

Astor Theatre
Sunday 26 October – 2pm to 7pm



The original theatrical poster*

***Blackboard Jungle*, (MA), 101 mins**
Director - Richard Brooks

Before *Welcome Back Kotter*, before *To Sir With Love*, there was *Blackboard Jungle*. Released in 1955, *Blackboard Jungle* launched a new genre of film and television, and began a teenage revolution that swept the world.

Dancing in the aisles to Bill Haley's *Rock Around the Clock*, rebellious teenage moviegoers soon let everyone, especially their parents, know that rock'n'roll was here to stay.

In a tale set on the 'wrong side of the tracks', Glenn Ford stars as Richard ('Ric') Dadier, an idealistic young English teacher overwhelmed by his unruly charges.

According to the school principal there is no 'discipline problem' so Dadier and his

colleagues are left to fend for themselves in what is often a hostile environment. Dadier, however, is convinced there must be a way to get through to these 'crazy kids'.

His wife (Anne Francis) is not so sure. She has good reason to want to see her husband move to a more 'normal' school, where students *want* to learn. She begs him to find another job.

After a nasty incident, a discouraged Dadier visits his former professor, seeking advice and inspiration. He's not prepared for this, he complains, but eventually decides he must return to his "jungle".

Gang leaders Artie West (Vic Morrow) and Gregory Miller (Sidney Poitier) are Dadier's principal targets in this war against apathy, peer pressure and anti-social behaviour. Racism and class issues provide convenient grounds for conflict and they are never far from the surface.

While lies, innuendo and accusations threaten to thwart Dadier's efforts, his wife and colleagues have their own battles to fight. They too are fearful for their safety in an environment where the students are often the teachers, teaching their elders what life is like in *their* classroom – the streets.

In a film where violence is an ever-present backdrop, there are nonetheless moments of inspiration and poignancy which stir the emotions in what is otherwise an incisive social commentary on its day.

Nominated for four Academy awards, *Blackboard Jungle* displays excellent art direction and cinematography although the screenplay, adapted from Evan Hunter's novel, may seem somewhat over-dramatised by today's standards.

Glenn Ford passionately embraces his role as Ric Dadier, while young supporting actors Vic Morrow and Sidney Poitier give highly credible performances in one of their earliest roles.

- Helen Major