The Piano

1. Identity card

Title: *The Piano*

Director: Jane Campion

Date of release: 1993

Genre: Historical drama / Romantic film

Historical and Cultural Context: Set in mid-19th-century colonial New Zealand, the film explores the encounter between European settlers and the natural environment, while questioning gender roles, colonial society and female autonomy. Campion became the first woman to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival for this film.

2. Plot summary

In a nutshell: Ada McGrath, a Scottish woman who has not spoken since childhood, is sent to New Zealand for an arranged marriage with Stewart. Deeply attached to her piano, she forms an unexpected relationship with George Baines after her husband refuses to transport the instrument. As Ada seeks freedom and self-expression, she must choose between social expectations and her own desires.

Key Moments:

- ➜ Ada arrives in New Zealand with her daughter Flora.
- ➜ Stewart leaves Ada's piano on the beach.
- ➜ Baines acquires the piano and offers Ada lessons in exchange for time together.
- ➜ Stewart discovers Ada's relationship with Baines.
- ➜ Ada leaves with Baines to begin a new life.

3. Main characters

Name	Role	Symbol
Ada McGrath	protagonist	self-expression, silence
George Baines	neighbour	freedom, desire
Alisdair Stewart	Ada's husband	authority

4. Major themes and links to the LLCER program

Première – Rencontres

How does the film illustrate this theme?

- ➜ Encounters transform Ada's life and challenge social conventions.
- ➜ Relationships reveal conflicts between duty and desire.
- ➜ Human connections allow personal freedom to emerge.

Key examples

- ➜ Ada meeting Baines.
- ➜ Ada's arranged marriage to Stewart.
- ➜ Flora's role in the relationships.

Terminale – Expression and construction of the self

How does the film illustrate this theme?

- ➜ Ada expresses her identity through music rather than words.
- ➜ The film explores freedom, desire and female autonomy.
- ➜ Self-expression becomes an act of resistance against social constraints.

Key examples

- ➜ Ada communicating through the piano.
- ➜ Her growing relationship with Baines.
- ➜ Ada choosing her own future.

5. Key quotes and key words

"The piano stopped speaking. It was me who had stopped speaking."

identity – silence – freedom – desire – music – communication – autonomy

6. Author's message

- ➜ Identity can be expressed in many forms beyond language.
- ➜ Freedom requires the courage to challenge social expectations.
- ➜ Love and art can become powerful means of self-expression.
- ➜ Women should be free to choose their own destiny.