The Shawshank Redemption (1994)
directed by Frank Darabont

Cast
Tim Robbins as Andy Dufresne
Morgan Freeman as Ellis Boyd “Red” Redding
Bob Gunton as Warden Samuel Norton
William Sadler as Heywood
Clancy Brown as Capt. Byron Hadley
Gil Bellows as Tommy Williams
Mark Rolston as Bogs Diamond
James Whitmore as Brooks Hatlen

Crew
Director: Frank Darabont
Producer: Niki Marvin
Writer: Frank Darabont (screenplay) based on Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption by Stephen King
Editor: Richard Francis-Bruce
Director of Photography: Roger Deakins
Music: Thomas Newman

Distribution/Studio Company: Castle Rock Entertainment and Columbia Pictures
MPAA Rating: R
Running Time: 142 minutes

Background and Introduction to The Shawshank Redemption

The Shawshank Redemption is a 1994 American drama film that was adapted from the Stephen King novella Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption. Stephen King has considered the film to be one of his favorite film adaptations based on his own work. Darabont’s adapted screenplay is #22 on the Writers Guild of America’s 101 Greatest Screenplays list. Shawshank tells the story of Andy Dufresne, a banker who is sentenced to life in Shawshank State Penitentiary for the murder of his wife and her lover despite his claims of innocence. During his time at the prison, he befriends a fellow inmate, Ellis Boyd “Red” Redding and finds himself protected by the guards after the warden begins using him in his money-laundering operation.

Roger Ebert suggested that The Shawshank Redemption is an allegory for maintaining one’s feeling of self-worth when placed in a hopeless position. Andy Dufresne’s integrity is an important theme in the story line, especially in prison, where integrity is lacking. Isaac M. Morehouse suggests that the film provides a great illustration of how characters can be free, even in prison, or unfree, even in freedom, based on their outlooks on life. Tim Robbins noted that the story is unique in depicting a nonsexual love story between two men. The film has been critically acclaimed for depicting Jean-Paul Sartre’s ideas about existentialism more fully than any other contemporary movie.

Although it was a box office disappointment, the film received multiple award nominations (including seven Oscar nominations – none of which it won) and outstanding reviews from critics for its acting, story, and realism. It was included in the American Film Institute’s 100 Years...100 Movies 10th Anniversary Edition after being excluded from its original list. It outranked both Forrest Gump (#76) and Pulp Fiction (#94), the two most critically acclaimed movies from the year of Shawshank’s release. It is considered to be one of the greatest films of all time. In 2015, the United States Library of Congress selected the film for preservation in the National Film Registry, finding it “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.” (Poster and screenshots © Castle Rock Entertainment, 1994)
**Pre-Viewing, During Viewing, and Post-Viewing Notes**

**Directions:** Conscientious film students prepare themselves for a film by writing any notes about the film that may be important during the pre-viewing process and any notes that the group presentation will make for our post-viewing discussion of the film. Jot down any lecture or discussion material here. In addition, this page is used to record your notes while you watch the film. In the left column, describe scenes from the film that seem intriguing, interesting, or relative to your life. In the right column, write a response to the scene you described in the left column. You may write what you think the scene means, what the scene reminds you of, what you don’t understand, how you feel about it, or any other comments.

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**Summary**

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Comprehension Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions during or after the movie.

1. In the novella, author Stephen King opens with Red describing who he is and how he can get people anything in prison. How do the filmmakers open the film adaptation? Why?

2. What role does the opening diegetic song “I Didn’t Care” that Andy listens to in his car play?

3. Why do the filmmakers flash-forward to Andy’s trial but then flashback to events from that night? What is the effect of this editing? Also, explain Andy’s behavior/demeanor in court.

4. Why do the filmmakers pan over the jury? What are the facts in Andy’s case? How were Andy’s wife and her lover killed?

5. What choices do the filmmakers use as a motif at Red’s parole hearings? List them and explain their effect/meaning. Why is Red rejected?

6. What point of view have the filmmakers used until now? What point of view does the film use now? Why? Note that this voiceover is how the novella begins.

7. What is the effect of the extreme long, aerial shot of Shawshank Prison? What is implied in the high angle shots in this scene?
8. Why do the cons call the new arrivals fish? Explain this **figurative language**. What do the cons bet on when new cons arrive? Why? How is this action **ironic**? How does this action indirectly characterize them?

9. What are Red’s initial impressions of Andy? Why? Once Red gets to know Andy, explain how Andy’s looks and actions initially deceived him?

10. What techniques do the filmmakers use to suggest the arrivals’ fear?

11. How is the warden indirectly characterized? What is suggested by his emergence and disappearance from and into the darkness?

12. What are the warden’s rules? What type of leader is he? Why?

13. How are the new felons indirectly characterized by their **costume**?

14. How do the men at Shawshank treat new arrivals? What do they bet on? How is this treatment **ironic**? Who breaks down? What happens to him?

15. How is Brooks indirectly characterized? Who is Jake and what can Jake **symbolize**?

17. What is the subtext of Bog’s question to Andy of “Did anyone come at you yet”? Who are the Sisters and what is their reputation?

18. What does Andy ask Red to get for him? Why? What does this item symbolize to Andy, and what does it later symbolize?

19. What is implied that happens to Andy? How and where does the camera move? Why?


22. Notice the change in color between this scene and the last. Why is this scene in blue and the last one in orange? How does each affect mood?

23. What do the Sisters attempt to do and do to Andy? Why is Andy filmed via high angle? What are the consequences of Bog’s actions?
24. What **comic relief** is in this scene, and how does it ease audience tension from the previous scene?

25. What does the Rita Hayworth poster **symbolize** to Andy? What does the poster **symbolize** to viewers later in the film?

26. Why does the warden toss Andy’s cell? What does he find, and what do the warden and Andy discuss? Where does salvation lie?

27. What is Andy reassigned to do instead of laundry? Why?

28. What does the warden grant Andy permission to do? What does Andy desire? What does he want to give other inmates? Why?

29. Why does Brooks attack Heywood? What does Red say about the **irony** of being at Shawshank for such a long time like Brooks has? How does Shawshank take convicts’ lives?

30. Why does Brooks release Jake? How does Brooks adjust to life on the outside? How does the **non-diegetic score** affect the **mood**?

31. Why does Brooks do what he does? What does this scene **foreshadow**?
32. What does Andy finally receive? Why? How is this scene juxtaposed against the last, and what is its purpose? What does Andy play for Shawshank to hear? Why? What are the inmates’ reactions?

33. What is the warden’s response to Andy’s actions? Why? How do Andy’s actions indirectly characterize him? What do Andy’s actions foreshadow?

34. What does music symbolize to Andy? What do Andy and Red discuss about hope?

35. Why is Red once again rejected at his parole hearing? What does he say? Why? What does Andy give as a gift? Why? What may it symbolize?

36. When Andy tells Heywood about The Count of Monte Cristo, what does this foreshadow? How is this a “meta moment”?

37. What does Andy receive from the state senate, and what does he do with these funds? To whom is the library dedicated? Why?

38. What is the warden’s Inside Out program? Why is he filmed via low angle? What are the benefits of the program to the warden, the inmates, and the community? What is Andy’s role in this program, and what is ironic about both the warden’s and Andy’s actions?
39. Who is Randall Stevens, and what is his role or purpose?

40. Who is Tommy Williams and how is he indirectly characterized by his actions as well as the non-diegetic/background score?

41. What does Tommy want, and why does he need Andy’s help? Why does Andy help him, or what does he receive in return?

42. How does Tommy think he did on his exam? What does Andy do?

43. What does Tommy tell Andy and Red he has heard? Why is he framed in between them? Why does the camera track toward him?

44. What is the warden’s reaction to Tommy’s story? Why? How does the warden respond to Andy calling him obtuse? Why? What does the warden do to Andy? Why? Why aren’t they filmed via a two-shot?

45. What does the warden do to Tommy? Why?

46. What does Andy threaten to do? Why? What is the warden’s response? Why? Why is Andy filmed via high angle and the warden via low angle? How does the non-diegetic score affect the mood?
47. What does Andy realize about his marriage and his role as a husband? How does this realization indirectly characterize him?

48. What is Zihuatanejo, and what does this setting symbolize to Andy? What does Andy mean when he says, “Gest busy living or get busy dying”?

49. What do Andy’s friends think he’ll do? What item does he have? Why? What is the longest night of Red’s life? Why?

50. What has happened to Andy? How has he done it? What does the film flashback to?

51. What did Andy steal from the warden, especially from his outfit? Why? How are these costume changes revealed cinematically?

52. Why is the setting important in both the plot and symbolism on the night that Andy escapes? Why?

53. Andy has to take off his prison uniform to avoid being caught, but what else could this costume change suggest or reflect about his indirect characterization? What does this extreme high angle/bird’s eye view suggest? This is most iconic image from the film and is typically used to advertise the film. Why?
54. What does Andy do when he escapes? Why?

55. What does the warden have on the wall in his office? What does it mean to the warden before and after being caught for his crimes?

56. Earlier in the film, the warden said that Andy would find salvation within the Bible. How did Andy find salvation? Think back to earlier in the film. How did Andy nearly get caught?

57. In what chapter of the Bible did Andy hide his rock hammer? Research this allusion. Why is it apt that Andy kept the rock hammer here?

58. What happens to both Captain Hadley and Warden Samuel Norton?

59. What does Red receive in the mail? What is his reaction to Andy’s escape? Why?

60. What does Red say at his next parole hearing? Why? How is this monologue different than the previous ones?

61. What red herrings do the filmmakers provide that suggest that Red might do what Brooks did? Notice the similarities in story and style.
62. What **internal conflict** does Red have outside of Shawshank, and how are they suggested in this shot?

63. What does this pan imply that Red is thinking? Why?

64. What was Red’s promise to Andy, and how does Red’s promise to Andy save Red’s life?

65. What does Red discover under the stone wall? When did Andy leave it? What is Red supposed to do with this gift? Why?

66. What **themes** does Andy impart in his letter to Red? Why is it appropriate or fitting that Andy provides a voiceover here?


68. In the novella, King closes with Red hoping that he’ll meet Andy in Mexico, but it doesn’t definitively conclude with him reuniting with Andy. The film chooses to explicitly showcase their reunion. Why?

69. Why does the film close with an **extreme long shot** of Andy and Red in Zihuatanego? What does the shot suggest for the two men?
Discussion Questions

**Directions:** Answer the following questions after you watch the film.

1. People don’t tend to like prison films – except if they’re prison break films. Why is that? What about prisons do people not want to accept or see? Why?

2. *The Shawshank Redemption* failed at the box office but later earned a cult following. Why did viewers grow to accept and love this film only after it left theatres? Explain its poor initial reception.

3. Red says that too much hope is a dangerous thing. Andy says that hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things. Do you agree with Red or Andy? What is the fine line with hope? Why?

4. In the film, viewers never learn of Red’s crime. Does it matter? Why or why not? Author Stephen King details Red’s crime in the second paragraph of the novella and writes that Red killed his wife for a large insurance payout by cutting the brakes in her car. The car also contained a neighbor and her infant son. Why don’t the filmmakers include this in the film’s plot, and how would it have affected Red’s characterization (if at all)?

5. Why is it ironic that the warden and captain of the guards commit the actions that they do? How are authority figures portrayed? Why?
6. Why do you think the filmmakers abridged the **title** from its original *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption* to just *The Shawshank Redemption*? Does the **title** spoil the **resolution**? Why or why not?

7. What role do gambling and chess play in the film? How do these act as **motifs** throughout the film, and how do these **motifs** connect to any of the film’s **themes**?


9. Some viewers feel that the film should end when Andy escapes and that Act III drags on too long. Do you agree or disagree? Is it important that Red is released and the two reunite? Why or why not?

10. Comment on the benefit or effect/meaning of the film’s **point of view**. Why do we see the film from this person’s perspective, *not* from anyone else’s?

11. If you believe that a story has only one **protagonist**, who is the **protagonist** of *The Shawshank Redemption*? Is it Andy or Red? Why? Who is redeemed, and how is he redeemed?

12. Write your own discussion question here: __________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________