



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts 'The Shawshank Redemption' by Frank Darabont

Please note: *The Shawshank Redemption* by Frank Darabont is a film included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2026 and 2027. It may be used as part of the Comparative Study at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.



Image courtesy of IMDb

Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons or as part of a unit of learning
- Students may wish to complete some tasks individually or in pairs/groups
- Tasks might be completed orally and/or in written format
- Students may also wish to engage in a think, pair, share activity for some tasks.

Making connections with the continuum of learning



Students should be able to:

Approach narrative texts from a variety of critical viewpoints e.g. analyse and compare texts under such categories as gender, power and class and relate texts from different periods and cultures. (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.12)

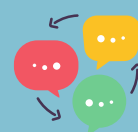
Develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts. Explore these responses relative to the texts read, generate and justify meanings and build coherent interpretations. (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.13)

Evaluate and critically respond to texts, identify and analyze the form, structure and style of a text and show an understanding of how all these elements constitute its genre. (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.14)

Pre-reading discussion:

"In the world of film, we can always see a character's resilience when faced with adversity. This will help to shape the audience experience of the film as an uplifting or disheartening one "

Discuss this statement considering how conflict, attitudes and perspective impact the narrative and the viewer's experience of that film.





Possible pair/group work:

1. Examine the use of lighting and colour in the different scenes below. How does the visual style contribute to the mood and tone in the following scenes throughout the film?
2. Analyse the use of cinematography and mise-en-scène in these stills. Decide if they are successful in conveying the sense of confinement and liberation throughout the film. Consider character, facial expression, positioning, costume, and props used.





Some aspects of film include...

Mise-en-scène in film

Mise-en-scène, literally translates to “placing on stage” or “what is put into the scene.” In the context of film, mise-en-scène refers to everything visible on screen, including setting, stage design, and the arrangement of actors within scenes.



Set design: The physical environment, props, and objects visible in a scene.

Lighting: How light is used to create mood and draw the viewer to certain elements.

Costumes and make up: The items of clothing worn by actors.

Actors’ positioning, gesticulation and movement: Directed and choreographed within the scene.

Composition: The arrangement of actors, props, and movement of the shot.

Social commentary in film



This film offers a lot of scope for social commentary in film. This may lead to discussions around the film’s themes and issues, social and cultural context, general vision and viewpoint, relationships and literary genre.

Social commentary is often utilised as a powerful tool for writers and filmmakers to engage audiences in meaningful discussions about the world and how they understand it. It can inspire reflection, empathy, and a deeper understanding of complex social issues.

Film often depicts cultural norms, values, and practices, providing a platform for critique. This might offer audiences a chance to reflect on their own beliefs and societal ideals and expectations. It may also provide an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and encourage cultural understanding. Further discussion may lead to musings about the human experience, existence, and the nature of reality.

The Shawshank Redemption examines issues of social and class inequality in prison institutions. It achieves this through undertones of hardship and oppression, and juxtaposes this with themes of loyalty, friendship and hope.



Possible activities

Paper 1

- Discuss the prison system and the concept of justice as presented in this film. How does the film critique or comment on these issues?

Possible questions that support the comparative study

- Identify one nurturing and one destructive relationship throughout the film. Are there key moments that highlight the nature of these relationships?
- As we follow the story of Andy Dufresne, how is he in conflict with the world around him throughout the film? Does this change as the film progresses?
- Explore the theme of redemption in the film. How is this theme portrayed through the characters, events, and symbolism as presented in *The Shawshank Redemption*?
- Discuss the theme of hope in "The Shawshank Redemption." How does Andy Dufresne maintain hope throughout his time in Shawshank prison? How do other characters, such as Red, perceive and experience hope? What role does hope play in the overall narrative of the film?
- How does the use of flashback and voiceover enhance the audience's perception of the characters and their motivations in *The Shawshank Redemption*?
- This film sheds light on issues related to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Discuss where this may be highlighted in key scenes in this film.

