West Side Story

1. Identity card

Title: *West Side Story*

Directors: Jerome Robbins & Robert Wise

Date of release: 1961

Genre: Musical film / Romantic drama

Historical and Cultural Context: Released during a period of social change in the United States, the film adapts *Romeo and Juliet* to 1950s New York City. It explores immigration, gang rivalry, racism and the difficulties of living together in a multicultural society.

2. Plot summary

In a nutshell: in New York City, two rival gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, compete for control of their neighbourhood. Tony, a former Jet, falls in love with Maria, the sister of the Sharks' leader. Their forbidden romance intensifies the conflict between the gangs, leading to violence and tragedy. In the end, the loss of Tony forces both groups to confront the consequences of hatred and prejudice.

Key Moments:

- ➜ Tony and Maria meet at the dance.
- ➜ The rumble between the Jets and the Sharks.
- ➜ Tony kills Bernardo.
- ➜ Anita is attacked by the Jets.
- ➜ Tony dies, bringing the gangs together.

3. Main characters

Name	Role	Symbol
Tony	former Jet	love, hope
Maria	Bernardo's sister	innocence, reconciliation
Bernardo	leader of the Sharks	pride, identity
Riff	leader of the Jets	loyalty, rivalry
Anita	Bernardo's girlfriend	resilience, independence
Chino	Shark member	revenge, tragedy

4. Major themes and links to the LLCER program

Première – Rencontres

How does the film illustrate this theme?

- ➜ A love story begins through an unexpected encounter.
- ➜ Relationships challenge prejudice and social divisions.
- ➜ Encounters can transform individuals but also create conflict.

Key examples

- ➜ Tony and Maria's meeting at the dance.
- ➜ The growing relationship between the two lovers.
- ➜ Anita's interactions with both gangs.

Terminale – Arts and debates of ideas

How does the film illustrate this theme?

- ➜ The film denounces racism, prejudice and discrimination.
- ➜ It questions violence, social divisions and intolerance.
- ➜ Art becomes a powerful way to promote dialogue and coexistence.

Key examples

- ➜ The rivalry between the Jets and the Sharks.
- ➜ The discrimination faced by Puerto Rican immigrants.
- ➜ Tony and Maria's relationship is challenging prejudice.

5. Key quotes and key words

"Life can be bright in America."

love – prejudice – immigration – identity – violence – tolerance – belonging

6. Author's message

- ➜ Hatred and prejudice lead to violence.
- ➜ Love can challenge social divisions.
- ➜ Dialogue is essential for peaceful coexistence.
- ➜ Diversity should unite rather than divide.