

# What To Look For When Watching Movies

Adaptation of Article by Brian Godawa, found at <http://www.godawa.com/>

Here is a summary of the things to look for when watching a movie in order to understand what redemption is being offered the viewer.

## 1) Look for the protagonist and the antagonist.

Consider whose side you are on. With the tendency in modern cinema toward relativism, the graying of right and wrong, and the vilification of virtue, heroes are becoming more like villains and villains more like heroes. Remember: the protagonist/hero and antagonist/villain represent world views in competition for the way we ought to live.

## 2) Look for the hero's weakness/fault/need.

Right from the start you should be able to recognize what the hero wants and what keeps him from attaining it. What is the way he looks at the world or lives in it that is not quite right? Look first at his behavior, but then for his rationale for his beliefs or behavior. This is the setting of his need for redemption.

## 3) Look for the hero's self-revelation.

The point near the end of the movie where the hero has his speech about what he learned or how he changed his mind is the redemption of the story. This is how the storytellers think we ought or ought not to live in this world.

## 4) Look for the opponent's rationale.

Why does the opponent do what he does? This is also usually a speech of some sort early on or revealed near the end in confrontation with the hero. This view is what the movie wants us to decide against in our lives. Remember, even exaggeration in a character can be a subtle reflection of a less extreme viewpoint.

## 5) Look for the factors that make the characters change their minds and why.

This is the means of redemption offered by the movie. While *we* may not need to experience the same drastic situations as the characters in the movie to achieve this same objectivity, we can certainly learn the lesson that we must do some drastic things in our lives in order to break our own moral and character impediments.

## 6) Look for the four "W"s: Who wins? Who Loses? Who dies? And why?

Whoever wins is usually the storyteller's model of how we ought to be and whoever loses is usually the storyteller's admonition of how we ought not to be. Whoever dies is often the "weaker" viewpoint that cannot survive in this world. But be careful. Death can be tricky. The context of death can have the opposite effect, for instance in the death of characters who offer their life to save others.

**7) Look for consequences to behavior.**

If a behavior doesn't end in negative consequences then it is often being considered legitimate. If behaviors or beliefs result in bad consequences then they are undesirable character traits for society.

**8) Look for repeating phrases.**

Often, a phrase will be repeated throughout the film that focuses attention on what the storyteller is trying to communicate. In *Dead Poets Society* it's "Carpe Deum," seize the day. In *Forrest Gump*, it's "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get," and "Stupid is as stupid does." In *Shadowlands* (1993) it's "pain is God's megaphone to a deaf world" and that "the pain now is part of the pleasure later."

**9) Look at how it ends.**

This is simple enough, but often missed. Do the bad guys get away or are they caught? What is the overall effect of the characters actions – does it end well or poorly for them? Don't forget the nature of morality tales that waken us up to our own ignorance by showing how evil can win if we fail to do the right thing.

**"In short, movie storytelling is about redemption – the recovery of something lost or the attainment of something needed."**

- Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews* (15)