

The Prison Paper

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Purpose Statement: The main character in Shawshank Redemption shows that being patient and working slowly towards a goal is a secret to success.

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Many people may think about love and loss, the pursuit of inward growth or some other such silly thing such as “hope springs eternal”, when they think about the plot of *The Shawshank Redemption*. However, with a fine viewing one might see that the over arcing solution and method of the prison escape is actually rather mundane and uninteresting- had it not been carried out by our cast of characters and against the backdrop of the other attempts of our main character to integrate himself into prison society and to find and preserve some form of a reasonable happy homeostasis. Loosely planned in the beginning, *The Shawshank Redemption* shows that accomplishing a large or unfathomable task- such as hollowing out a six-foot thick concrete wall to escape undetected- is possible when we break it down into small manageable steps.

Arguably, our main character, Andy Dufresne, is accepted as the ‘face’ of the movie from the beginning and viewers are eager to see him succeed in his new found home. Introduced as a softly-spoken character, his introduction into prison life is rough- on his first night in the ‘joint’, the current old-timers take bets on which of the ‘new fish’ will break first. Later in the movie, we see Andy dealing with the intricacies of trying to maintain his position and social relationships with other inmates and with the guards- and this while also trying to maintain his physical integrity and safety from other inmates as well.

Building from one scene in which he barter the opportunity to do a guards tax return to gain a dozen beers for his new friends (himself, not even drinking,) our character later sets about to develop the local library. At this point in the movie a viewer may begin to wonder the success (or freedom,) that our character may find. With the library project, soon come students. Skipping the plot development aspects of the primary student, the process of teaching and of having a purpose in his new found life was an element of success. However, that purpose of helping other in the library became threatened later by the warden. If the library was not secure, then how secure could this success be?

Our character, displayed as an innocent man (until he went to prison,) had ingratiated himself well to the warden. Though our character certainly knew how to fill out paperwork and tax forms correctly, he also seemed to know how exactly to use the same skills to cover-up, hide money and create alternate paper trails, even paper people! At this stage again, our character seems to have achieved a level of being reasonably happy- however that situation was predicated on the whims of the warden! As good writing would have it, the plot development from the main library student became the element that eventually soured the relationship with the warden and made remaining for more of the status quo to be untenable path forward for our lead.

Though many other dramatic situations occurred with Andy and his fellow inmates, the prime issue that Andy faced was a thick concrete wall that kept him securely imprisoned. Given at the end of the movie, so with it's own luxury of hindsight, we see that Andy had quickly developed an important habit shortly after he first arrived at the prison. His first thoughts were for the simple joys of creating small trinkets and passing time, however once he began carving chunks out of his wall- and hiding them with a poster- he was in the midsts of a long and slow method of escape (and a private means of self-affirmation.) He had acquired a small rock hammer after he'd first arrived, and continued for the next twenty years to carve, reduce, and transport the rocks and cement powder out to the yard undetected by way of his pant cuffs.

This movie may be interpreted from a variety of viewpoints and some may see the overall theme to be of our character's pursuit of happiness when placed into a horrible situation. From being a happily married man, he was quickly transformed into a jilted lover then abruptly arrested, falsely convicted, and imprisoned for an alleged act of murderous revenge. From the onset, Dufresne was forced to reassess his internal definitions of success and happiness- so that he could even merely survive the short-term! Over the length of the movie, Andy rises to higher and higher stations within his setting and perhaps begins the sullen process of "institutionalization".

With dramatic revelation, we see that the higher stations, the short-term solutions to provide the main character with an internal sense of purpose, did not allow him to follow a fulfilling moral compass at the same time. As those higher stations and rewards then also fell away, the value of maintaining his original goal- freedom- was exposed. As clearly as the movie ends on a beautiful beach in

Mexico, a viewer may also learn a calm and patient approach to discipline in which a person steadfastly pursues their dreams against all odds by segmenting their efforts in such a way that they can maintain the effort needed to accomplish basic survival, rising in station as viewed from their society, as well as continuing small and persistent efforts towards their own "master plan", so to speak.

The Shawshank Redemption is widely liked film for many reasons: a stellar cast, high profile actors, an amazing story from a world renowned author, as well as realistic sets that truly showed the full measure of problem that faced the inmate: six feet of cold limestone concrete that could only be chipped away and innocuously discarded a small cuff full of stones at a time. In addition, this movie shows a concrete method of achieving success with our goals: to chunk large tasks up into small manageable tasks and to continue working until you get what you want... Even if takes twenty years.

Works Cited

Darabont, Frank. *The Shawshank Redemption*. Columbia Pictures, 1994.