

## Citizen Kane Starter Kit

1. Watch the film (more than once).
2. Consult the supplementary material below.
3. Use the introductory paragraph below (modify as needed).
4. Pick a thesis statement (or supply your own)
5. Just add water (aka brilliantly insightful analysis and interpretation, clearly and convincingly written).
6. Read and proof your essay carefully.
7. Send it to me (use your name as the file name—aka lavery.doc) and e-mail it to me (david.lavery@gmail.com).

### Introductory Paragraph (feel free to use in whole or in part):

To call Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) "incomparable" is an understatement. Generally recognized as the most important, if not the best, film every made, branded as the "watershed," the turning point, of film history. *Kane* was, astonishingly, the first film of a 25 year old director who famously described the experience as being like a kid allowed to run wild in a candy store. Welles, however, knew very well what he was doing.

**Possible thesis statements** (use as desired, adding the thesis of your choice, exact or modified by you, to the introductory paragraph above):

1. Thanks to Welles' collaboration with pioneering cinematographer Gregg Toland, *Kane* is, from first shot to last, masterfully filmed.
2. *Kane's* narrative structure, which makes use of a newsreel, a frame tale, and multiple flashbacks, is both innovative and masterful.
3. Already a well known stage actor himself, Welles secures excellent performances from his actors.
4. Using every "toy" at his disposal, Welles creates a complex biopic of a man who sought to change the world without ever understanding himself.
5. Among the film's lasting influences was its pioneering use of "deep focus."

### *Citizen Kane*

US (1941): Drama

119 min, No rating, Black & White

Producer	Orson Welles
Director	Orson Welles
Screenwriter	Herman J. Mankiewicz, Orson Welles
Editor	Robert Wise, Mark Robson
Cinematographer	Gregg Toland
Composer	Bernard Herrmann
Art design	Van Nest Polglase, Perry Ferguson
Special effects	Vernon L. Walker
Costumes	Edward Stevenson

Charles Foster Kane	Orson Welles
Jedediah Leland	Joseph Cotten
Susan Alexander	Dorothy Comingore

Mr. Bernstein	Everett Sloane
Boss J.W. "Big Jim" Gettys	Ray Collins
Walter Parks Thatcher	George Coulouris
Mary Kane	Agnes Moorehead
Raymond	Paul Stewart
Emily Norton Kane	Ruth Warrick
Herbert Carter	Erskine Sanford
Jerry Thompson	William Alland
Matisti	Fortunio Bonanova
Head Waiter	Gus Schilling
Mr. Rawlston	Philip Van Zandt
Miss Anderson	Georgia Backus
Jim Kane	Harry Shannon
Kane III	Sonny Bupp
Kane at Age 8	Buddy Swan
Reporter	Alan Ladd
Reporter	Arthur O'Connell

**Content Outline**

**Citizen Kane**

From Ronald Gottesman, *Focus on Citizen Kane* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971). Adapted from a teaching aid developed by John Cawelti.

<p><b>I. INTRODUCTION</b></p>
<p>"No Trespassing." Fences in fog. Gate with Xanadu in distance. Rapid sequence of shots of Xanadu. Lighted window of castle. Snow, dissolve to paperweight. Kane's lips whisper "Rosebud." Paperweight drops, bounces, breaks. Nurse enters. 'Window at dawn.</p>
<p><b>II. NEWSREEL AND PROJECTION ROOM</b></p>
<p>Shots of Xanadu and Kane's collections. The FUNERAL: "1941's biggest and strangest." Sketch of Kane's life: Thatcher: "Nothing more or less than a communist." Radical Speaker: "A Fascist." Kane: "I'm an American." Kane's influence and importance. Kane's marriages. Kane's political career. Depression and collapse of Kane's empire. Kane's death. Projection room sequence after newsreel: Rawlston and others. Thompson assigned task of discovering meaning of "Rosebud": How is Kane different from Hearst or Ford?</p>
<p><b>III. THOMPSON VISITS SUSAN ALEXANDER KANE</b></p>
<p>Long tracking shot in rain over roof and through skylight of Susan's cabaret. Susan refuses to talk, orders Thompson out. Thompson calls Rawlston from pay phone. Thompson's conversation with waiter: "She never heard of 'Rosebud.'"</p>
<p><b>IV. THOMPSON'S VISIT TO THATCHER LIBRARY</b></p>
<p>Conversation with officious librarian and guard. In the library vault with memoirs. Young Kane in snow with sled. Interior of house: Thatcher with Mr. and Mrs. Kane. Outside young Kane is seen throwing snowballs and heard shouting, "The Union Forever." First encounter between Thatcher and young Kane outside house; parents tell boy he must go with Thatcher. Shot of sled in falling snow dissolves to fancy new sled. Rapid sequence of shots develop Thatcher-Kane relationship with skillful transitions both visual and aural. Thatcher, Kane, and Bernstein in office as Kane signs over control of his enterprises in 1929. Kane: "If I hadn't been very rich I might have been a really great man." Final shot in Thatcher Library.</p>
<p><b>V. THOMPSON AND BERNSTEIN</b></p>
<p>Bernstein and Thompson talk as rain beats on window; Bernstein tells story of girl in white dress. Establishment of <i>Inquirer</i>: First day at the office. Kane and old editor, Carter. Story of missing women from Brooklyn. Kane's "Declaration of Principles," original of which Leland asks to keep. The Rise of the <i>Inquirer</i>. Party celebrating ascendancy of <i>Inquirer</i> over <i>Chronicle</i>. In rapid sequence: Photograph of former <i>Chronicle</i> staff changes to present <i>Inquirer</i> staff, Kane as master of ceremonies, band and girls enter, Bernstein and Leland talk as Kane dances. Kane's trip to Europe. Montage of collections he ships back. Kane's return, presentation of cup, announcement of marriage to Emily Norton. Back to Bernstein's office. Bernstein: "He was a man who lost almost everything he had."</p>
<p><b>VI. THOMPSON AND LELAND</b></p>
<p>Shot of bridge. Leland in hospital. Kane and Emily; the disintegration of their marriage. Back to hospital. Kane's meeting with Susan Alexander. Amuses Susan by wiggling his ears, making shadow figures (last of rooster), exchanging confidences; she sings and he applauds. Political campaign. Leland's speech. Kane in huge hall speaking in front of poster. Shots of family and then Gettys as he leaves. Speech ends and Kane and Emily meet at car. "Love-nest" sequence: Through door, upstairs, confrontation of Emily, Susan, Gettys, and Kane which ends with Kane vowing to send Gettys to Sing Sing and stiffly polite going of their separate ways by Gettys and Emily. Campaign ends. Bernstein selects headline: "FRAUD AT THE POLLS." Campaign Headquarters and confrontation between Kane and Leland: "You want love on your own terms." Kane: "Those are the only ones anyone ever knows--his own." Marriage of Kane and Susan. First</p>

<p>opera sequence. Ends with stagehand in flies holding his nose. Chicago <i>Inquirer</i> office after performance. Leland in drunken sleep at typewriter. Kane and Bernstein enter; Bernstein reads unfinished notice in typewriter; Kane snatches it away to finish it. Leland awakes, goes to where Kane is typing, and is fired by Kane. Return to hospital. Final comments on Kane. Leland, asking Thompson again for cigars, is led away by nurses.</p>
<p><b>VII. THOMPSON AND SUSAN ALEXANDER KANE</b></p>
<p>Shot over cabaret roof as in earlier sequence. Thompson and Susan at table. Susan: "Everything was his idea." Singing lesson: Susan, Matisti, Kane. Opera House sequence (as experienced by Susan). Reactions of Leland, Bernstein, etc. culminating in Kane's solitary applause. Susan and Kane the morning after debut. Susan screams about Leland's bad review; messenger arrives with torn-up check and original copy of "Declaration of Principles." Argue about Susan's future. Montage of her disastrous singing career ending with and aural "running-down." Susan's bedroom (and deep-focus shot of glass, bed, Susan has attempted suicide and Kane finally agrees her withdraw from operatic career. Susan and Kane at Xanadu. Susan doing crossword puzzle. Susan's desire to go to New York. Kane (as he moves to fireplace): "Our home is here." Crossword puzzles suggest tedium and passing of seasons. Talk across huge room--cars along beach, cut to- Picnic at Xanadu: Old Negro singer: "It can't be love." Kane and Susan argue, he slaps her. Susan packs and leaves. Back to cabaret; Susan suggests Thompson interview Raymond.</p>
<p><b>VIII. THOMPSON AND RAYMOND</b></p>
<p>Raymond lights cigarette, asks how much meaning of "Rosebud" is worth. Raymond's version of Susan's departure. Kane wrecks Susan's room, Picks up paperweight, says "Rosebud" and walks slowly past servants and in front of infinitely reflecting mirrors. Back to Raymond: Thompson tells him the information not worth \$1000.</p>
<p><b>IX. FINALE</b></p>
<p>Thompson descends stairs. Tracking shots through hall and over Kane's collections, statues, memorabilia. Thompson and photographers in shadows as Thompson reflects on his failure to find "Rosebud." Thompson: "Something he couldn't get or something he lost." Reporters leave. Long tracking shot over sea-like expanse of crates, boxes, etc. Shot of "Rosebud" being consumed in furnace. Shots of Xanadu and fences, reversing those in Introduction. Long shot of Xanadu and smoke. "No Trespassing."</p>

**A Viewer's Guide to *Citizen Kane*  
by Roger Ebert**

**"Rosebud"** The most famous word in the history of cinema. It explains everything, and nothing. Who, for that matter, actually heard Charles Foster Kane say it before he died? The butler says, late in the film, that he did. But Kane seems to be alone when he dies, and the reflection on the shard of glass from the broken paperweight shows the nurse entering the room.

Gossip has it that the screenwriter, Herman Mankiewicz, used "rosebud" as an inside joke, because as a friend of Hearst's mistress, Marion Davies, he knew "rosebud" was the old man's pet name for the most intimate part of her anatomy.

**Deep Focus** Everyone knows that Orson Welles and his cinematographer, Gregg Toland, used deep

focus in KANE. But what is deep focus, and were they using it for the first time? The term refers to a strategy of lighting, composition, and lens choice that allows everything in the frame, from the front to the back, to be in focus at the same time. With the lighting and lenses available in 1941, this was just becoming possible, and Toland had experimented with the technique in John Ford's *THE LONG VOYAGE HOME* a few years earlier.

In most movies, the key elements in the frame are in focus, and those closer or further away may not be. When everything is in focus, the filmmakers must give a lot more thought to how they direct the viewer's attention, first here and then there. What the French call *mise-en-scène*—

the movement within the frame—becomes more important.

**Optical illusions** Deep focus is especially tricky because movies are two-dimensional, and so you need visual guideposts to determine the true scale of a scene. Toland used this fact as a way to fool the audience's eye on two delightful occasions in the film.

One comes when Kane is signing away control of his empire in Thatcher's office. Behind him on the wall are windows that look of normal size and height. Then Kane starts to walk into the background of the shot, and we realize with surprise that the windows are huge, and their lower sills are more than six feet above the floor. As Kane stands under them, he is dwarfed—which is the intent, since he has just lost great power. Later in the film, Kane walks over to stand in front of the great fireplace in Xanadu, and we realize it, too, is much larger than it first seemed.

**Visible ceilings** In almost all movies before CITIZEN KANE, you couldn't see the ceilings in rooms because there weren't any. That's where you'd see the lights and microphones. Welles wanted to use a lot of low-angle shots that would look up toward ceilings, and so Toland devised a strategy of cloth ceilings that looked real but were not. The microphones were hidden immediately above the ceilings, which in many shots are noticeably low.

**Matte drawings** These are drawings by artists that are used to create elements that aren't really there. Often they are combined with "real" foregrounds. The opening and closing shots of Kane's great castle, Xanadu, are examples. No exterior set was ever built for the structure. Instead, artists drew it, and used lights behind it to suggest Kane's bedroom window. "Real" foreground details such as Kane's lagoon and private zoo were added.

**Invisible wipes** A "wipe" is a visual effect that wipes one image off the screen while wiping another into view. Invisible wipes disguise themselves as something else on the screen that seems to be moving, so you aren't aware of the effect. They are useful in "wiping" from full-scale sets to miniature sets.

For example: One of the most famous shots in KANE shows Susan Alexander's opera debut, when, as she starts to sing, the camera moves straight up to a catwalk high above the stage, and one stagehand turns to another and eloquently reviews her performance by holding his nose. Only the stage and the stagehands on the catwalk are real. The middle portion of this seemingly unbroken shot is a miniature, built in the RKO model workshop. The model is invisibly wiped in by the stage curtains, as we move up past them, and wiped out by a wooden beam right below the catwalk. Another example: In Walter Thatcher's library, the statue of Thatcher is a drawing, and as the camera pans down it wipes out the drawing as it wipes in the set of the library.

**Invisible Furniture Moving In** In the early scene in the Kanes' cabin in Colorado, the camera tracks back from a window to a table where Kane's mother is being asked to sign a paper. The camera tracks right through where the table would be, after which it is slipped into place before we can see it. But a hat on the table is still trembling from the move. After she signs the paper, the camera pulls up and follows her as she walks back toward the window. If you look sharply, you can see that she's walking right through where the table was a moment before.

**The Neatest flash-forward in Kane** Between Thatcher's words "Merry Christmas" and "...a very Happy New Year," two decades pass.

**From Model to Reality** As the camera swoops above the nightclub and through the skylight to discover Susan Alexander Kane sitting forlornly at a table, it goes from a model of the nightclub roof to a real set. The switch is concealed, the first time, by a lightning flash. The second time we go to the nightclub, it's done with a dissolve.

**Crowd scenes** There aren't any in CITIZEN KANE. It only looks like there are. In the opening newsreel, stock footage of a political rally is intercut with a low-angle shot showing one man speaking on behalf of Kane. Sound effects make it sound like he's at a big outdoor rally. Later, Kane himself addresses a gigantic indoor rally. Kane and the other actors on the stage are real. The audience is a miniature, with flickering lights to suggest movement.

**Slight Factual Discrepancies** In the opening newsreel, Xanadu is described as being "on the desert coast of Florida." But Florida does not have a desert coast, as you can plainly see during the picnic scene, where footage from an earlier RKO prehistoric adventure was back-projected behind the actors, and if you look closely, that seems to be a pterodactyl flapping its wings.

**The Luce Connection** Although *CITIZEN KANE* was widely seen as an attack on William Randolph Hearst, it was also aimed at Henry R. Luce and his concept of faceless group journalism, as then practiced at his *Time* magazine and *March of Time* newsreels. The opening "News on the March" segment is a deliberate parody of the Luce newsreel, and the reason you can never see the faces of any of the journalists is that Welles and Mankiewicz were kidding the anonymity of Luce's writers and editors.

**An Extra with a Future** Alan Ladd can be glimpsed in the opening newsreel sequence, and again in the closing warehouse scene.

**The Most Thankless Job on the Movie** It went to William Alland, who plays Mr. Thompson, the journalist assigned to track down the meaning of "Rosebud." He is always seen from behind, or in backlit profile. You can never see his face. At the movie's world premiere, Alland told the audience he would turn his back so they could recognize him more easily.

**The Brothel Scene** It couldn't be filmed. In the original screenplay, after Kane hires away the

staff of the *Chronicle*, he takes them to a brothel. The Production Code office wouldn't allow that. So the scene, slightly changed, takes place in the *Inquirer* newsroom, still with the dancing girls.

**The Eyeless Cockatoo** Yes, you can see right through the eyeball of the shrieking cockatoo, in the scene before the big fight between Kane and Susan. It's a mistake.

**The Most Evocative Shot in the Movie** There are many candidates. My choice is the shot showing an infinity of Kanes reflected in mirrors as he walks past.

**The Best Speech in Kane** My favorite is delivered by Mr. Bernstein (Everett Sloane), when he is talking about the magic of memory with the inquiring reporter: "A fellow will remember a lot of things you wouldn't think he'd remember. You take me. One day, back in 1896, I was crossing over to Jersey on the ferry, and as we pulled out, there was another ferry pulling in, and on it there was a girl waiting to get off. A white dress she had on. She was carrying a white parasol. I only saw her for one second. She didn't see me at all, but I'll bet a month hasn't gone by since, that I haven't thought of that girl."

**Genuine Modesty** In the movie's credits, Welles allowed his director's credit and Toland's cinematography credit to appear on the same card—an unprecedented gesture that indicated how grateful Welles was..