

CLUELESS

RUNNING SHEET and NOTES for opening 10 minutes

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The following notes are on the opening 10 minutes of the film. Beside each 'time' indicator is a description of the shot. The 'boxed' or comments in bold are my ideas on the shot, possible readings or discussion points for students to consider and some connections to Austen's *Emma*.

0.0.0 - Paramount Pictures logo; Song over → leads to credits

Note colours of credits – bright, garish, kids' colours? comment? sense of fun, brightness, happy = carefree

Montage of shots with song "Kids in America" – car driving/jeep; shopping; dancing; around the pool; ice-cream etc

But these aren't just any American kids. Song suggests "average" = all kids, but the visuals contradict this. Film shows a particular group. Their lifestyle and position are clearly defined by the visual montage; note camera angles and pace of this sequence – hand held camera moves in carefree style depicting their fun and frivolity; pace of life and movement; careening around in jeep, at parties, shopping. High energy, music dominates soundscape. Unusual camera angles and movement but Cher visually highlighted; overheads and close-ups → movement of car + their pace of life → carefree, fun, money (\$)

0.00.38 Voiceover (Cher) addresses audience about what we think we might be seeing = a Noxema commercial. And goes on to declare she is a normal teenager.

Positions viewer? And begins the long list of brand names referred to in the film that reinforce their interests, lifestyle, money etc. = consumer society. Irony of voiceover – Cher trying to convince the viewer she is a normal teenager but visuals contradict this - Her "normal" life → computer → selection of clothes Note song – *Fashion Girl* used to parody her statement. (Is this Heckerling's first authorial comment?) Just as Emma is introduced as having very little in her life to distress or vex her so too is Cher presented this way to the audience.

0.01.10 Voiceover – Cher introduces her father = a litigator = "scariest kind of lawyer" – he gets paid for arguing; even servants afraid of him.

Back shot of him on screen – his faceless figure "fills" the frame – he needs to open double doors at top of staircase to get through – gives him "presence" both in Cher's life and for the viewer: he dominates the screen = his position and

importance as he descends the stairs – visual joke as maid Lucy runs from him which is reinforced in later dinner scene as she hesitantly places the food down before him. Compare/contrast with Mr Woodhouse – different personalities but both respected men, powerful positions (one inherited, one “self made”?) Note visual images of house = \$ → staircase, servants, clothes, kitchen appliances, size and space. Note also colours in house – expanse of white with some primary colours in paintings (compare this later to the “traditional” and solid wood dominated design of Mel’s office.)

Cher → looking after father: orange juice, Vitamin C. Cher suggests they visit her grandparents in Malibu or “lowlifes” as Mel calls his parents. Josh coming to visit them. Cher’s negative, questioning reaction. But this shot reinforces Mr Horowitz’s relationship with Josh.

Begins image of Cher looking after father’s health – reinforced in later scenes as she is always concerned about his diet and food (c.f. Emma and Mr Woodhouse) N.B. important exposition here – Josh is a STEP brother – Mel was hardly married to his mother. His “relationship” as a step brother, no blood relation to Cher is clarified/repeated constantly in film – no “incestuous” ideas can be justified later.

0.01.56 – learning to drive/ shots of her in jeep on her own. Cher lists the car’s attributes → something to learn on -hasn’t got her licence yet!! Hits potplant on sidewalk.

Values being reinforced? Father only removes this privilege when she gets a ticket.

Car/licence = rite of passage + equates to the “walking” they do in *Emma*. Gives them mobility in their world.

Speed of jeep – long shot of jeep’s burst up street – exaggerated (smoke, noise, speed) suggests Cher’s recklessness, carelessness, believes she is in control despite evidence to the contrary?

Shots of driving through Beverley Hills street– wide streets, palm trees–houses - all depict \$. Viewer familiarity – plus at the time of film release popularity of tv show *Beverley Hills 90210* = intertextuality?

Reinforces for reader that these are not just any “Kids in America”. To Cher and Dionne Beverley Hills is the centre of their world – and therefore the world itself! Note later scenes when we are reminded of how parochial their world actually is (freeway scene, needing street directory to get to party) Compare to *Emma* and her conception of Highbury. Conflation between world and “village” in *Emma* reflected in central concept of Beverley Hills as a village inhabited by teenagers who think that it is the centre of the world.

0.2.10 - Picks up Dionne – viewer told of what they have in common/ their friendship reinforced. Both know what it’s like for people to be jealous of them/ fashion/ both named after famous singers etc. In car together. Dionne comments on her driving.

Note shots of Dionne’s house as she comes out = \$ - visual shot of house overflows the frame; size and dominance suggested plus traditional style of house (“classic”

**English imitation? compare to Cher's later comment about her "classic" columns?) - establishing their mutual, common "environment"/"world" – on the same social level – namesakes suggest a similar lineage (famous singers) – satire?? (plus is Heckerling's deliberate casting of an African America character meant to portray fluidity of class/race in this setting/social context?)
Cher pauses but doesn't stop at stop sign = makes her own rules?**

0.2.40 At school. Murray paging Dionne on phone (**lifestyles and values? Teen flick – communications**)- discuss hair piece found in his car – Dionne and Murray's relationship established here.
Cher questions why she's going out with a highschool boy

**Note visual shots of responses to Cher by boys as she walks up path. Note also how many shots of Cher at school show her walking down a path and in a dominant or central position → composition of frames = Cher in centre, leadership position – background of shots shows people responding to her presence – making way for her. Also often a sense of space surrounding her in these shots and others where it is crowded (see party scene when she dances with Tai – crowded room yet she stands out and has space around her)
Scene also establishes her views on dating, love and men – her values?**

0.3.50 Lesson with Mr Hall on oppressed people – debate – her final comment about RSVP on Statue of Liberty.

**As she talks camera pans members of the class and their features → nose jobs, makeup, using mobile phones = their lifestyle, values
+ disinterest in class or debate (ironical given their enthusiastic applause for Cher at end? – does this establish her position in the class for the viewer – well received regardless of what she says or does?)**

0. 4.57 Amber criticises Cher's argument.

**Long shot of class – reading newspaper/ doing nails.
What does this suggest? Disinterest in the class or not interested in criticism of Cher? Is Amber her only critic? Note – Travis with skateboard and his ideas on "tolerance" (foreshadowing? irony?)**

0.5.50 – Report cards received. References to Christian (his absences → joint custody) Cher upset with her grade – calls Dionne on mobile to discuss their results and the harshness of Mr Hall

**Christian as parallel to Frank Churchill introduced/ Frank is discussed prior to reader "meeting" him - his letter etc. – same with Christian.
Cher seen in this scene as authoritative, knowing. SHE is informing the teacher about a student. Image of her knowing what's going on = NOT then totally clueless?**

0.6.45 Cher and Dionne meet in hall while talking to each other on mobiles.

Note how this shot is staged for effect – medium shot of Cher on phone and Dionne enters from side of frame and joins her.
Contemporary values/mobile phones – reinforces teen flick + communication methods (link back to letters etc in *Emma*)

0.6.50 Cher's house and voiceover - "classic" columns on house – date all the way back to 1972! – Cher's mother's portrait → died when Cher a baby – fluke accident during routine liposuction - Speaks to portrait about her 98 in geometry etc.

Irony? satire? Cher's own concept of "classic" – uses this term in later scenes. Beverley Hills' standards/values = money? Lifestyle = consumerism and image. Reinforced by dominant position of her mother's portrait in house – bright colours of portrait in 'white' house used to highlight it; reference to her as a Betty → ideals of beauty, \$ → superficial values → preoccupation with beauty and appearance (liposuction) - developed through idea of "makeovers"

0.7.10 "Yuk" comment about music of the university station – goes out to kitchen where Josh is at fridge. Josh's comment "Who's watching the Galleria?" Banter between them → "father", "dad" - "he's not your dad"; girls at NYU → they aren't particular – Josh changes channels – cartoons to news/war documentary = need to know what's going on in the world – v- Cher knowing how to be cool.

This scene sets up relationship between them – their banter shows their age difference, interest levels and their view of each other – the gulf between them – c.f. Emma and Knightley + Knightley's presence/position in the Woodhouse's home/family. Sets up later scene when Cher not watching cartoons.

0.8.30 Father calls them in to dinner. Thinks Josh has grown/have discussed him doing corporate law. Dinner table banter; Cher believes she "has direction" - Josh's response = "yeah, towards the mall". Discuss Cher's report card and her "starting point for negotiations" - phone rings and all three pick up their mobiles. Josh and Cher trade insults – "brown noser" "space cadet" – Cher has got teachers to change grades before

Scene shows Mel Horowitz nurturing Josh/ interested in him – familiar and comfortable with Josh. cf Knightley and Mr Woodhouse. Plus develops Josh and Cher's friendly teasing. Also comfortable with each other.
Note Josh's T-shirt = Amnesty – link to later scene where he is reading Nietzsche – his characterisation – caring, philosophical concerns, more worldly and experienced? → different values to Cher
Note composition of the frames in this shot to establish the "family" group – and mise-en-scene of dining room – chandelier hangings at top of frame, candle and table decoration, sense of being waited on etc.
Negotiation of grade/ phones all ringing simultaneously etc suggesting value system/ world they live in – Cher's confidence as she has succeeded previously.

0.9.27 Quick sequences/series of shots showing Cher “negotiating” with her teachers about her grades– P.E. teacher, Miss Geist, Mr Hall – latter unreasonable so Cher needs to regroup her strength at the mall. She felt “impotent and out of control”.

These scenes show Cher’s capabilities - She knows the women teachers weaknesses/ vulnerabilities/ interests – and works on them. Astute in her “negotiations” - but male teacher becomes the obstacle. Cher surprised by his resistance and needs to regroup – BUT doesn’t give up! Mall seen as her sanctuary as well as her world of influence and control.

0.10.05 – hits the shopping mall with Dionne – shopping all day while considering how to make Mr Hall “sublimely happy” – he’s single, 47 and thankless, needs a boink fest – shortage of eligible women but Cher hones in on Miss Geist for him. Decides to act.

Shot shows Mr Hall walking down pathway to school – isolated, alone, in the middle of the frame, space around him – walking with purpose but it is professional not personal.
Then camera pans around canteen to reinforce the voiceover comment about eligible women– note how point of view is clearly Cher’s – reinforced when shot shows Snickers and then jumps back to them = Cher’s eyes/view. Camera zooms in when considering Miss Geist then camera tilt close ups show runs in her stockings, lipstick on her teeth, slip always showing with Cher’s comment “this woman is screaming for a makeover”.
Here begins the matchmaking or “makeovers” in the film– note it comes from Cher’s need to change her grades (– motivation important here!)