SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION NOTES & QUOTES

**The Shawshank Redemption** is an impressive, engrossing piece of film-making from first-time director/screenwriter Frank Darabont who adapted horror master Stephen King's 1982 novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* (first published in *Different Seasons*). The inspirational, life-affirming and uplifting, old-fashioned style Hollywood product - resembling *The Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962) and *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) - is a combination prison/dramatic film and character study, abetted by the golden cinematography of Roger Deakins, a touching score by Thomas Newman, and a third imposing character - Maine's oppressive Shawshank State Prison itself (filmed at the transformed, condemned Mansfield Ohio Correctional Institution).

Posters for the film illustrate the liberating, redemptive power of hope and the religious themes of freedom and resurrection, with the words: "Fear can hold you prisoner, Hope can set you free." It is a patiently-told, allegorical tale - unfolding like a long-played, sometimes painstaking, persistent chess game - of friendship, patience, hope, survival and ultimate redemption by the time of the film's finale.

PLOT

Red, the narrator, recounts how he planned and carried out his wife’s murder by disabling her brakes, which accidentally killed a neighbor and child as well and earned him a life sentence at Shawshank Prison. Red also remembers the arrival of an inmate named Andy Dufresne, whose tenure at Shawshank affected the lives of everyone at the prison. Andy was sent to Shawshank for life in 1947 for the cold-blooded murder of his wife, Linda, and her lover, tennis pro Glenn Quentin. Despite the damning evidence placing him at the scene of the crime on the night of the murders, Andy has always maintained his innocence, which Red eventually comes to believe in as well.

Andy has some initial difficulty adjusting to prison life, especially because many of the other prisoners think he’s a snob. A gang of men known as the Sisters frequently attack and rape him in the laundry room while the guards look the other way. Andy fights the Sisters, even though it always lands him in the infirmary and sometimes solitary confinement. Despite these hardships, however, Andy never complains or loses his confidence.

Soon after arriving at Shawshank, Andy approaches Red and asks him to procure a rock hammer because he’s interested in rock collecting and carving. After a while, he also pays Red to smuggle in some polishing cloths and then, rather nervously, a large poster of pinup Rita Hayworth. Red fulfills Andy’s requests.

After a few years, Red and Andy both find themselves on a work crew, tarring the roof of the prison’s license plate factory. Andy overhears Byron Hadley, a prison guard, complaining to the other guards about the taxes he’ll have to pay on the $35,000 he just inherited from his long-lost brother. Andy offers Hadley some financial advice by telling him to give the money to his wife as a one-time tax-free gift. Andy even offers to fill out the paperwork for Hadley in exchange for giving three beers to each prisoner on the work crew. After some initial hesitation and suspicion, Hadley agrees. The deal wins Andy the respect of everyone involved and makes him a mythic hero in the eyes of the prisoners. Andy also becomes a valuable financial resource to those who run the prison. As a result, the guards and the warden protect Andy from the Sisters, make him the prison librarian, and don’t assign other inmates to his cell. Andy relishes his new position and works hard during the next two decades to significantly expand the library.

Andy’s financial responsibilities start with filing the guards’ tax returns, but they soon expand to laundering money for the various prison wardens, including Bible-thumping Samuel Norton. Andy has no moral objection to hiding the money that Norton receives from construction companies, but he doesn’t realize that doing so also hurts his chances of ever leaving Shawshank.

A new inmate named Tommy Williams arrives at Shawshank and tells Andy that he served time in another prison with Elwood Blatch, a man who privately admitted to killing tennis pro Glenn Quentin. When Andy asks Norton to request a retrial, Norton dismisses Andy’s claims and puts him in solitary confinement for more than a month on the “grain and drain” diet of bread and water. Norton, meanwhile, transfers Tommy Williams to another prison out of fear that Andy would expose his money laundering operation if paroled. After another aborted attempt to reason with the warden and another stint in solitary, Andy drops the issue and becomes more brooding and introspective.

Eventually Andy emerges from his lengthy depression and tells Red one day that he had a friend set up a false identity for him. Under the false identity, the friend invested $14,000 of Andy’s money, which has since become more than $370,000. Andy, however, can’t touch the money, saved under his alternate identity, because he would risk exposing himself and losing everything. The documents and lucrative bonds are kept in a safe-deposit box at a local bank, the key to which has been stashed under a black volcanic rock wedged into a stone wall in the countryside near the prison. Andy dreams of escaping, assuming the new identity, and becoming the proprietor of a small hotel in Mexico. Andy also imagines Red going with him.

Red thinks nothing of this until years later when the prison guards find Andy’s cell empty one morning. The guards search the prison but find nothing, until an extremely frustrated Norton rips the pinup poster from the wall to reveal a gaping hole in the thick concrete. The hole leads to the sewage drainpipe, which empties into the marshes surrounding Shawshank. Red figures that Andy slowly and systematically used the rock hammer and polishing cloths every night for nearly twenty years to carve through the wall. After completing his hole, Red also figures that it took Andy roughly eight years to muster the courage to actually try to escape.

A search of the marshes and nearby towns reveals nothing, however, and Norton has a nervous breakdown and resigns. Red never hears anything from Andy but receives a blank postcard from a border town in Texas some months later. The story of Andy’s escape spreads throughout the prison and gives him an even greater mythic status. He becomes the symbol of hope for many prisoners, not only as someone who successfully escaped, but also as a man who never let prison crush his spirit.

Red adds a postscript to his story about a year later, writing from a hotel in Portland, Maine, after being released from Shawshank. The transition to life on the outside has been tough, and Red thinks of Andy when he feels the urge to commit a petty crime or violate the terms of his parole so that he’ll be put back in prison. Now working as a bag boy at a supermarket, Red uses his days off to explore the countryside, partly because he likes the freedom and the space but also because he’s looking for the volcanic rock where Andy hid the key to the safe-deposit box.

Red walks the rural hayfields in search of the stone wall Andy had described years earlier, and after several weeks of searching, he finally finds the rock. Underneath, Red discovers a letter addressed to him from Peter Stevens, Andy’s pseudonym. The letter invites Red to join Andy in Mexico and includes a gift of $1,000. Red concludes the postscript with renewed hope for the future as he decides to abandon his job, violate his parole, and make his way to Mexico to find Andy.

*1. All I know for sure is that Andy Dufresne wasn’t much like me or anyone else I ever knew. . . . It was a kind of inner light he carried around with him.*

Red writes these lines after recalling how Andy traded tax advice with Byron Hadley in exchange for three beers apiece for the crew of prisoners tarring the roof of the Shawshank license plate factory. Andy’s reputation soars to legendary status after taking on Hadley and returning a sense of self-worth and dignity to the prisoners in the work crew. Red realizes that what some prisoners had originally written off as snobbishness or the swagger of self-satisfaction was merely Andy’s unrelenting sense of self-worth. In a system designed to undermine personal identity and label individuals as unworthy of being normal members of society, Andy’s composure and confidence stand out from the rest of the prisoners, whose aspirations and attitude become slowly blighted during the grinding years of incarceration. Andy’s sense of self-worth exists as another form of freedom, the liberation of knowing he is in full possession of himself no matter how suffocating and claustrophobic the prison becomes. In that sense, Andy never actually loses his freedom because no one can take it away from him.

*2. I hope Andy is down there.*

*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.*

Red’s words at the end of his narrative reinforce the central role hope plays in “Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption.” Finding Andy’s letter could not have come at a better time, because Red has reached an impasse within his first few tentative months of freedom after being paroled. Red’s difficult transition and struggle with finding his place in society place him at risk of violating the terms of his probation and intentionally returning to the familiar surroundings of Shawshank. Upon first entering prison, many inmates resent the loss of control of their lives, but they later miss that level of control once they’ve been released. The regulated, ordered lifestyle offers structure, routine, and discipline. Freedom and release, once so highly prized, become foreign and threatening. Women, for example, seem threatening to Red, and his job is unfulfilling. Andy’s request to join him in Mexico, however, gives Red the direction and purpose that he had lacked. Even though Red fears that the waters of the Pacific will not be as blue as he has imagined them to be and realizes that he may not even be able to find Andy, their friendship has once again infused him with a strength that he would not otherwise possess.

CHARACTERS

**Red** -  The narrator of the story. A convicted murderer serving a life sentence, Red writes the story to try to make sense of his friendship with Andy, his life in prison, and his hopes for the future. Red is a key figure inside prison, a lifeline to the outside world who can smuggle almost anything into the prison—for a price. Once paroled, he struggles with his newfound freedom, dissatisfied with his job and still without hope for a better future.

Read an [in-depth analysis of Red.](http://www.sparknotes.com/short-stories/rita-hayworth-and-the-shawshank-redemption/canalysis.html#Red)

**Andy Dufresne** -  The protagonist. The former vice president of a bank in Portland, Maine, Andy is thirty years old when he arrives at Shawshank and approximately fifty-eight when he escapes. A short, neat, meticulous man with sandy blond hair, he has small hands and wears gold-rimmed glasses. Most of the other inmates think that Andy is cold and snobbish because he’s always so calm and composed, rarely revealing his inner thoughts or true character. Andy eventually becomes the prison librarian and financial wizard, offering free tax advice to guards and wardens in exchange for protection and favors. He’s one of the few innocent inmates at Shawshank.

Read an [in-depth analysis of Andy Dufresne.](http://www.sparknotes.com/short-stories/rita-hayworth-and-the-shawshank-redemption/canalysis.html#Andy-Dufresne)

**Samuel Norton** -  One of the prison wardens. Norton institutes the new “Inside-Out” program that forces prisoners to work on chain gains to repair roads and public buildings. Even though he claims to be a devout Baptist, he accepts bribes from local construction companies so that the Inside-Out program won’t put them out of business. He uses Andy’s financial expertise to hide his illegal earnings and therefore refuses to help Andy win a retrial. Norton eventually resigns in disgrace after Andy’s escape.

Read an [in-depth analysis of Samuel Norton.](http://www.sparknotes.com/short-stories/rita-hayworth-and-the-shawshank-redemption/canalysis.html#Samuel-Norton)

**Byron Hadley** -  A prison guard. A tall man with thinning red hair, Hadley speaks loudly and uses the threat of violence to control the prisoners. Pessimistic, cynical, and paranoid, he feels the world is out to get him, even when he inherits $35,000 from a long-lost brother. Andy’s offer to help Hadley avoid paying taxes on the money marks the beginning of Andy’s career as the prison’s financial wizard. Hadley eventually has a heart attack and retires.

**The Sisters** -  The gang of inmates who prey on weaker prisoners. The Sisters, including inmates Bogs Diamond and Rooster MacBride, maintain their dominance in the hierarchy of prisoners by beating and gang-raping new inmates, including Andy. Andy always fights back even though he usually loses. Andy eventually wins protection from the Sisters after helping the guards and wardens with their finances.

**Tommy Williams** -  A young inmate. A career criminal, Tommy has served time in another prison with Elwood Blatch, the man who privately admits to killing Andy’s wife and her lover. Tommy offers to help Andy prove his innocence, but Norton transfers Tommy to a minimum-security prison to keep Andy from leaving Shawshank.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Red is the lifeline of the prison, the man who can smuggle almost anything into Shawshank from the outside world. By making himself indispensable to the other inmates, Red affords himself protection and an esteemed place in the pecking order of the prison yard. He forces the other men to do business on his terms and knows full well the need to defend his own interests in a world where violence and exploitation are the norm. Ultimately, however, Red’s hardened stance conceals his fear and insecurity as he struggles to make sense of his life both in and out of prison. Even though Red’s narrative focuses on Andy and his eventual escape, Red admits that the story is really all about himself. Andy’s inner confidence and sense of self-worth represent the part of Red that Hadley, Norton, and the other prison authorities never managed to crush. Although Red has undoubtedly thought of escaping numerous times during his thirty-eight years in prison, it is Andy’s resolute sense of hope that Red admires. Red knows that hope is what keeps him and every other inmate alive.

Andy is an enigma to Red and the other inmates, a man they admire but never really understand. An element of fantasy infuses the characterization of Andy: at one point King even refers to the mysterious “myth-magic” that his protagonist seemingly possesses. In truth, Andy is an anomalous figure who stands out from the rest of the inmates at Shawshank Prison, but not for any mythical or spiritual reason. Andy’s calm, cool collectedness govern his interactions with the world around him, and he rarely succumbs to emotion or cheap sentiment. What many inmates take for snobbery is actually reserve and caution as Andy tries to stay one step ahead of his adversaries. Without this strength and inner resolve, Andy would never have survived his twenty-eight years in prison nor managed to escape. Andy emerges as an object of fascination for many of his fellow prisoners, a figure onto whom they project their various embellishments of the ideal man: Andy, the man who can talk down the guards; Andy, the man who can manipulate the warden; and Andy, the man who can escape out from under everyone’s noses.

**Themes**

**The Burden of Isolation and Imprisonment**

Each of the inmates inside Shawshank Prison is locked up metaphorically as well as literally, hiding from himself or unable to function in the unregulated world that extends beyond the prison walls. There are many levels of isolation inside Shawshank, from the large, enclosed recreation yard to the smaller work crews down to the cellblock, cells, and, finally, solitary confinement. The prison is thus a multilayered world, a microcosm of the world outside that the prisoners have been forcibly removed from. The bars, strict schedules, sadistic keepers, and predatory Sisters only add a sense of entrapment and suffocation to these layers of isolation.

Shawshank’s confines, however, also highlight the extent to which the prisoners have isolated themselves and compromised their sense of identity. Beneath the hardened criminals lie insecure, maladjusted outcasts, many of whom believe they can’t function outside the prison system. Elwood Blatch, for example, is a braggart and an egomaniac whose exaggerated accounts of his exploits fool none of his listeners into believing that he is the master criminal whom he makes himself out to be. Red, meanwhile, identifies Andy as the part of himself who never let go of the idea of freedom. Freedom is a frightening concept for Red, who dreams of being paroled but eventually struggles to find his place in society after almost forty years in prison. Recounting Andy’s escape, therefore, allows Red to face his fears and find the psychological freedom he seeks.

**The Power of Hope**

Hope, more than anything else, drives the inmates at Shawshank and gives them the will to live. Andy’s sheer determination to maintain his own sense of self-worth and escape keeps him from dying of frustration and anger in solitary confinement. Hope is an abstract, passive emotion, akin to the passive, immobile, and inert lives of the prisoners. Andy sets about making hope a reality in the form of the agonizing progress he makes each year tunneling his way through his concrete cell wall. Even Andy’s even-keeled and well-balanced temperament, however, eventually succumb to the bleakness of prison life. Red notes that Tommy Williams’s revelation that he could prove Andy’s innocence was like a key unlocking a cage in Andy’s mind, a cage that released a tiger called Hope. This hope reinvigorates Andy and spreads to many of the other inmates in the prison. In his letter addressed to Red, Andy writes that “hope is a good thing,” which in the end is all that Red has left. Red’s decision to go to Mexico to find Andy is the ultimate proof of Red’s own redemption, not from his life as a criminal but from his compromised state, bereft of hope and with no reason to embrace life or the future. Red’s closing words, as he embarks tentatively onto a new path, show that hope is a difficult concept to sustain both inside the prison and out.

**Motifs**

**Corruption and Crime**

Shawshank blurs the line between right and wrong and challenges the notion that isolating and reforming criminals will turn them into law-abiding citizens. Instead, the prison is a den of corruption, greed, bribery, and money laundering. Everyone exploits the system for their own gain, from Red, who can smuggle anything into the prison, all the way up to the wardens, who profit from forced prison labor. Andy’s willingness to launder Warden Norton’s slush money initially serves as a survival technique, a means of protecting himself by extending his good will to the administration. His complicity and knowledge of the warden’s illegal enterprises, however, keep Norton from ever releasing him for fear that Andy would reveal the warden’s secret. The fact that Shawshank is as corrupt and tainted as the outside world further justifies Andy’s escape from a hypocritical, exploitative system that cares little for the prisoners’ lives or rehabilitation.

**Time**

Time serves as both a source of torment as well as the backdrop for the slow, eventual achievement of Andy’s escape, his seemingly impossible goal for nearly twenty-eight years. Shawshank redefines the passage of time for the inmates, especially for the “lifers” like Andy and Red, who can only look forward to death. Hours can seem like a lifetime, and every day seems indistinguishable from the next, adding to the loneliness and burden of imprisonment. Ironically, however, time also proves to be the means of Andy’s escape and salvation and gives him hope throughout his quarter-century in Shawshank. An amateur geologist, Andy realizes that dripping water can erode stone over the span of several million years and that with his small rock hammer and a lot of patience, he too can break through concrete. His devotion to chipping away at the concrete not only allows him to measure the passage of time but also gives him the sense of hope that the other inmates lack.

**Symbols**

**Rita Hayworth**

The pinup posters of Rita Hayworth and the other women represent the outside world, hope, and every inmate’s desire to escape to a normal life. Andy admits as much when he tells Red that sometimes he imagines stepping right through the photograph and into another life. More literally, Rita Hayworth really does remind Andy of his desire to actually break out of Shawshank because of the chiseled hole in the concrete that the posters conceal. As a result, Rita Hayworth embodies the sense of hope that keeps Andy alive and sane and distinguishes him from the other inmates. Even though it takes Andy more than twenty-five years to hammer his way through the wall, the mere fact that he has something to work for keeps him from lapsing into bouts of self-pity as the other inmates do. Having a mission and something to look forward to—even before he knew he would use the hole to break out—kept Andy alive and gave him his “inner light.”

**Rocks**

The rocks Andy sculpts serve as a cover to justify owning a rock hammer, but they also represent the spirit of hope that he exudes. As an amateur geologist, Andy is undoubtedly distracted from the doldrums of daily prison life by the rocks. Continuing to pursue his hobby gives him a sense of normality and control over his life that many other inmates lack. Displaying his collection of polished rocks on the windowsill of his cell also gives Andy a sense of accomplishment and means to measure the passage of time. More important, however, sculpting the pebbles give Andy hope and a means to fend off despair. Giving these sculptures away to Red and other inmates also represents Andy’s ability to transfer his sense of hope—his “inner light” as Red calls it—to some of the other inmates.

“Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption” is presented in the form of a **monologue, a written narrative** that Red prepares to come to terms with his life in prison and the aftermath of his incarceration. Although Red spends much of his time recounting Andy’s story, he admits that the narrative is as much about himself as it is about his friend. Red merely uses Andy’s story as a parable to convey his own sense of frustration, despair, and, ultimately, hope. King’s use of the first-person also gives the story credibility and authenticity. Red’s frank, down-to-earth voice, grammatical mistakes, and use of prison slang, such as *screws* instead of *guards*, make the story much more real.

At the same time, first-person narration reveals the limits of individual perception and the human tendency to remember details selectively. Red describes how Andy became a Shawshank legend and says that dozens of men could recall seeing Andy confront Byron Hadley on the roof of the prison’s license- plate factory, even though only a dozen or so men had actually been there. For this reason, readers must question Red’s account of events as a biased observer who freely admits that so much of what he knows about Andy comes from rumor and hearsay. Furthermore, Red’s admiration of Andy makes the story less credible as a factual account but insightful as a window into Red’s own psyche. Andy’s hopes and dreams of life outside reflect Red’s own, just as Andy’s eight-year struggle to overcome his fear of escaping Shawshank mirrors Red’s own fears of the future and life on the outside. So while Red’s warm, immediate, and engaging style of storytelling infuses the novel with directness and authenticity, Red is an unreliable narrator, attempting to overcome his limitations as an imprisoned observer to construct the story he wants to tell about both himself and the inmate who changed his life.