

Attack the Block (Joe Cornish 2011)
 Knowledge Organiser

Institutional information	
Director:	Joe Cornish
Release:	October 27, 2011
Production company:	Film4, Studio Canal, Big Talk Pictures, UK Film Council
Country of production:	UK/France
Starring:	Jodie Whittaker, Nick Frost, John Boyega, Luke Treadaway
Genres:	Sci-fi; comedy; action; horror.
Other information:	Produced by Edgar Wright, Director of Shaun of the Dead. Joe Cornish's feature film debut.
Award nominations:	BAFTA nominated: outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer

Context:
Set in a South London, 2011.
Idea for film came from Joe Cornish being mugged by a teenage gang in similar setting.
Joe Cornish was a fan of creature features and Sci-Fi films growing up, including Star Wars.
Cornish interviewed various people in youth groups in London in order to find out what kind of weapons they would use if a real alien invasion occurred. He also used these interviews to develop the colloquial language for his characters.
The fictional locations and surrounding areas in the film are named after British sci-fi writers.
Film was released two months after the London riots of 2011. The representation of the working classes in the British Media has always been pejorative, but this event gave rise to iconic images which were used to demonise certain people.
"Hoodie Horror" films such as HARRY BROWN (2009) and ILL MANORS (2012) offer a negative view of a similar setting.

Narrative (The method and means by which you construct the events of a story into a plot)	
Narrative structure:	Linear narrative, three act structure.
Narrative viewpoint:	Teen POV, young adult POV.
Binary oppositions:	Create conflict. Key oppositions are children vs. their parents, teenagers vs. adults and young people, in particular black teenagers and young adults and police oppression/profiling.

Characters	
Moses:	Protagonist: 'Gang' leader. A teenager. Age unknown for most of the film. Criminal as he mugs Sam. Kills the first Alien that lands and as a result is responsible for the alien invasion. Becomes the saviour by the end of the film.
Sam:	Young trainee nurse. Begins films as protagonist. Is mugged on her way home on fireworks night. Resents the young gang who mugged her but comes to work with them for the greater good.
Pest:	One of the gang members who looks up to and takes 'orders' from Moses. Is often the comedic relief in the film and offers audience some insight into life of a teenager by expressing what Moses does or cannot.
Brewis:	Zoology student stoner who comes to the Block to buy drugs. Is very much the 'fish out of water' in the situation.
Hi-Hatz:	Antagonist: feared gang member who runs the Block in terms of crime and drugs. Psychopathic, prone to violence and owner of the weed grown by Ron at the top of the Block.

Film Style		
	Realistic depiction of London	Sci-fi
Lighting	Low-key. Light provided via ambient elements such as lamp posts, fireworks and car headlamps. Whole block is bathed in shadows.	Inside; corridors are generally high-key and well lit, somewhat unnaturally so. Block itself features odd spotlights and bright lights from flats that resemble lights from a spaceship. Blacklights create unusual and unsettling light in the 'weed room'.
Props	Recognisable items for teenagers; BMXs, moped, mobile phones, hoodies and caps. Fireworks and other weapons are 'realistic' in their origin.	Aliens as puppets are especially unsettling and recognisable as a key sci-fi trope. Weapons are 'realistic' but weapons in general key for sci-fi, especially when establishing or creating conflict.
Cinematography	Grey, dull and drab. Very reflective of typical high-rise estates. Colour palette reflects brutalist architecture and the atmosphere of social anxiety. Night-time evokes sense of criminality and hostility.	Unusual colours; bright & luminous blues, UV whites, silver & "blackest black" on the alien 'fur'. Smoke used in corridor to create tension, restrict view but also to resemble key scenes from other sci-fi films. Shots in corridors framed to resemble interior of spaceships; 'weed room' alien in design-pipes etc.
Sound	Local dialect and accents used. Sound effects of bikes, weapons, fireworks reflect recognisable aural soundtrack. Soundtrack utilises elements from hip-hop and grime.	Soundtrack uses elements typical of sci-fi genre, colloquially referred to as 'bleeps and boops' and these become more prominent as narrative involves the aliens more. Alien sound effects not recognisable as natural.

Themes/issues.	
Conflict:	Seen all the way through the film, conflict is key.
Adults vs. teenagers:	This is a development from theme of conflict. Doesn't just refer to conflict however when the gang are seen running home for supplies we see the disconnect between adults and teenagers in a variety of ways. Note how Sam, Ron, Hi-Hatz and Brewis all approach the situation differently to the teenage gang.
Authority:	Police are seen as bullies and people who will not listen. Their authority is undermined by the aliens and their tactics are seen to be unsuccessful compared to the teenagers. Younger people in the Block have no respect for the police and by extension, almost all people older than them.
Invasion:	Whilst the aliens are the most obvious example of 'invasion', this can also be seen via the police 'invading' an area they are not welcome in. Invasion of privacy into their flat is an issue for the young girls.
Consequences:	From the beginning, the film deals with the idea of actions have consequences. The mugging of Sam nearly costs Pest his life when Sam initially refuses to treat him later on. The reckless actions of the teenagers throughout the film, especially Moses, have dire and often fatal consequences.
Redemption:	Moses gains redemption for his life of crime and poor choices. Near the beginning of the film it is established that Moses is a criminal and makes bad choices. We later learn that some of this is due to his need to survival and self-preservation-he appears to be largely alone and in need of support. His reckless actions in killing the alien cause the overall, main invasion and consequently the death of his friends, but his final act and the celebration of him as a hero, serves as a great example of redemption.
Sacrifice:	The most obvious example of sacrifice is of Moses at the end of the film, but we see examples of sacrifice throughout, some of principles others of physical acts.

Links to technology timeline:	
Soundtrack	Featuring a Dolby Surround 7.1 mix, Attack the Block features dialogue, a soundtrack, score and makes wide use of digital sound production.
Colour	Perhaps unsurprisingly, colour is used throughout. Night-time scenes are handled well and some post-production work on the colour grading has been done to create the specific look of the film.
Independent studio production	Not a product of one of the larger film studios .
Widescreen, not 3D	Attack the Block is presented in a widescreen ratio of 2.35:1
Some CGI, but mostly practical effects	Most of the special effects in this film are practical, meaning the use of puppets and models, rather than CGI. Some CGI was used to help <i>augment</i> the practical work however.

Key scenes	
The Opening Scene: (http://bit.ly/ATBKS1)	As with all films, this scene establishes character and scenario. In this case, the film establishes that it's set during Bonfire Night and that our central character, for now at least, is a young trainee Nurse called Sam. It also establishes an uneasy atmosphere because of the mugging. Interesting however, it establishes the characters of the young gang but in a way that might not be fairly representative of what they're actually like, as we see later in the film as the narrative develops.
Attack on the police van: (http://bit.ly/ATBKS2)	This is a great scene in the way that it uses the conventions of horror to help develop the uneasy atmosphere earlier in the film. It also raises the stakes in terms of the on-screen violence and the peril for the main characters. The scene also helps to establish a relationship between Sam and the gang, as well as utilise imagery that has interesting social context. The representation of police as authority figures here is key.
The final scene (http://bit.ly/ATBKS3)	The final scene uses key generic conventions from the sci-fi and action genre films. It's also the most obvious example of Moses' redemption. The lighting is especially interesting here and key aspects of cinematography such as camera movement and the editing decision of having much of the scene in slow-motion is also an interesting choice that is worth analysing.
Preparing to kill the aliens (http://bit.ly/ATBKS4)	In a film full of sci-fi imagery, few scenes are as obvious as this one. The use of the UV light as a 'body scanner' is something that has been used in sci-fi films for decades. The lighting and mise-en-scene too is cleverly manipulated to create the sense that this setting is not 'realistic' or 'Earthly' in style. It also features some interesting interactions between the characters and we get a much clearer sense of who they are as people. The way that Moses offers to be the sacrifice and how people respond to this are great examples of the themes of consequences and redemption in the film.
The gang walk through the estate (http://bit.ly/ATBKS5)	Another scene which helps to see the difference between the style of the world outside the block and the style inside. The gang are initially looking at the things they stole from Sam. As they throw them away it's as if they're getting rid of 'realistic' props. The focus then becomes the alien. As the gang approach the Block the walkways and low-key lighting that cast straight-lined shadows create a strange style. It resembles the retro futuristic style of a 70s sci-fi aesthetic, with muted colours and straight lines. When walking towards the Block, the lighting takes on a strange blue-hue, reminiscent of the aliens' teeth and an unusual colour for Earth. indicating that the Block is much more of a sci-fi setting than the 'real world' outside.