalie); Mike White (Ned Schneebly)

### Background:

Austin-based Richard Linklater had already established himself as one of America’s most celebrated independent directors with an astonishing variety of low-budget films, including *Slacker* (1991), *Dazed and Confused* (1993), *Before Sunrise* (1995), and the animated feature *Waking Life* (2001), all of which are worthy of study. *School of Rock* clearly marks his effort to enter the Hollywood mainstream with a commercial hit; indeed, the film earned strong reviews and extraordinary financial success, particularly in DVD/VCR format. Certainly much credit for this success should be shared by Jack Black, who was an emerging comic star after his performances in *High Fidelity* (2000) and *Shallow Hal* (2001), and screenwriter Mike White, who also plays Ned. The film follows the time-honored formula of the let’s-put-on-a-show musical that dates back as far as the Judy Garland/Mickey Rooney MGM classic, *Strike Up the Band* (1940) and includes such recent movies as *The Full Monty*, *The Commitments*, and *Sister Act*. *School of Rock* also draws upon the “inspiring teacher” model (*Dead Poet’s Society*), the school-turned-upside-down theme (*Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*) and the cute-kids-playing-together plot (*The Bad News Bears*). It remains a perfect example of Hollywood “packaging,” appealing equally to youngsters and parents, rebels and conservatives.

### Cinematic Qualities:

1. acting: Jack Black’s performance speaks (or rather, riffs) for itself—he is called upon to appear in nearly every scene and “carries” the movie—but pay attention to Joan Cusack’s amusing supporting role. She redeems what could have been (like Ned’s bitchy girlfriend) a one-dimensional stick figure.
2. camera movement: the tracking shot that opens the film serves to energize the band’s lackluster performance and is employed throughout to follow Dewey’s frenetic actions. Note, too, the slow track out during Dewey’s a capella classroom demonstration that positions the spectator among the students.
3. montage: the “bridge” scene in the middle of the film incorporates rock history through stills and video clips juxtaposed with the band’s rehearsals to encapsulate an intense period of preparation. The rapid flow of images in this montage, of course, simulates the editing techniques of music videos and returns in the climactic Battle of the Bands performance.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Given its reliance on established formulas and a predictable plot, how does *School of Rock* transcend the limits of genre? Are there any original elements to the film?
2. What is the significance of the protagonist's name, Dewey Finn?
3. What is the ultimate ideological position of the film? Does it confirm the subversive potential of the parodic Pledge of Allegiance to Rock n Roll and the music's avowed intention to "stick it to The Man"?
4. What is the function of the closing credits sequence? How does it differ from the narrative style of the feature, and how does it extend the movie's central themes?