

Discussion Questions for Shawshank Redemption

“Fear can hold you prisoner. Hope can set you free”

1. Take note of the visual imagery in the film. How does the Director convey the bleakness of prison life? When, how and to what is this imagery contrasted?
2. What is the significance of Andy asking the prisoner's name – the ‘New Fish’ beaten by the guards?
3. Andy and Red develop a close friendship throughout the film, during a period in time (1950-1965) when segregation was still common. What aspects of each of their character do you think helped bring them together?
4. Rape is about asserting one's power over another person. How did the Warden assert his power over Andy?
5. Why does Andy turn on the Mozart music for all the prison to hear, when he could have listened it to himself and not get in trouble? Was it worth it?
6. What items in Andy's cell represent his character?
7. Andy earns the good graces of most of the guards by offering tax advice and other financial planning. In what ways did that benefit him? Was that ethical? Why or why not?
8. Captain Hadley avenges Andy by severely beating Bogs. Was that justice? Why do you think he did that?
9. Andy helped Warden Norton create a fake person, Randall Stevens, and helped him fix the books, illegally laundering money. Given that he was a prisoner and would be punished if he didn't, do you think it was ethical for him to do so? Why or why not?
10. Was it ethical for Andy to take the money the Warden had intended for himself? Why or why not? What ironies are associated with the various crimes committed in the prison?
11. Why did Norton have Tommy killed?
12. How do you respond to the religious imagery and behaviour of the warden? To what extent does this kind of hypocrisy undermine genuine faith?
13. What symbolism does Brooks' pet bird, Jake, stand for?
14. What are some of the other symbols in the movie?
15. Red uses an extended metaphor about how being institutionalized takes away the part of you that counts? What is he referring to?
16. Why is hope so important in the film? Describe each of the characters' attitudes towards hope: Andy, Red, Brooks, Norton etc.
17. How is the concept of freedom represented and described in the film?
18. Brooks says, 'I'm tired of being afraid all the time,' and Red says, 'it's a terrible thing to live in fear'. Why were Brooks and Red afraid, outside of Shawshank?
19. Explain the significance of the note Andy left for Warden Norton in the front of the bible that says 'You were right, salvation lies within.'
20. Why did Red change his speech to the parole committee the last time? Do you think he would have been freed if he hadn't? What has he learned in his time at Shawshank?
21. What is the significance of the title Shawshank **Redemption**? Which character(s) is the title intended for?
22. What did you think of the narrator's voice in the movie (Red)? Could the story be told without it? Was the voice intrusive or appropriate?
23. What scene in The Shawshank Redemption was the most meaningful for you? Why?
24. The Shawshank Redemption is an allegorical film. What is the allegory? Give some evidence.

“Let me tell you something my friend. Hope is a dangerous thing.
Hope can drive a man insane.”

Big Red – The Shawshank Redemption

Andy Dufresne: That's the beauty of music. They can't get that from you... Haven't you ever felt that way about music?

Red: I played a mean harmonica as a younger man. Lost interest in it though. Didn't make much sense in here.

Andy Dufresne: Here's where it makes the most sense. You need it so you don't forget.

Red: Forget?

Andy Dufresne: Forget that... there are places in this world that aren't made out of **stone**. That there's something inside... that they can't get to, that they can't touch. That's yours.

Red: What're you talking about?

Andy Dufresne: Hope.

Could Chris from *Horses of the Night* say the same lines as Andy?