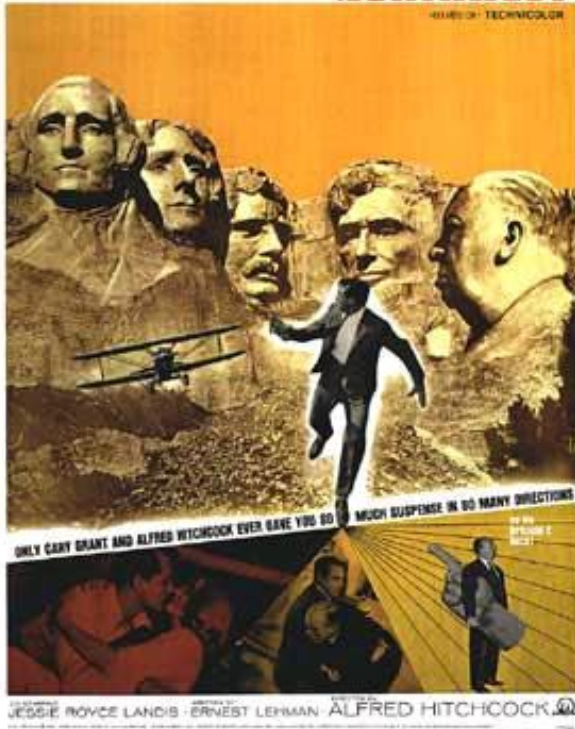


Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____ Due: _____

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PRESENTS
GARY GRANT
EVA MARIE SAINT
JAMES MASON
IN ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S
NORTH BY NORTHWEST
A FILM BY ALFRED HITCHCOCK
RELEASED IN TECHNICOLOR



***North by Northwest* (1959) directed by Alfred Hitchcock**

Cast

Cary Grant as Roger O. Thornhill
Eva Marie Saint as Eve Kendall
James Mason as Phillip Vandamm
Jessie Royce Landis as Clara Thornhill
Leo G. Carroll as The Professor
Josephine Hutchinson as Mrs. Townsend
Philip Ober as Lester Townsend
Martin Landau as Leonard

Crew

Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Producer: Herbert Coleman and Alfred Hitchcock
Writer: Ernest Lehman
Editor: George Tomasini
Director of Photography: Robert Burks
Music: Bernard Herrmann
Distribution/Studio Company: Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM)
MPAA Rating: R (Based on 1984 Re-Release)
Running Time: 136 minutes

Background and Introduction to *North by Northwest*

Nobody likes to be mistaken for somebody else. Every year that I teach identical twins, I always get them confused and I can't tell the difference between the two. Whenever I incorrectly identify one, one of the twins gets grossly offended. This misunderstanding is what happens to Roger Thornhill in one of Alfred Hitchcock's masterpieces, *North by Northwest*. It addresses an ongoing motif in many Hitchcock films: an ordinary, everyday protagonist is placed in extraordinary circumstances. In fact, the film captures the extraordinary in the ordinary. One wouldn't normally think that a cornfield would be a suspenseful location, and one wouldn't expect a thrilling chase on a national monument (Well, that is before *National Treasure* was released, of course).

As the title implies, the film is a journey across the American landscape. It begins in the crowded streets of Manhattan and ends at the sculpted outcrops of Mount Rushmore. Thornhill's journey acts as a quest, "a series of tests that he must pass and grow until he achieves ultimate deliverance" (Costanzo 143). As you watch the film, compare Thornhill to the epic heroes you have read in literature (e.g. Odysseus in *The Odyssey*).

The film was released in 1959 near the height of the Cold War. Some critics have interpreted the film as a parable of cold war politics. As you watch the film, consider how the good guys and bad guys regard civilian life. Note how both sides use deception to get what they want.

One of Hitchcock's signatures is that he always makes a cameo appearance in his films. By the time *North by Northwest* was released, viewers grew aware of the practice and eagerly awaited his appearance in the film. For *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock decided to appear early in the film to avoid teasing his viewers. See if you can spot him, for his appearance is brief and quick.

Comprehension Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions as you watch the film.

1. Saul Bass' credit sequence begins with a blank green screen. Parallel lines invade the frame from three sides to the vigorous tempo of Bernard Hermann's "fandango" theme. The lines form a grid, which becomes a tilted surface for the credits, and then turns into the glass façade of an office building, reflecting the traffic below. Describe the **mood** (the emotion that *you*, the viewer, experience) created. What expectations are created by the music, the perspective, and the images?
2. What does Roger Thornhill's method of getting a taxi reveal about his **character**?
3. How does Thornhill get mistaken for George Kaplan?
4. In the drunk driving scene, when does it seem like a thriller? When does it seem like a comedy? How do the lighting and special effects influence your experience? How does **tone** change?
5. One of Hitchcock's trademarks is the use of the **bird's eye view shot**. What effect is implied when Hitchcock uses this shot when Thornhill flees the United Nations?
6. What commentary does Hitchcock make about the government when they refuse to assist Thornhill?
7. What religious allusion is made with the name of Eva Marie Saint's character, Eve?
8. The film is particularly sexually suggestive, especially in the train car scenes with Roger and Eve. Viewers were entranced with these scenes when the film was released. Is the effect similar today?

9. When Thornhill sees Vandamm's hand on Eve's bare neck, he feels betrayed. Who has the power in this scene? Take note of how the characters are dressed and placed in relation to one another.

10. Why does Vandamm release his hand off Eve's neck? What does this movement suggest?

11. How does Thornhill use the situation at a public auction to ensure his "survival" and gain the upper hand?

12. How does Eve use her sexuality to manipulate both Roger and Philip?

13. Eve is supposed to be the agent, the one in control; however, Roger rescues her multiple times. What does this relationship suggest about gender roles?

14. We are never told what is on the microfilm. What do you think is on it?

15. What do you think of the ending of the film? Is it an example of brilliant editing, or do you want more information?

16. What makes this finale both a typical Hollywood ending and a parody? Consider the lighting, music, costuming, and that parting shot of the train into the tunnel.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions after you watch the film. We'll discuss them in a seminar.

1. Find a few key words to describe Roger Thornhill at the beginning of the film. Describe his appearance, mannerisms, and personality. Do you notice any changes as the film progresses? If so, when? To what extent does he emerge as a new man by the final scene?
2. Hitchcock used the term *MacGuffin* to describe a plot device that is important to the characters but not to the audience, like the microfilmed secrets hidden in the statue. If the secrets are not important to you, what is? What keeps you interested in the movie?
3. Some viewers notice that there are few minorities in the film. Where do they appear? What do their roles tell you about the United States in the 1950s? How do you think minorities would be represented if the film were remade today?
4. Take a close look at the women in Thornhill's life. How do you characterize his relationships to his secretary, his mother, Mrs. Townsend, and Eve Kendall? What evidence of personal growth do you see, if any, in these relationships?
5. Thornhill's character is considered to be a precursor to James Bond. Based on your understanding of James Bond's character in the films you have seen, would you agree or disagree? Why?
6. Some viewers think it's hard to tell the good guys from the bad guys in this film. Compare the Professor and Vandamm. Who are they, what are their objectives, and what do they represent? Describe their use of force, deception, and ordinary citizens in the service of their goals.
7. How do you characterize Eve? Consider her **character archetype** shifts throughout the film.