

Juno

(Jason Reitman, USA, 2007)

Component 1: Key Developments in US Film
Focus Area: Specialist Writing on Film (see separate resource for set Specialist Writing passages)

PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

Sequence 1 - 'Juno calls Leah' – 00:6:40-00:8:21

Sequence 2 - 'Meeting Vanessa and Mark' – 00:27:02 - 00:34:23

PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography (including Lighting)

- Sequence 1: When Juno speaks to Leah on the phone there is a MS of Juno in foreground with slight tilt up which suggests she's taking control of situation; background shows collage of different drawings, cartoons etc. : the cluttered, eclectic life she used to have, the slight blur showing this may have to be left behind. Compare this to the scene where Juno tells her parents: again lots of tilted up MS of Juno whilst parents are sat, shown in two-shot (communicating strength of their relationship). This again suggests that Juno is asserting that she is in control of the situation (she verbally reassures her parents that she has already found a couple to adopt the baby).
- Sequence 2: Many of the shots in Vanessa's home are framed symmetrically, emphasising the imposed order and control over her environment. In other shots of Vanessa, a large amount of the frame is given over to the furnishings of her house, showing how important these trappings of 'good taste' are to her.
- When Mark and Vanessa are sat together on the sofa, a 'two-shot' is used, but she leans forwards, whilst Mark reclines back, symbolising the nature of their relationship:

together yet also living separate lives. Later in the scene, the camera separates them entirely, foreshadowing their later break-up.

Mise-en-scène

- Sequence 1: Juno's room symbolises her inner life (similar to Mark's in later scenes - where Vanessa makes him keep "his stuff"). "Hello, I'm... drunk" name badge; then lots of eclectic objects (broken dolls, a cartoon of a woman with a 'sperm' entering her heart) that now seem symbolic of pregnancy, perhaps showing the change in her consciousness since discovering she's pregnant. The photo of Bleeker on her guitar is the only photo – suggesting that he could be the only 'real' thing in her life.
- This 'bricolage' aesthetic is consistent with the rest of Juno's home. The MacGuff household is cluttered but rich with the warm evidence of healthy family life, lit in soft browns and oranges. It seems homely and 'lived-in', accepting and comfortable with the fact that family life is 'messy'. (In contrast with Vanessa's house).
- Sequence 2: Vanessa's costume and interior decor have exactly the same colour scheme, reflecting how her 'perfect' home is an extension of her identity: polished and controlled. There are some warmer creams and browns, however, which suggest she does have a more tender side. By contrast, Mark's room (that Vanessa "gave" him for his "stuff") is like Juno's, covered in posters and with a cosier, warmer colour scheme.

Editing

- Hand-drawn, animated titles for seasons similar to a teen diary but also shows this is just a single year in a long and eventful life (echoed when Juno assures her parents with "In 10 months we can forget this ever happened.") Also signifies an 'indie' aesthetic.
- Sequence 1: Cross-cutting between Juno's room and Leah's. Shows similarities and differences between friends. Both have cluttered collages on their walls. But Juno's are of

cartoon female superheroes (echo of 'Fruitful Yuki' manga comic Mark shows her later) to symbolise her youthful idealism; whilst Leah's are of the older men such as Prince Charles that she not-so secretly desires.

- Sequence 2: Our first introduction to Vanessa is a series of jump-cuts of her disembodied hands arranging flowers, incense, magazines (focused on homes and parenting) and towels. The final shot of this sequence is her adjusting her cufflinks. We see the features of her 'perfect' home before we even see her face, suggesting these belongings *are* her identity. This sequence is also cross-cut with Juno's drive to Vanessa's, passing huge and impressive houses to emphasise the wealth of the neighbourhood.

Sound

- Throughout the film, events are musically accompanied by covers or original songs by Kimya Dawson (of indie band the Moldy Peaches): mostly acoustic, cosy sounding but with clever wordplay about nuanced differences in relationships. In the final scene, Juno and Bleeker play one of Dawson's songs 'live' implying this is the music of their own band - this suggests Beeker has been on her mind throughout the narrative.
- Sequence 1: 'Teen slang' e.g. "Honest to blog", "Fo shizz, I'm up the spout", "Phuket, Thailand!" - 'clever' puns that reflect how the teenagers consider themselves articulate and intelligent. Critics attacked the dialogue between the young characters as being unrealistic of how actual teens speak.
- Sequence 2: The dialogue between the Lorings, their lawyer and the MacGuffs emphasises the class difference, and their differing attitudes towards parenthood. Juno is, typically, blunt and unsentimental ("Can I just squeeze it out and hand it over"); her father 'down-to-earth' ("This is my irresponsible daughter"); whilst the Lorings either use legal terms ("open" or "closed adoptions") or language that reflects Vanessa's idealised view of motherhood ("I think pregnancy is beautiful").

PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts

Social

- Representations of age: the film challenges lots of stereotypes of teenagers, adults and parents. The teens are articulate and witty, aware of the fact

their sassiness hides vulnerability ("I don't know what kind of girl I am") and even conscious of the way that they themselves construct their image (the 'how to make a nerdy girl' sequence' 00:11:57-00:12:40). Juno's parents seem wise, disarmingly honest about their daughter, but are also supportive and level-headed - in contrast to the absentee or judgemental figures we'd expect. Mark is also an interesting portrayal of an adult male who clings to his younger identity rather than embracing adult responsibility.

- Gender: Juno also challenges many stereotypes of young women. It is her "idea" to have sex, and she takes full responsibility for the outcome. Almost all of her decisions can be seen as rational (though her crucial decision to not have an abortion has been controversial - see below), and though she is in touch with her emotions, she never seems overwhelmed by them. Bleeker also challenges the stereotype of the male 'jock' (despite him being an accomplished athlete). It is Juno who is in control of their relationship, and the casting choice of Michael Cera suggests a sensitive, almost feminine young man (especially during his 'argument' with Juno <https://goo.gl/uNAu4z>)

Historical

- *Juno* is part of a genre of teenage movies where the characters defy or even consciously reflect on the stereotypes that are imposed on them. *The Breakfast Club*, *Heathers* and *Mean Girls* all feature young adults who consciously comment on how their roles are created in the social milieu of the American high school. An interesting comparison would also be *Brick*, where the Californian high school setting is re-envisioned through the film noir genre.
- *Juno* also shares the theme of young women struggling with unplanned pregnancy. *Knocked Up* and the earlier *Trust* have interesting explorations of the social expectations of motherhood and how this fits in with a contemporary, independent young woman's aspirations.

Political

- Political negative responses to the film have focused on the representation of teenage pregnancy, and what some interpreted as a 'pro-life' message.
- Focus sequence: Juno at abortion clinic 00:16:35-00:19:26 <https://goo.gl/IHmMMd> Critics attacked the depiction of the clinic as dirty and

unpleasant, with dismissive staff (the desk clerk who offers Juno a condom), as a representation that may dissuade women exploring this option. Juno is asserted throughout as a strong and independent-minded character, so the fact that she responds to the clinic with such distaste and decides to keep her baby was seen by some as sending a neo-conservative 'pro-life' message. Others pointed out that in real life, abortion clinic demonstrations are aggressive

and intimidating for women using their services, and have resulted in violence and even murder for those who work there. This is a far cry from the lone demonstrator who confronts Juno. In 2008, Time magazine did a feature on a recent rise in teenage pregnancies, naming it the 'Juno Effect' and suggesting the positive portrayal of teen pregnancy in the film was encouraging young women to 'copy' Juno's behaviour.