**Film Studies yr1** – *Bonnie and Clyde* context research task

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| **Area of historical context** | **Research findings** | **Examples from *Bonnie and Clyde* – how are your research findings reflected in the film, in the film’s themes?** |
| A  Social context:  Look at relevant dominant **attitudes** and **beliefs** in American society- include debates around, age, gender and ethnicity.  (Hippie movement, sexual revolution, civil rights, youth culture…) | The **hippie movement** was a **youth culture** movement that happened in the mid-60s. Known as the **counterculture**, youngsters moved away from traditional routes post-high school such as getting a 9 – 5 job, getting married and starting a family. The hippie mantra was **peace and love**. With the invention of the **birth control pill** and young peoples’ relaxed ideas about **drugs**, 1967 was dubbed the **summer of love**. The watershed moment of the hippie movement was the **Woodstock** music festival in 1969.  Along side this was the rise of **second wave feminism**. The aim being to increase more equality for women across the western world.  The **civil rights** movement started in approximately the mid-50s and ended in the late 60s. The goal was securing equal rights for African Americans,that white Americans already enjoyed. | *Bonnie and Clyde* was made during the year of the **summer of love**. Although not overt in its portrayal of sex, the two protagonists have a complex relationship. Bonnie’s overt sexuality juxtaposes nicely with Clyde’s impotence.  C.W. Moss’s dad refers to Bonnie and Clyde as a couple of kids and takes umbrage with his son’s tattoo which directly references **peace and love**.  Bonnie can be seen as a **feminist icon** with her overt sexuality and occasional androgynous look (taking the cigar and gun from Clyde). She is very much of equal footing as Clyde in the relationship.  Although not overt in its content, Bonnie and Clyde certainly share an affinity with the commonman, taking on a Robinhood type persona. This also refers to their rare interaction with an **African American character** when we see Clyde let the farmer shoot the bank sign and who then lets his colleague, the sharecropper join in. |
| B  Cultural context:  Includes a sense of what **fashion** and music were popular at the time.  Other **films** and **filmmakers** that influenced the style of the film.  (European arthouse, French New Wave…) | The 60s was a watershed moment for **culture** across the western world, with new ideas about **fashion**, **music** and **art** being embraced. The invention of the mini skirt allowed for a much more overt fashion statement about women’s bodies.  **Music** became much more rebellious and experimental. Bands and artists enjoyed rising popularity such as- The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan.  **European cinema** flourished in the post war years. Prominent movements include- Italian Neo Realism, Poetic Realism, British Free Cinema Movement and The French New Wave.  The French New Wave (La Nouvelle Vague) had a distinct style of filmmaking- on location, handheld camera, jump cut editing and original narrative pacing. | Although set in the 1930s, the film had an effect on **women’s fashion**. Bonnie’s look and style was championed by women- her silk scarf and beret became popular in the late 60s.  Although a technique not utilised by director Arthur Penn, rock music was becoming a popular way to score important scenes. Both *The Graduate* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969) put this notion to good use. The closest the film gets to **popular music** is the anachronistic use of the blue-grass country song Foggy Mountain Breakdown during chases sequences.  **La nouvelle vague**, particularly the early films by Francois Truffaut and Jean Luc Godard were influential to the writers and the director of *Bonnie and Clyde*. The film’s editing style, narrative structure and overall tone were attributed to this movement. Moreover, both Truffaut and Godard were approached to originally direct *Bonnie and Clyde*. Truffaut became an adviser to an early draft of the screenplay. |

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| C  Political context:  An exploration of the impact of important American **historical** **events** at the time.  (Vietnam war, JFK assassination…) | The **Vietnam war** was a military conflict between America and Vietnam that lasted two decades, with over 55,000 American fatalities. Ending with America’s withdrawal in 1975. The war was met with protest and rebellion by America’s youth and liberal Americans. The Vietnam war is said to be the first televised war.  **John F. Kennedy** the 35th **US president was assassinated** in 1963. A popular figure, and held up as a liberal icon, the shocking moment was captured by an onlooker with a home video film camera. | The anti-establishment themes of *Bonnie and* *Clyde* are directly related to the **political unrest** in America at the time the film was made. The film follows the outlaws, rather than the law enforcement officers to highlight this point.  The **bloody violence** of Bonnie and Clyde is said to have been replicating the violence that was common-place on American television during the Vietnam war. For example, the graphic shooting of an unarmed man (the bank teller).  Likewise, the brutal **violence at the end** of the film is a direct reference to the JFK assassination that sent shockwaves through America back in 1963. Particularly a flap of Clyde’s skull comes off during the bullet onslaught. A similar sight can be seen on the slowed down footage of Kennedy’s death. |
| D  Institutional context:  Who **produced**, wrote and **directed** the film. Institutional frameworks were they work under. Funding, **technology** and **classification** restriction.  (Breakdown of the studio system, New Hollywood, new ratings system…) | **Post 1954** (the Paramount decree) **Hollywood studios** were told to **break up their oligopoly** hold over the rest of the industry. The industry was in meltdown, having experienced expensive flops and losing the habit audience (families and teenagers). The studios gambled on **young university educated directors** to make modestly budgeted films to appeal to the youth market.  The film was rated by the **Production Code**, but the Code was **no longer being adhered to** by filmmakers, as it had become too old fashioned and outdated in comparison to its European counterpart’s rating systems. It was soon to be replaced by the MPAA (still in existence to this day). | The **film was a gamble** for **Warner Bros**.- on a young actor Warren Beatty and a smart but untested director with a background in TV and theatre. The film had a middle to low budget of $2.5 million. It was mainly shot on location in Texas, to avoid interference from the studio.  The films **graphic depiction of sex and violence** is said to be the final nail in the coffin of the production code. Bonnie’s nudity and sexual frankness. The shooting in the face of an unarmed man and the bloodthirsty finale too. |

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| E  Film’s setting context:  An exploration of time in which the film was set. **1930s**.  (Wall Street Crash, The Great Economic Depression, Dust Bowl America…) | The film is set around **1934**, during the **Great Economic Depression** that started with the **Wall Street crash** of 1929, which slowly spread across America and eventually much of the rest of the world. The depression caused massive **displacement across America,** with many families leaving their homes looking for any work available. | The events of the **Great Depression** clearly had an effect on the overall look of the film. A realist depiction of 1930s. We see many examples of homes being foreclosed and people being displaced.  Famous pictures by prominent photographers of the era- Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans were used by the art direction team to try to create a sense of authenticity. |