

Dramatic Interpretation of West Side Story:

The Rolecards

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For explanation of the pictures: see the German edition !

Riff

You are the leader of the Jets and 17 years old. Everyone considers you to be dynamic, original, intelligent and charismatic. Your parents haven't made much of that, though. Four years ago, they moved into this shabby apartment, because they couldn't afford the rent downtown. That is why you are usually over at Tony's, your best friend. Tony and you founded the Jets. His mom, a heavy-set housewife, doesn't seem to mind that you're often there; she seems to like you.

You are the leader of the Jets because you always stay cool, even when the others have already lost control. Diesel is your lieutenant and the strongest of the Jets. All the gang members listen to you, because you've always got a good grip on what's going on. The gang means everything to you, and you try to keep them together, which isn't always easy. In this neighborhood, if you don't belong to a gang, you can pack it. Simply hanging around doesn't cut it in this quarter of town. You're always the center of attention in the gang. Since Tony has started his new job, however, he has been growing apart from the group. Lately, the other guys in the gang have become more important for you.

Girls aren't allowed to belong to the gang, even if they can fight as good as Anybodys. Velma, your current girlfriend, is someone you can show off. She's a great dancer; you can take on every challenge with her. Dancing and athletics are a real part of being in the gang. A gang isn't just a heap of criminals.

Listen to Nr. 10 "You're never alone..."



Tony

You are 18 years old and have off-blond hair. You still live at home. Your best friend, Riff, just about lives at your place. Your mom is a housewife, and your dad is an ambitious and hard worker. He takes evening classes to improve his English. Your parents were born in Krakow and keep to their friends from the Jewish community.

As Riff moved into the neighborhood, you formed the Jets with him. It was a shock for your upright, devout parents. They got over it, though. You did, too. In the past, you risked a lot for your gang and came through for the boys when it really counted. Your father used to have to fight a lot in his homeland before he emigrated. He always said that the days of street-fighting were going to pass.

And that's the way it is. For the past four months, you've been working in Doc's Drugstore as an errand-boy. Through your job, your life has gotten new perspectives. You've grown apart from the gang more and more. On top of that, you've been having a reoccurring dream lately. In your dream, you're reaching for something, but you don't know what it is. You feel that something is going to change in the near future.

Listen to Nr. 6 "Could it be"!

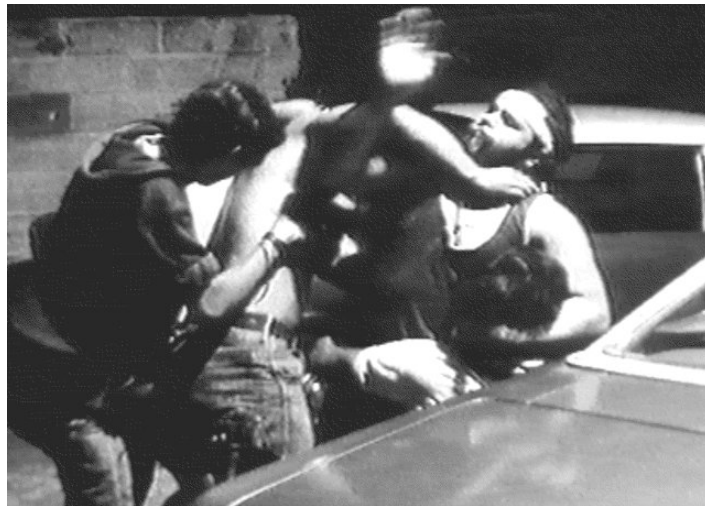


Diesel

You are a Jet, 17 years old and were born here in the West Side. You know your way around here well. Most people in the neighborhood move away after living here for a couple of years. Your father has an "alternative" car repair shop in the backyard. That means he receives cars from friends and has to make them unrecognizable by altering and painting them for the used car market. You were always asked to help, even as a small child. That kept you fit and gave you considerable know-how. For some time you didn't go to school very often, until one day the friendly man from the Youth Office appeared at the door. Your father didn't understand any English and acted Italian (which he was, of course).

The police tried to close down the repair shop several times. Only once, your dad had to serve a 6 months sentence. That's when you joined the Jets. You're not very bright, but big, sensible and strong. That's why you are Riff's lieutenant. In most important operations, you are sent to the front. Everyone, including the girls, likes you. Graziella is your present girlfriend. You don't like it if she's around when trouble strikes. That's a man's job, as your father always says.

Listen to Nr. 10 "You're never alone... "!



Action

You're a Jet, 16 years old and live in a run-down house in which only Greek people live. Your father, who came from Thessalonica, found his wife in the Jewish neighborhood. Later you were born, and shortly after, he took off. You always defend your mother, even if the people slander her. When that happens, you get very angry and feel like throwing punches right away.

You came to the Jets because you think they are great, and Riff isn't a jerk like your dad. They say you're the most aggressive-looking member of the gang. Riff sometimes tells you to be the look-out guy, which you hate, because it's really boring. You can't stand softies like Tony, and you can't understand why Riff gets along with him. You hate it that the Jets spend most of the time talking, discussing, negotiating and reflecting. You don't care for girls, either, unless they can fight like Anybodys. You ask yourself why a lot of the guys in your gang waste their time with girls, though. When you're bored, your favorite thing to do is to play darts.

Listen to Nr. 10 "You're never alone... "!



Baby John

You are a Jet. You just turned 13 years old and live on the edge of the gang's neighborhood. Your father works in an office somewhere, and your parents' apartment is so large, you and your younger siblings even have your own rooms with a double bed. You read a lot of comic books. Your favorites are Superman and Tarzan. But being at home is really boring.

Half a year ago, you helped a boy in a street fight. Ever since then, you're allowed to be a part of the Jets. If other, bigger kids threaten you, which often happens, you tell them your big friends will help you. You keep to A-Rab to be protected. Once, as the Jets were going at it against another gang, you thought it was all over for you, but Tony made a magnificent move to save you. It's a shame that Tony, who you particularly like, doesn't hang out with the Jets much anymore.

You don't understand some of the things the Jets discuss. Those who still go to school don't go to the same school as you. And if your parents ever found out about your being a Jet, they'd keep you grounded at home.

Listen to Nr. 10 "You're never alone...“!



A-Rab

You are a Jet, 14 years old and still go to school. When you come home, there is no-one there. And it's better that way. Your mom, who has to work the whole day, argues with your dad, who is an alcoholic. He lost his job because of his drinking problem. Since he's been unemployed, he complains about all the new immigrants, about niggers and Latinos who took away his job.

You used to often be home alone - that's how you learned to be patient. Nowadays you go straight to your favorite playing field after school. It's on 86th Street. You show off your soccer skills and have a great time. You always notice too late when things start getting serious, though. You are the kind of guy who doesn't take things very seriously. You are with the Jets because the bigger guys are always there for you young guys in time of need. Considering that, you let the others boss you around a bit. Your friend Baby John is even younger than you are, which comforts you. Recently you got caught up in a group of Puerto Ricans, some of whom you know from school. One of them injured your ear when they were chasing you. You had played with his propeller airplane. Riff took care of you, and you were proud that your ear was bleeding.

Listen to Nr. 10 "You're never alone..." !



Professor (Snowboy)

You are a Jet, and the other Jets call you Professor or Snowboy. You are 15 years old and moved from New Jersey to New York a year ago. In the West Side, your father found a apartment in the basement. Instead of paying rent, he is working as the house caretaker, taking out the garbage, sweeping the staircase, and so on. He is one of those people whose words are bigger than his actions.

You always used to have the best grades in school, but here in the West Side, you find you must develop other qualities. You play the clever guy, exceeding the others with your smart remarks and witty retorts. You've mastered getting into adult-only movies, even without having to pay. When you get picked up by the cops, which sometimes happens, you end up in front of good „acquaintances“ at the Youth Office, who deliver you to your father's place.

You always have to prove yourself to get the Jets to accept you and to take you seriously. You try to get away from home as soon as possible. In a way, life in the gang is a contrast to the life your dad leads. During the day, he works in a wholesale trade store, and in the evening, he keeps the house tidy. He forgets what life is supposed to be about. You want to do things differently.

Listen to Nr. 10 "You're never alone..." !



Mouthpiece

You are a 15-years-old Jet. Your parents kicked you out of the house some months ago. Hence, you live in an attic apartment with your older sister, who is a saleswoman. You are allowed to stay there, provided you hand over 5 dollars a week as rent. Your father said he would beat you up if he sees you around. He found out that, due to a couple of incidents, you were suspended from school for 4 weeks. He also found out that you are a member the Jets and were involved in a few fights.

You're great at making smart remarks. You can impress some people with them, but it usually gets on peoples' nerves. When the police arrive, the Jets send you up to "negotiate". The girls sometimes laugh at you, or turn and groan when you say something. You would like it if the gang helped you in coming up with your rent for your sister. Most of them don't like stealing or that kind of stuff, though. They rather battle like medieval knights for their honor. You find that quite dumb, but you can't change anything about that now.

Listen to Nr. 10 "You're never alone... "!



Velma

You are 16 years old and have been here in the West Side for a year. The house in which you used to live in was torn down, and the rent in the neighborhood got too expensive. Now you live here very cheaply, but your dad has to drive an hour to work every day. It is very dirty and dreary here. You go to high school because your father says that education is everything. You don't think so. School is a mix-up of different people and languages. Half of your classmates switch classes within a year. You don't like the blacks in your class very well, but you get along well with the Puerto Ricans in the class. You even pick up a couple Spanish idioms from them. ("Education is everything!")

Jazz is your favorite kind of music. You like to go dancing and to dress up. If you spend some time on your appearance, all the boys keep looking at you, not only Riff. You used to take dance lessons, and you try to be at every dance competition. The youth club offers dance-evenings sometimes. You then convince your boyfriend, Riff, to come along and dance with you. That's a lot of fun, especially when your friend Graziella is there, too. Riff and his gang are really after her.

You came to the Jets through Riff, whose leadership in the gang you totally admire. Riff acts very cool and superior. Even you don't always get along with him. Most of the Jets are too small, too young and too immature for you, though. Anybody's, who tries to be one of the Jets even though she is girl, is ridiculous in your eyes.



Graziella

You are 16 years old and live in a two bedroom apartment on 86th Street with your two older siblings. Your mom is Spanish; she can't speak a word of English. Two years ago, after your dad got crushed at work by a harbor crane, your mom moved back to her parents' town in Spain with the smaller children. For the widow of a casual harbor worker with seven children, welfare simply isn't enough. You and your older siblings stayed here, because you all have small jobs at a Laundromat. You are waiting to see how things will go from here.

After work you and your siblings usually walk home together. When you go out again later in the evening, you feel a bit uneasy. That's why you are glad there's a club across the street from you where young people can go dancing. You met your friend Velma there. Velma took you along to the Jets, whose leader is her boyfriend - a really cool guy.

The Jet boys are alright, but you really hate it when you girls get labeled as „dolls“. You even said that directly to Diesel once when he tried to make a blatant pass at you. You try to talk to Velma about this sort of macho thing sometimes, but it doesn't help.



Anybodys

You call yourself Anybodys, and you are 15 years old. You don't tell anyone your real name. Just like 86th Street and the run-down houses with their fire staircases, you belong to the West Side. You were born here, and have seen families come and go. You have always known that you can only be somebody around here if you belong to a gang. Even as a small girl, you decided to fight like a boy. You have always been where the boys and the action were. You were glad if they didn't notice that you are a girl.

When your father comes home drunk, and your mother timidly takes for cover, you tell yourself that this won't happen to you. You watch how the Jets behave when things get dangerous, how they coolly stand their ground and grab a hold with the speed of lightning. You have been out with the Jets often, and have tried persuading Riff that you're the right man for him. When all the Jet girls pull back, you still stand up for your gang. The Jet girls call you „an American tragedy“. When the boys talk about their „dolls“, and the girls don't say anything, you could really thump them all, the girls and the guys.

In the drugstore, you hang out by the juke-box, because Doc at the counter always says these strange things to you. And you can make Police Officers Krupke and Schrank uneasy by your appearance. That's fun.

Listen to Nr. 10 "You're never alone..." !



Clarice

You are 15 years old and spend a lot of time at home. After school, you've got to cook, go shopping, clean and take care of your younger siblings. Your mom doesn't get home until evening; your dad is unemployed and goes about the neighborhood with his girlfriend. You're glad you don't have anything to do with him. Velma lives in your building, one floor beneath you. She's lived here for a year and sometimes takes you dancing with her. She always shows you the newest dance steps. And since she has bought herself a record player, you can both practice the new steps when nobody's at home. You can't keep up with Velma's fashion; you can't earn your own money because you don't have any time to work. And your mom often doesn't even have enough money to take care of the children.

You watch carefully how Velma goes about with men, especially with the Jets, who aren't exactly liked here in the neighborhood. It makes you angry when the boys call you girls "dolls". Velma can't understand what you mean. On the other hand, you are amazed at how Anybodys, as a girl, refuses to let the Jets ban her from the gang.

You find the way the boys dance stupid. They even stay cool dancing the Jitterbug! If the Puerto Ricans dance it, it looks so different! Your biggest idol is Marilyn Monroe. You have asked for money for Christmas so you can go to the hairdresser's. Then you'll fit in better with the Jets.

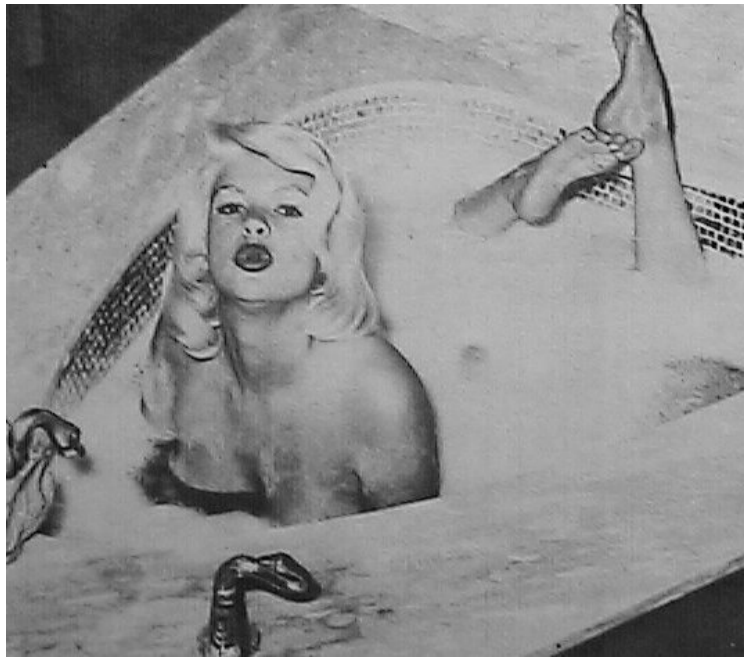


Minnie

You're 13, and will be 14 in half a year. You go to school and you want to learn there. Your parents never have any money and are always trying to come up with something. Your dad waits on the sidewalk of Park Avenue every morning to get signed up by truck drivers for loading work. Your mom is always on the go, looking for deals on food, clothes and other things she can barely pay for. It isn't easy with 6 kids. When you are grown, you don't want to lead the kind of life your parents are leading.

Often you walk home from school with Francisca and her friend Teresita. Teresita lives next door to you, and just recently arrived from Puerto Rico. She's a year older than you are, and is very funny and friendly. She shows you a lot of things from her homeland, like dance steps, paintings and artwork. You don't have enough courage to go to her house, though.

You also spend a lot of time with your friend Pauline, who doesn't have any brothers or sisters, and whose parents are away from home all day. Together with Pauline, you go out on the streets and watch when the Jets show off. Both of you find it sweet how Baby John and A-Rab mix in with the gang. Whenever the Jets start brawling, Velma and Graziella keep out. Then you are all the "Jet-Girls" and discuss whether you couldn't talk a bit of sense into the boys.



Pauline

You're 13, and you are home alone all day because your parents are always on the go. You haven't got any brothers or sisters, but a good friend called Minnie. She visits you just about every day. The two of you go out together. Through Baby John, who lives in the same building as you, you've got to know the Jets. Actually, you would be happier if you girls would simply create a gang of your own. Then you wouldn't always have to stand around and watch the boys show off. In an all-girls gang, you could do your own thing, and would have better things to do than just to watch the boys at dances. The boys only make stupid passes at you anyway.

You are happy about the fact that the youth club has dances in the afternoon, too. That's good for you, because you're not allowed to go out in the evening when your parents are home from work. You find it a shame that Minnie and you don't have any contact to the Puerto Rican boys in your class. You find them very funny and nice. But they don't even seem to take notice of you.



Bernardo

You are the leader of the Sharks, 18 years old, and have been living in the West Side for 5 years now. As a 13-year-old boy, you came here with your parents and two siblings. Your other younger siblings stayed with your grandmother in San Juan. In Puerto Rico, you quit school at the age of 10 and started working at the branch of an American company where your dad works, until the branch closed down. In New York, you had to go back to school, which only meant trouble. You've learned two things, nevertheless. For one, you're not any worse than the "native inhabitants" here, and for another, with good friends, you can achieve something. You don't really have any career prospects, though.

The Sharks already existed before you arrived in the West Side. You spent every free minute with the Sharks, unless it had to do with going dancing. Last year, you got promoted as leader of the Sharks, and Pepe became your lieutenant. At a dance, you met Anita; since then she is your bride. She is a Puerto-Rican, too, but sometimes she pretends to be American and is quite rebellious. Then you call her by her full Spanish name to annoy her.

A month ago, your sister Maria came from Puerto Rico to New York, because Anita's boss said she could use another capable temporary worker. As the older brother, it is your responsibility to take care of your younger sister Maria. You've made a deal with your friend Chino that he should marry Maria. Your father told you the sooner Maria's ties the knot, the less trouble she'll be.

Listen to Nr. 11 "America" (from the Movie)!



Chino

You are a Shark, 17 years old, and a friend of Bernardo's. You already knew Bernardo's family when you were living in Puerto Rico. Even then, you were doing better than Bernardo, although you're shy and quieter than he is. You learned English in school, while Bernardo quit school.

When your mother left for New York, she took you by the hand and said to "goodbye forever" to your father. Since then, you two have been living with an aunt and her son, Primo, on the 5th floor of a really run-down house in the West Side. A year ago, a friend of your aunt's also moved in with you into the two-room apartment, which is now quite crowded.

When you arrived in New York, Bernardo took you along to the Sharks. Nevertheless, you finished school here and became an employee in a lawyer's office. That way you can help out your mom financially, and in the near future, you'll be able to afford your own apartment. Although your mom is better off here than in Puerto Rico, and you're better off than most of the Puerto Ricans in the West Side, you're still annoyed that the so-called "Americans" earn more than you do, even if they're only delivery boys, like Tony, for example.

Bernardo has suggested that you should marry Maria as soon as possible. That makes you somewhat uneasy, even though you think she's really nice. But you don't know how you should behave towards her, being here in the USA. In Puerto Rico, everything would be a lot simpler.

Listen to Nr. 11 "America" (from the Movie) !



Pepe

You're a Shark, 16 years old and the lieutenant to Bernardo, your leader. At the age of 2, you came to New York on one of the very first passenger flights between San Juan and New York. In the meantime, your parents have gone back in Puerto Rico; only your grandparents stayed here. Up until 3 years ago, you lived in El Barrio (East Harlem). Then your granddad lost his job because too many younger Puerto Ricans came to the area. He brought you to friends in the West Side, packed his few prized possessions and headed back to Puerto Rico. You had to quit school and earn money to survive. But you don't have a job right now.

In school in El Barrio, you used to hear about the Sharks. Even as a small boy, you were a member of youth-gangs. Upon arrival in the West End, the Sharks accepted you quickly, because you're a good fighter and like to knuckle people down. You would have liked to have more support for your "money concerns", but you soon noticed that the Sharks is not about robbery or burglary.

You're also happy with your girlfriend Consuelo. You noticed her because of her bleached hair and dangly jewelry. She behaves like a young Puerto Rican woman who as adjusted a bit to American fashion – but only on the outside: She doesn't question the authority Puerto Rican men have over women.

Listen to Nr. 11 "America" (from the Movie) !



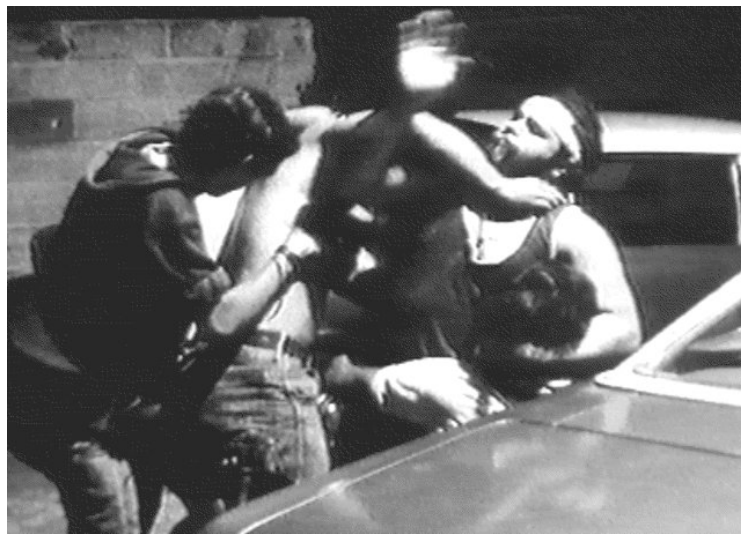
Indio

You are a Shark, 15 years old and have been living in New York for 8 years now. Two years ago, for your first communion, you visited relatives in Puerto Rico, and got to know life in your actual homeland better. Ever since then, you've only got one wish: to earn a lot of money in New York, to save up, and then go back to Puerto Rico. You know exactly, though, that they're going to mock you as a "Gringo" back there.

You are always wondering which is better: to study for school or to be a criminal. In school, you're always a second class citizen because your English isn't that great. Once you wanted to discuss with a couple of guys from your class how you could possibly get a hold of some money. When they noticed that you were Puerto Rican, they just left you standing there. Since then, you're afraid of being blackmailed. That's why you've joined the Sharks.

Luis and Juano go to the same school as you. The three of you make up the Sharks "student club". You help out Luis sometimes when there are problems at school. And when someone gets beaten up on the way home from school, Bernardo and a couple of the older boys appear at the scene. You don't want to be with the Sharks forever, but at the moment, you've got no other choice. What bothers you the most about the Sharks is that there is actually no difference between them and the white gangs in the West Side. You often have to remind Bernardo: "We're not just any old gang, we're a Puerto Rican gang!"

Listen to Nr. 11 "America" (from the Movie) !

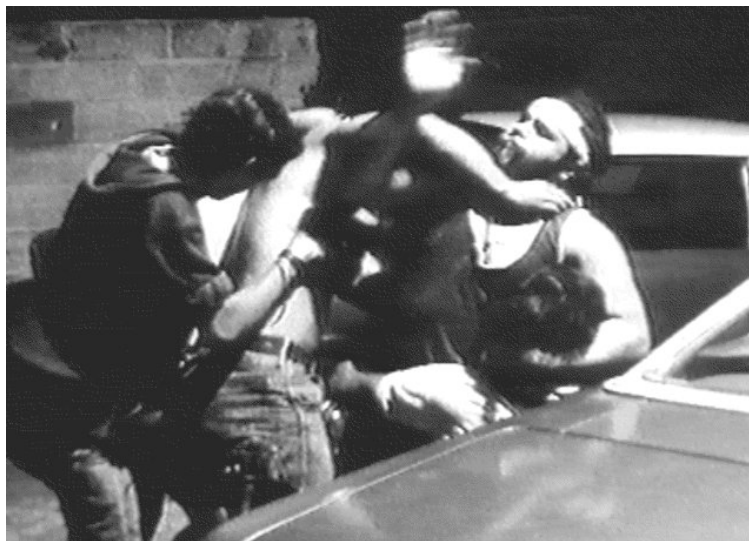


Juano

You are a Shark, 14 years old and arrived in the West Side with Luis a year ago. Your two big brothers have already been living here for a couple years. You are supposed to help them with running their small store. A couple things quickly got in your way, though. First, it was the Youth Office, which forced you to go to school. Then, it was the construction of the freeway along the West Side, which cost your brothers' store its customers. Your brothers had to move away to another part of the city to find work. So you go to school with Luis and often get beat up on the way home. Often, you've got to listen to your brothers who tell you you're a lazy bones, and that they have to pay everything for you. The only thing that impresses your brothers is that you are a member of the Sharks. They think you should be careful when fighting, of course. After all, they don't want the police to come to them. But they also think that every man in the West Side has to protect himself as good as possible. And they say, "Alone, you're a goner".

If you weren't teased and beaten up so often, you would rather live without the Sharks. Then you could run a snack bar with your big brothers and make yourself useful some other way. Your friend Luis helps you out when it's necessary. Nevertheless, you think he acts a bit too grown up for his age, even though he's younger than you. And when Francisca or Teresita are around, he really overdoes it.

Listen to Nr. 11 "America" (from the Movie)!



Luis

You are a 13-years-old Shark. You have been living in New York for a year now. In school, you don't understand a word, except when the teacher says, "Get back to where you came from, you lazy bunch. We only work and pay taxes for your parents' Welfare!" Then a brawl is certain to break out; your friend Juano and a couple other classmates help you. Juano also took you along to the Sharks, who are almost a size too big for you. Too often, there are arguments and squabbles which you don't like.

Your mom always cries whenever you come home with a couple scratches or ripped clothes. She says she doesn't know how to raise you and your 4 siblings, because your dad can't find a job. Only your older sister seems to bring in some money now and then. Other than that, your mom often sends you and your brothers to the Salvation Army for supper. The people there aren't very friendly when they notice that you're a Puerto Rican.

Although you have been living here for a year, somehow you can't understand why your parents moved to New York. When you ask them, they don't answer. When you get homesick for Puerto Rico, you go to the youth club, where they play Mambo and other music reminding you of your home. You like going to the club with Teresita and Francisca, who live in the same building as you, and who also belong to the Sharks in a way.

Listen to Nr. 11 "America" (from the Movie) !



Anita

You are 17 years old, were born in Puerto Rico and have been living in New York for 3 years now. You are glad you could leave Puerto Rico and found work in a bridal shop. Your boyfriend is Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks, whom you met at a dance competition. Both of you won a prize that day. Bernardo clearly doesn't want to give up his Puerto Rican machismo. He always tries to boss you around, and that's why the both of you are almost always quarreling.

Your biggest wish is to have all the freedom that the American girls have, and yet not to be so "well behaved" as these boring blondes. You know exactly what catches a man's eye, and how to balance American fashion with Puerto Rican charisma.

You make fun of the way Bernardo "rules" the Sharks so seriously. And when Bernardo plays the biggest and coolest guy in front of his gang, all you have to do is flirt with Pepe or Indio a bit, and Bernardo immediately pays attention to you. Then he calls you by your full Spanish name, which really gets you angry.

For the past month, Bernardo's sister, Maria, has been working with you in the bridal shop. You are trying to prepare Maria for life in the West Side. You know how all the white boys in the neighborhood react when a Puerto Rican woman appears without the company of a man. Besides a small flirt, it is advisable not to get involved with Americanos.

Listen to Nr. 9 "Anita's gonna get" !



Maria

You are 15 years old and came to New York from Puerto Rico a month ago. You live with your parents and three siblings in a very small but pretty apartment in the West Side. After your parents and your bigger brother, Bernardo, had left you with your grandparents in Puerto Rico 5 years ago, you only had one wish: As soon as you finished school, you wanted to come to New York, too, and get away from the crowded conditions in Puerto Rico. Since your first communion two years ago, you feel more and more that life as a girl in Puerto Rico is almost like being a prisoner. Without the company of an adult, you weren't allowed to go out on the street. If you ever happened to go out alone, you were approached by all sorts of men.

You are working in a bridal shop with your friend Anita. Before you came here, she already told you about life in New York in all her exciting letters. You already knew all the dance clubs and street names in the West Side by heart before your airplane took off from San Juan. Now you're here, in the "big world", and feel as closed in as before. During the day, you work in the bridal shop, and in the evening, you sit at home or are supervised by Bernardo. Bernardo even thinks that once you turn 16, you're going to marry Chino.

Anita and you have finally persuaded Bernardo that you should be allowed to go to a dance. You're totally excited, because you've got this feeling that today, your life as "Lady America" is about to begin.

Listen to Nr. 7 "I feel pretty!"



Consuelo (Consuela)

You are 16, and came to New York with your two older siblings two years ago. You moved in with friends of your parents. You've got a small quiet room and pay 12 dollars a week as rent. Since then, your siblings have moved to other parts of the city. You're glad that you've found a group of girls with who go dancing with you, or hang out with the Sharks. That's where you met your boyfriend Pepe. He comes from El Barrio and is an experienced guy. He knows New York from all angles. You do yourself up with makeup for him as good as you can. And he always 'organizes' striking jewelry for you. When you hear under which conditions most Puerto Rican girls still live here in New York, how they are bossed around by their parents or brothers, you only laugh. You write your parents in Puerto Rico regularly, and enclose a 10 dollar bill. That's enough for a couple months then. You would never move back to Puerto Rico. As a sign of this, you've bleached your hair. Everyone calls you "Platinum Blonde". You're very content with that!

Listen to Nr. 8 "Have you met" !



Rosalia

You are 15 years old, go to high school, and have been living in New York for a few years now. Your father and uncle came here so that you, your siblings and cousins could get a better education than is available in Puerto Rico. You were lucky, because you're in a school where there are classes for Spanish-speaking kids. This way, you are rarely together with "American" girls and boys. You like it that way. You act as "Spanish" as possible so people notice you're pure Puerto Rican. You long for your homeland; you find New York too loud, hectic and chaotic. In Puerto Rico, you would (if possible) move out into the countryside, and work as a teacher or a nurse.

You are going out with Indio. Admittedly, he's heavily involved in the Sharks, but nevertheless, he's not a big city guy. Indio will go back to Puerto Rico with you; that's what he promised you. You don't like what the Sharks do in this neighborhood. You've noticed, though, that it's pointless wanting to persuade boys to do something other than going about in gangs. When you get one of the boys alone, they're really nice, even Bernardo or Pepe. Put them together, and they are unbearable.

Listen to Nr. 8 "Have you met" !



Francisca

You're 14 years old, were born in Puerto Rico, and have been living in New York for a long time. A couple of years ago, your family moved to the West Side, because apartments are quite cheap there: the houses are supposed to be torn down during the next two to five years. You go to school and help some of your friends who haven't been here that long. You help them with the English language, because you're quite good at English. Your best friend is Teresita, who just recently moved to New York. She's actually supposed to be a relative of yours. Every two years, someone in your family flies to Puerto Rico to visit relatives, to go to some great-great-uncle's funeral, or to go to a wedding. When you come along, you notice how this "homeland" is no longer home for you. You would never want to move back. In Puerto Rico, the people make fun of those who've been in America by calling them "Gringo". The bridal store is a meeting place for a group of Puerto Rican girls. Anita, Consuelo, and since recently Bernardo's sister all work there. Bernardo is the leader of the Sharks. You somehow feel you belong to the Sharks. In any case, you love going dancing with Luis and Juano, and both of them are genuine Sharks. You don't like many things Sharks do, but you realize that gangs here in New York are simply like that.



Teresita

You are 14 years old, and just recently moved to New York with your parents. At first, you all stayed with your relatives in East Harlem. Your dad didn't find a job and didn't get along well with his uncle. When your dad started drinking, your mom moved with you to a friends' place in the West Side. Your father has probably moved back to Puerto Rico in the meantime. Your mom doesn't want to hear from him. Luckily, you got to know Francisca at school. She can speak English fluently and knows her way around. The two of you walk home from school together and watch out that no Americanos chat you up.

A meeting place for Puerto Rican girls is the bridal shop which Francisca showed you. All the Shark-Girls meet there and discuss "strategies". The main topic of discussion is the boys' machismo and your parents' way of keeping you under their rules. Most of the girls agree that they want to live like the "American" girls of the same age: go dancing until 10 p.m., and be able to meet boys without supervision.

Going out is not as big a problem for you as for the other girls, though. You barely have any time for these "American" fancies. Your mom and her friend have to work the whole day, and therefore, you are responsible for shopping, cleaning and cooking. Your mom says, if you want to be free in New York, you will have to earn it. However, since she separated from your father, she doesn't say 'it's a good idea to find a good husband at the age of 15' anymore.



Gladhand

You are 33 years old and were born in the West Side when it was still almost purely a "white" neighborhood. You were a first aid man during the war, and you've noticed how social problems have grown since then. Because you didn't want to sit back and simply accept this development, you enrolled in the Columbia University School of Social Work. The school is practically in the middle of the West Side. You got a degree in Social Work and Street Work. Many discussions have been led in the West Side in the last few years, as to what is the most effective kind of social work. The concept of "cultural understanding" is something you hold dear. With this in mind, you organize your so-called "youth club". Two times a week, young people meet in a gymnasium and hold a dance. As long as the kids come alone, or in small groups, everything runs great. When whole gangs start showing up, though, you're quite helpless.

The 4th District police administration is skeptical about the effectiveness of modern social work. They want to force you to report all sorts of incidents as criminal activities. Because you don't do that, though, the responsible police lieutenant sends an inspector to every event. This kind of police protection admittedly has its advantages too. For example, there haven't been any incidents with drugs in your club, something which isn't necessarily the case in the other clubs east of here.

Your teacher always used to say, "good intentions are important, but they're not enough". That's so true. Unfortunately, though, no one in New York can say what one can do besides having good intentions. Therefore, everything stays as it is. You put on your records with a smile on your face.



Shrank

You are a plain-clothes police lieutenant, 38 years old, and a "native inhabitant" of the West Side. Your decision to become a police officer was secure as you came back in '45 from the war as a GI. You were quickly promoted, and not only because of your military merits for the "American cause". With your charming, pleasant ways of concealing your rage, you were able to master difficult situations. In the 12 years that you've served in the West Side, a lot has changed. There are ever-increasing amounts of conflicts between the different immigrants, especially the Latinos, Puerto Ricans, and the lower class whites who didn't manage to leave the West Side in time. On top of that, you've got a youth-gang problem in the neighborhood. It is always being discussed in the 4th District how the police force should deal with the new youth gangs. If you had your way, you would take more drastic measures to show the new immigrants that they can't simply show up here and then open their big mouths. You're not really allowed to tighten down on them, though. The new tactics of your superiors are more psychological. With the two problem groups in the area of 86th Street, the Jets and the Sharks, you think the force should do the following: First, liquidate the Sharks, possibly with the help of the Jets, and with these measures, scare away the Jets. If this strategy worked, a promotion to a better neighborhood in the West Side would be sure to come. If your plan failed, and there were too many attacks or deaths, you would have to count on the worst ... reduction to the level of Inspector.



Krupke

You have been, with your 35 years of age, a police inspector for a long time now. In other words, you have to take care of the dirty work in the neighborhood. You get to drive a police car with a lot of chrome, and get to show off your gun too. Besides that, though, you have to repeatedly win your respect every day. With your 110kg weight, a height of 190cm and a chest measurement of 120cm, not counting your muscles, you got into police academy easily. What was more difficult, was trying to hide with your facial expressions the fact that you don't really know what's going on. Considering this, it doesn't really bother you when Schrank goes out on patrol with you and tells you what to do.

The problems in the West Side have become more difficult in the last couple years. So difficult, in fact, that you can really forget what you learned at police academy. What should you do, for example, when the youth make a skit on the sidewalk, a skit in which they make fun of you with your truncheon. And then the skit suddenly turns serious, and degenerates into a brawl. If you forbid the kids from being on the street, then they'll go into the back-alleys, where they're completely uncontrollable. And if you let them be, they walk all over you.

A colleague of yours got knocked down in front of his own front door after he had arrested a couple young rowdies and beat up a black. After that, you applied for and received a residence in the Lower West Side. There, in a quieter area, at least you don't feel followed and threatened. The 30 minute drive to your District is well worth it. Safety first.



Doc

You are 51 years old, and everyone calls you “Doc” because you already wore glasses as a boy. At the end of the 1920s, you moved from Pennsylvania to New York. As the depression came to an end, you opened a bar in the German part of town, which they call the “4th Reich”. (Your grandfather came from Hamburg and worked in a German brewery in the Bronx before the First World War.) During the war it became an American drugstore (and you gave it your nickname). Since the West Side became the collecting place for the poorest from every nation in the world, you’ve set up your store with a jukebox, darts and a couple modern game machines, so that young people can meet here over a Coca Cola. You ask yourself often why Blacks never come, and why Puerto Ricans seldom come to your drugstore although you never forbid them from entering. You live in a small apartment above the drugstore. You go to bed at about 1:00a.m. after the store closes, and start cleaning up at 8:00a.m. You’ve never had a wife and family. In a way, the youth which meet in the drugstore are a family replacement for you. And, you can’t understand what it must be like at home with their parents, what causes these young guys to go at each other and be disruptive.

