

HOMEWORK #1

Use examples from the film and quotes from the film to explain your terms and answers. See screening checklist, terms, ppt, and outlines for more help.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYING THEME (SEE TYPES OF MEANING AND THEMES ON OUTLINE)

On Theme and Focus

What is the film's primary focus: plot, emotional effect or mood, character, style or texture or structure, or ideas? On the basis of your decision, answer one of these questions:

1. If the film's primary concern is plot, summarize the action abstractly in a single sentence or a short paragraph.
2. If the film is structured around a mood or emotional effect, describe the mood or feeling that it attempts to convey.
3. If the film's focus is on a single unique character, describe the unusual aspects of his or her personality.
4. If the film seems to be built upon a unique style or texture or structure, describe the qualities that contribute to the special look or feel of the film.
5. If the film's primary focus is an idea, answer these questions:
 - a. What is the true subject of the film? What is it really about in abstract terms? Identify the abstract subject in a single word or phrase.
 - b. What comment or statement does the film make about the subject? If possible, formulate a sentence that accurately summarizes the idea dramatized by the film.

On Identifying the Theme

1. Although a director may attempt to do several things with a film, one goal usually stands out as most important. Decide which of the following was the director's *primary* aim, and give reasons for your choice.
 - a. providing pure entertainment—that is, temporary escape from the real world
 - b. developing a pervasive mood or creating a single, specialized emotional effect
 - c. providing a character sketch of a unique, fascinating personality
 - d. creating a consistent, unique feel or texture by weaving all of the complex elements of film together into a one-of-a-kind film experience
 - e. criticizing society and social institutions and increasing the viewer's awareness of a social problem and the need for reform
 - f. providing insights into human nature (demonstrating what human beings in general are like)
 - g. creating a moral or philosophical riddle for the viewer to ponder
 - h. making a moral implication to influence the viewer's values or behavior
 - i. dramatizing one or more characters' struggle for human dignity against tremendous odds
 - j. exploring the complex problems and pleasures of human relationships
 - k. providing insight into a growth experience, the special kinds of situations or conflicts that cause important changes in the character or characters involved.
2. Which of the items listed in the previous question seem important enough to qualify as secondary aims?

On Evaluating the Theme

1. Is the film's basic appeal to the intellect, to the funny bone, to the moral sense, or to the aesthetic sense? Is it aimed primarily at the groin (the erotic sense), the viscera (blood and guts), the heart, the yellow streak down the back, or simply the eyes? Support your choice with specific examples from the film.
2. How well does your statement of the film's theme and focus stand up after you have thoroughly analyzed all elements of the film?
3. To what degree is the film's theme universal? Is the theme relevant to your own experience? How?
4. If you think the film makes significant statement, why is it significant?
5. Decide whether the film's theme is intellectually or philosophically interesting, or self-evident and boring, and defend your decision.
6. Does the film have the potential to become a classic? Will people still be watching it twenty years from today? Why?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYZING FICTIONAL AND DRAMATIC ELEMENTS (SEE OUTLINE/TERMS AND USE AS MANY AS POSSIBLE IN YOUR ANALYSIS)

On Story

How does the film stack up against the characteristics of a good story? 4 Vs?

1. How well is it unified in plot or storyline? EXPLAIN PLOT VS STORY.
2. What makes the story credible? Pick out specific scenes to illustrate the kinds of truth that are stressed by film:
 - a. objective truth, which follows the observable laws of probability and necessity
 - b. subjective, irrational, and emotional inner truths of human nature
 - c. the semblance of truth created by the filmmaker
3. What makes the film interesting? Where are its high points and its dead spots? What makes you bored by the film as a whole or by certain parts?
4. Is the film a proper blend of simplicity and complexity?
 - a. How well is the length of the story suited to the limits of the medium?
 - b. Is the film a simple formula that allows you to predict the outcome at the halfway point, or does it effectively maintain suspense until the very end? If the ending is shocking or surprising, how does it carry out the tendencies of the earlier parts of the story?
 - c. Where in the film are implication and suggestion effectively employed? Where is the film simple and direct?
 - d. Is the view of life reflected by the story simple or complex? What factors influenced your answer?
5. How honest and sincere is the film in its handling of emotional material? Where are the emotional effects overdone? Where is understatement used?

On the Significance of the Title (TITLE SEQUENCE IMPORTANT?)

1. Why is the title appropriate? What does it mean in terms of the whole film?
2. How many different levels of meaning are expressed in the title? How does each level apply to the film as a whole?
3. If the title is ironic, what opposite meanings or contrasts does it suggest?
4. If you recognize the title as being an allusion, why is the work or passage alluded to an appropriate one?
5. If the title calls your attention to a key scene, why is that scene important?
6. How is the title related to the theme?

On Dramatic Structure (SEE RANGE/DEPTH/CHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE)

1. Does the film use linear (chronological) or nonlinear structure? If it begins with expository material, does it capture your interest quickly enough, or would a beginning “in the middle of things” be better? At what point in the story could an *in medias res* beginning start?
2. If flashbacks are used, what is their purpose and how effective are they?
- ***3. Include a plot chart that explains the order of the film on screen with flashbacks, range, depth, change of knowledge, repetition, parallelism, motifs, etc. L This will be just like your group created for the project (but on paper).**

On Conflict (SEE ALL CONFLICTS)

1. Identify the major conflict.
2. Is the conflict internal (individual against self), external, or a combination of the two? Is it primarily a physical or a psychological conflict?
3. Express the major conflict in general or abstract terms (for example, brains versus brawn, human being(s) against nature).
4. How is the major conflict related to the theme?

On Characterization (SEE TYPES OF CHARACTER AND HOW WE LEARN ABOUT THEM-names, music, clothes?)

1. Identify the central (most important) character or characters. Which characters are static and which are developing? Which characters are flat and which are round?
2. What methods of characterization are employed and how effective are they?
3. Which of the characters are realistic and which are exaggerated for effect?
4. What about each character’s motivation? Which actions grow naturally out of the characters themselves? Where does the filmmaker seem to be manipulating the characters to fit the film’s purpose?
5. What facets of the central character’s personality are revealed by what he or she chooses or rejects?
6. Which minor characters function to bring out personality traits of the major characters, and what do these minor characters reveal?
7. Pick out bits of dialogue, images, or scenes that you consider especially effective in revealing character, and tell why they are effective.
8. Which characters function as stock characters and stereotypes? How can their presence in the film be justified?

On Symbolism (SEE TYPES OF SYMBOLS/MOTIFS)

1. What symbols appear in the film, and what do they represent?
2. What universal or natural symbols are employed? How effective are they?
3. Which symbols derive their meaning solely from their context in the film? How are they charged with symbolic value? (In other words, how do you know they are symbols and how do you arrive at their meaning?)
4. How are the special capabilities of film (the image, the soundtrack, and the musical score) employed to charge symbols with their meaning?
5. Which symbols fit into a larger pattern or progression with other symbols in the film?
6. How are the major symbols related to the theme?
7. Is the story structured around its symbolic meanings to the extent that it can be called an allegory?
8. Which symbols' meanings are clear and simple? Which symbols are complex and ambiguous? What gives them this quality?
9. Are visual metaphors employed effectively? Are they primarily extrinsic (imposed artificially on the scene by editing) or intrinsic (a natural part of the setting)?
10. How fresh and original are the film's symbols and metaphors? If they seem like clichés or timeworn, where have you encountered them before?

On Irony (SEE ALL TYPES)

1. What examples of irony can you find in the film?
2. Is irony employed to such a significant degree that the whole film takes on an ironic tone? Is an ironic worldview implied?
3. Do any particular examples of irony achieve comic and tragic effects at the same time?
4. Where in the film is suspense or humor achieved through dramatic irony?
5. How do the ironies contribute to the theme?

ANYTHING ELSE WE NEED TO KNOW?