Pierrot le Fou
by Jean-Luc Godard
France-1965-112min

> Pierrot le Fou is part of a collection of European films: the CinEd collection, a film education programme for young people.

> This student sheet allows me to rediscover the film, to go through it in words and images, to know more about where the characters live and their time, to create and invent, to go further by discovering other works: films, books, music, photographs, paintings...

By participating in CinEd, I share the discovery of films with young people from other countries, all over Europe!
(1) Husband and father of two, Ferdinand (known as Pierrot) is disgusted by his bourgeois environment where people speak in advertising slogans. An old flame reappears in his life: Marianne.

(2) Marianne and Pierrot spend the night together, they run away from Paris leaving a dead body behind.

(3) The film becomes a road film, the couple goes on a cross-country road trip, steals a big American car which ends in water.

Marianne and Pierrot isolate themselves living like Robinson Crusoe on a deserted island. He reads, she prefers music and would love to go dancing.

Marianne is bored, they come back to the world and are rapidly separated: dirty business, Marianne’s awkward feelings for her “brother”…

Marianne involves Pierrot in criminal stories.

Pierrot finally realises that Marianne betrayed him: Fred is not her brother.

Marianne and Pierrot live their tragic destiny to the end: she gets shot by Pierrot, who then decides to blow himself off with explosives.
Pierrot: Why do you look so sad?
Marianne: Because you talk to me with words, and I look at you with feelings.

Pierrot: Conversation with you is impossible. You never have ideas, only feelings.
Marianne: That's not true! Feelings contain ideas!

Marianne: What are you doing?
Pierrot: Looking at myself.
Marianne: And what do you see?
Pierrot: The face of a man who's about to drive over a cliff at 60 mph.
Marianne: I see the face of a girl in love with the man who's about to drive over a cliff at 60 mph.
Pierrot: Then let's kiss.

« After Athens, after the Renaissance, now we are entering the civilization of the rump. » Pierrot

« Obviously. Words are funny. They say the opposite of what they mean. We say “obviously” when things aren't obvious at all. » Marianne

« That's rich, Fitch! » Marianne
Chantal Akerman explains here how she discovered *Pierrot le Fou* when she was fifteen.

She is a Belgian film director famous for her boldness and experiments. Her filmography accounts very varied forms: fictions (*Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles, La Captive...*) and documentaries (*News from Home, D'est...*).

« So I went to see this film because I liked the title, *Pierrot le Fou... And I saw the film, and it was something else, totally different.

I was under the impression that the film was speaking to me, that it was poetry. And since before I wanted to make films, I wanted to be a writer, I felt in this film something that achieved great moments of writing, but by another way, and this other way seemed even more fascinating to me.

And when I left the cinema, I said, "I want to make films too".»

### In Europe and elsewhere

**How do you say *Pierrot le Fou* in other countries?**

- **France:** Pierrot le Fou
- **Spain:** Pierrot el Loco
- **Portugal:** Pedro, o Louco
- **United Kingdom:** Pierrot the Madman
- **Czech Republic:** Bláznivý Petříček
- **Lithuania:** Pamišėlis Pjero
- **Romania:** Pierrot nebunul
- **Bulgaria:** Лудият Пиеро
- **Italy:** Il bandito delle 11 (where they took the book's title adapted by Godard – *Obsession* by Lionel White)
- **Finland:** Hullu Pierrot

In Europe and elsewhere

Context: 1965
Since the end of World War II, the world had been cut in half: it was the Cold War. The United States represented the capitalist side and the USSR the communist model whilst China developed. One of the Cold War’s major conflicts intensified in 1965, and shook the world: the Vietnam War.

In France, General De Gaulle was president since 1958, face of the resistance during World War II, he embodied order and authority. A part of the youth was protesting against the way he led the country more and more in 1965, three years before May 1968’s protest. This era was also the one of a powerful development of the French consumer society and more widely of the western world’s.

The film and me

If I could give Pierrot le Fou another title, it would be…

What would I like to know more about the country or the era where the story takes place?

What surprised me?

I learn and I imagine

I write a letter to the filmmaker, Jean-Luc Godard, to tell him what I thought about his film, what touched me, what I didn’t like, what I understand or not about his choices.
The film and me

Do those pictures from Pierrot le Fou make me think about other images I know?

I find images echoing those two photograms, they can be images from all sources (paintings, comics, photos, video clips, adverts, other films, etc.).

In Pierrot le Fou, Jean-Luc Godard put posters, logos and advertising boards in his film. These are also inspiration sources even for photographers (Walker Evans, Billboards in Times Square, New York, 1952). I take a picture of some myself, I can play with words and turn them around like Godard did.

In the Young Spectator Space, I choose my top ten favourite images, those that struck me, moved me, shocked me… I can also select images from the following themes: faces and looks, colours, the couple, the landscape, violence.

I build up a sequence of images from my selection. I can offer a visual poem mixing images and words.

I can also produce my own shots.
To go further

If I liked Pierrot le Fou, I might also like these characters:

Michel Poiccard: in *A bout de souffle* (1960), by Jean-Luc Godard. Michel is played by Jean-Paul Belmondo; he could be Pierrot’s brother, for example when he says “If you don’t like the sea… If you don’t like the mountains… If you don’t like the city: fuck off!” This rude thug who killed a policeman reaches Paris to conquer Patricia’s heart, an American student.

Monika: She is the main character in *Summer with Monika* (1953) by Ingmar Bergman. Although the film is very different, it inspired Pierrot le Fou – Godard was really shaken when he discovered it. Like Pierrot and Marianne, Monika and Harry run away from the city to live their love on an island. After this parenthesis, their relation is put to the test when they return to the society.

Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow: They really existed in America in the 1930s. Like Pierrot and Marianne, it is a romantic couple, felonious, murderous, specialised in banks armed robberies. Their lives inspired the cinema, like *Gun Crazy* (1950) by Joseph H. Lewis, and it has been adapted by Arthur Penn in *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967.

If I liked Pierrot le Fou, I might also like this film:

The Happiest Girl in the World 
(2008, Romania) by Radu Jude 
(*film in the CinEd collection*)
As in Pierrot le Fou, the story is a satire of the consumer society. Délia, 18, won a car in a competition, to get it she has to appear in an advert. But nothing goes right: Délia is an awful actress, the film crew is not kind… And her parents get involved.
These painters and their work seen in *Pierrot le Fou*:

- **Henri Matisse**
  *La Blouse roumaine, 1940*

- **Auguste Renoir**
  *Nu, 1880*

- **Pablo Picasso**
  *Portrait de Sylvette, 1954*

These books:

- **Robinson Crusoe (1719)**
  by Daniel Defoe
  The story of Robinson, castaway on a deserted island for 28 years. In *Pierrot le Fou*, the fleeing lovers isolate themselves to live like a Robinson. “Friday” is said and we also read it on a page of Pierrot’s diary, that’s how Robinson calls the indigenous he meets on the island.

- **Journey to the End of the Night (1932)**
  by Louis-Ferdinand Céline
  Bardamu narrates his tumultuous adventures in the first person: his experience as a World War One soldier, the Interwar period, African colonisation and the American Dream upside. Bardamu like Pierrot face difficulties living the confrontation between their idealism and life turmoil. Pierrot is also called Ferdinand because of the tribute to this novel’s author.

- **Obsession (1963)** by Lionel White
  It is the detective novel adapted by Jean-Luc Godard. It had been the film’s title for a long time before the filmmaker chose *Pierrot le Fou*. The story takes place in the United States. Allie is younger than Marianne in the film. It is about an outrageous love between a married man and a child-wife who hasn’t got any moral values, and who does not hesitate to kill when she is upset.

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