*The Shawshank Redemption*

[*The Shawshank Redemption*](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111161/); Columbia Pictures, 1994; Directed by Frank Darabont; Starring Tim Robbins, Morgan Freeman, & Bob Gunton; Rated R; [Watch the trailer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hB3S9bIaco).

Summary:

Andy Dufresne, convicted of killing his wife and her lover, is sentenced to two life sentences, “one for each of your victims,” the judge says. In Shawshank Prison, Andy meets “Red,” an inmate whose entrepreneurial skills earn him the reputation as a man who knows how “to locate certain things from time to time.” Andy and Red become friends over their years enduring the abuses, trials, rules, and punishments in the prison. Based on the Stephen King novella *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, this film has nothing to do with supernatural horror and everything to do with the horrors humans can commit against each other; but there still is hope—and redemption. *The Shawshank Redemption* flopped at the box office upon its initial release but has since gone on to become one of the most respected films of modern times.

Themes, Symbols, & Motifs:

* Institutions. Red philosophizes on what it means to be “institutionalized,” namely that one becomes so acclimated to a prison environment that he depends on “the walls” rather than hates them.
* Hope and redemption. Andy says, “Remember Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.” Andy argues that hope is what sustains him, while Red initially sees hope as dangerous.
* Freedom. The inmates have a difficult time adjusting to freedom once it is granted. Some, like Brooks, fear true freedom and find a measure of comfort in the prison’s lack of freedom.
* Time. The film covers nearly twenty years, yet the prison routines, staff, and walls never change. The outside world changes, as do some of the men inside.
* Innocence and guilt. Red admits his guilt; Andy claims to be innocent; all the other inmates also profess innocence. The film explores what “crimes” are, what deserves punishment, and what makes one guilty and in need of redemption.

Discussion Questions:

1. Red says, “They send you here for life, and that's exactly what they take. The part that counts, anyway.” In what ways do you see the modern correctional system balancing (or not) between retribution and rehabilitation?
2. The scene with Mozart’s opera *The Marriage of Figaro* was not in King’s book. Why was this scene added to the film?
3. What portions of Red’s voiceover narration stand out to you? Why?
4. The last lines of the film are from Red: “I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.” Originally, the director wanted to fade to black while Red was on the bus, but the studio demanded a more “fulfilling” ending. Which ending better serves the film? Why?
5. Does Andy Dufresne function in any way as a Christ figure?