

FILM ANALYSIS
The Birds Assignment · DeMiero

Name(s) _____

Period _____ Due Date ___/___/___

The Birds

"Why are they doing this? Why are they doing this? They said when you got here, the whole thing started. Who are you?

What are you? Where did you come from? I think you're the cause of all this. I think you're evil! EVIL!"

~ mother in the diner to Melanie

Essential Guidelines for All Questions:

- clearly identify the question you are addressing
- properly head your paper
- edit carefully and cite plenty of evidence
- **please** use the Google Doc provided in our Google Classroom
- be sure to properly submit your final draft via the Google Classroom
- you *may* print a hard copy following our class guidelines and turn it in to the class basket, but I prefer the Google Doc

Part One: Literary Connections: Pick **one** of the following questions below and answer it as thoroughly as possible in 2 ¶s or less. Please cite evidence from the film and any other applicable source. Use examples from the film and/or other related films that would provide supporting evidence.

1. Consider and describe the **mood** and **tone** of this film. Does the **mood** change? Is there anything unique about the **tone** of this film?
2. **Dramatic irony** refers to a situation in which events or facts not known to a character on screen are known to another character and/or the audience. How is **dramatic irony** used in this film? Cite and explain at least two examples.
3. Cite at least two concrete examples of **foreshadowing** used in this film. Also consider the use of **motifs** as a form of **foreshadowing**.

Part Two: Cinematic Connections: Pick **one** of the following questions below and answer it as thoroughly as possible in 2 ¶s or less. Please cite evidence from the film and any other applicable source. Use examples from the film and/or other related films that would provide supporting evidence.

4. Essentially, there are **three types of movement** in film: 1) the viewer's eye scans the screen, 2) characters or objects move in the frame, and 3) the camera moves across, into or away from its own field of vision. Describe a memorable scene from the film for each **type of movement**.
5. Analyze the general quality of **cinematography** in this film. There are some unique techniques used in this film – some successfully and some not. Identify what you consider to be the film's strengths and weaknesses in terms of cinematography.
6. Recall a scene from the movie that you believe was particularly effective. Comment on why you believe the director made the right choices in terms of shot selection, editing, camera movement, etc.

Part Three: MacGuffins and Motifs

Pick **one** of the questions below and answer it as thoroughly as possible in 2 ¶s or less. Please cite evidence from the film and any other applicable source.

7. Identify an example of a **MacGuffin** from the film. Clearly demonstrate how your example fits the definition of a **MacGuffin**, then **analyze** its effectiveness and relevance to the story.
8. Identify an example of a **motif** from the film. Clearly demonstrate how your example fits the definition of a **motif**, then **analyze** its effectiveness and importance in the context of the story.

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Part Four: Analysis: Pick **one** of the following questions below and answer it as thoroughly as possible in about 5 ¶s. Depth of thought and analysis is what counts here, *not* hot air. Please cite evidence from the film and any other applicable source.

9. **Symbolism.** Hitchcock “claims” he doesn’t use **symbolism** in his films. What do you think? Can you cite the use of symbols in “The Birds”? If so, identify at least three symbols and explain what they mean and what function they perform in this film.
10. **No Score.** Instead of relying on his favorite film scorer , Bernard Herrmann, Hitchcock had Herrmann advise on the score and instead used what might be the first electronic soundtrack in any major film. In fact, the score isn’t a score at all, but instead simulated bird sounds and wing flaps along with sounds from a rather obscure electronic instrument called a Mixtur-Trautonium – kind of a precursor to a synthesizer. What impact did this score – or a lack of a traditional score – have on the film?
11. **Contrast or Comparison.** Here’s an interesting exercise. Remember the iconic shower scene from “Psycho”? Now, think of the phone booth scene in “The Birds.” Think they’re similar? Think they’re considerably different? Think it’s a bit of both? Fine. Pick one perspective (similar/different/both) and defend that perspective with evidence from both films and any other applicable source.
12. **The Shot’s the Thing.** There are several iconic shots in this movie – some that are, quite frankly, difficult to get out of your mind’s eye. However, for this question, you need to recall a shot that happens about 45 minutes into the film when Annie and Melanie are in Annie’s apartment and she gets a phone call from Mitch. As it turns out, Mitch actually wants to talk to Melanie – not Annie. We never hear Mitch’s voice, instead Hitchcock gives us a sequence of 2-shots and individual medium shots and close-ups of the two women. What’s going on in this sequence? Why, if Annie is reclining on a chair, does she look so tense and uncomfortable? Why, if Melanie is being invited to little Cathy’s birthday party, does she look and act so indifferent? What are the shot selections telling us that the dialogue is leaving out?
13. **On a Razor’s Edge.** Film critic Robin Wood said that Hitchcock frequently asserts in his films that “civilization rests precariously on a very thin layer of what we accept as reality, but which covers a foreboding, underlying chaos.” Wood also asserts that while this theme is present in many of Hitchcock’s films, “it reaches its fullest fruition in ‘The Birds.’” In fact, Wood says that Hitchcock suggested that “The Birds” was about the Day of Judgement, and Wood infers that this means that in “The Birds,” it is “the value of life itself that is on trial.” What do you think of this suggested theme? What evidence is there in the film that would support this theme?
14. **You be the instructor.** Write a question that you think would have been better than any of Mr. D’s. Yes, you must include an acceptable answer, too. The best of the best will be used in future classes.

Notes:

Release Date.....1963
Producer/Director.....Alfred Hitchcock
ScreenplayEvan Hunter
Based on a story byDaphne Du Maurier

Characters:

Melanie DanielsTippi Hedren
Annie HayworthSuzanne Pleshette
Mitch BrennerRod Taylor
Lydia BrennerJessica Tandy
Cathy BrennerVeronica Cartwright
Mrs. BundyEthel Griffies
Fisherman in the Diner.....Charles McGraw
Hysterical Mother in the DinerDoreen Lang
Pet Store ClerkRuth McDevitt