

# The shawshank redemption



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The walls of Shawshank are both confining and comforting for the men they imprison. The Shawshank Redemption takes a dual approach to ideas of freedom, exploring both the need for a sense of freedom and the desire to remain in the security of the institution. Andy's twenty-year struggle to escape represents the profound human need to be free. The enjoyment of the prisoners as they share beers while tarring a factory roof and the mental release they feel as Andy plays forbidden music across the hijacked public address system demonstrate the idea that a sense of freedom is essential when physical escape is impossible.

However, for prisoners who come to depend on the structure of their confinement, freedom is an intimidating challenge. Both Red and Brooks become institutionalised and struggle to survive in the world outside the prison's walls. While Red chooses to make the most of his freedom, the experience is too much for Brooks and his release causes him to kill himself. While the film asserts the basic need for a sense of freedom, it also explores the idea that absolute freedom can be dangerous for those who have lived too long without it.

Andy's attitude during his time at Shawshank is represented as being very different to that of the other inmates. Andy's need to be free gives him the determination to escape. After crawling five hundred yards through the sewer pipe Andy is shown stripping off his uniform and washing himself clean. An overhead shot is used to show Andy in the creek and spreading his arms to embrace his freedom. The symbolism of Andy removing the prison uniform represents him leaving Shawshank prison behind.

This image is reinforced through the traditional literary symbol of the storm representing change through a washing away of the old. While this moment creates a sense of celebration and relief for both Andy and the audience, his escape has a profound impact on the prisoners he left behind. His determination inspires hope in those around him. This is seen through the effect it has on Red.

Due to Andy's influence, Red starts to have hope of one day becoming free from Shawshank. Just after Andy's escape from Shawshank, Red says, I have to remind myself that some birds aren't meant to be caged, their feathers are just too bright, and when they fly away, the part of you that knows that it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice; but still the place you live in is that much more drab and empty now that they've been gone. I guess I just miss my friend. Red's description of Andy as a bird with bright feathers reflects the impact Andy had had on Shawshank. The symbolic use of the metaphor of the bird, and the use of emotive language in "bright" and "rejoice", reveals the sense of hope Red feels following Andy's escape.

Andy's twenty year determination to escape, and the obvious impact his hope has on those around him, reveals a deep-seated need in the characters to be free. The scene in which Andy and his fellow inmates share beers on the roof explores important ideas of a sense of freedom in captivity.

Constant exposure to the brutality of the guards leads the prisoners to be scared of their superiors. Being outside the prison on a work party, Andy and his fellow inmates are confronted with a sudden sense of freedom.

The prisoners are able to relax with beer Andy's audacity wins from the guards in a rare moment of human connection, and try to imagine themselves being free men. Red recounts this idea in his narration, " We sat and drank with the sun on our shoulders and we felt like free men. Hell, we could have been tarring the roof of one of our own houses. We were the lords of all creation. " While Red speaks, the camera transitions from mid-shot to long-shot to show the visual use of physical space which represents the emotional sense of freedom. The camera is also used to show a shift in the power dynamic.

As they drink, both prisoners and guards are represented through eye-level shots. This moment of equality stands in stark contrast to the striking power imbalance previously depicted through high-angle shots of the prisoners and low-angle shots of the guards. The effect on the men, and through them the audience, of this momentary sense of freedom reinforces the powerful need of individuals to feel free. The Shawshank Redemption explores both physical and emotional freedom. While the walls of Shawshank prison keep the inmates physical captives, the institution seeks to imprison their spirit.

Even though they may be denied actual freedom the prisoners seek out anything that gives them a sense of freedom. An example of this can be seen when Andy plays music across the gaol's public address system. As the music wafts across the cold stone of Shawshank, the camera pans across the courtyard, showing every prisoner frozen and captivated by the experience. Red recounts the moment by describing it in this way, I tell you those voices soared higher and further than anybody in a grey place dares to dream.

It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away; any for the briefest of moment's every last man in Shawshank felt free. This moment is so different from their typical days in the prison that it enables them to escape from the mental institutionalisation. The symbolic escape the prisoners find in the music is coupled with the metaphorical use of the image of a caged bird. In doing so, Red's narration infuses the scene with a sense of the power and importance of freedom for the inmates.

In particular, the metaphorical claim that the music “ made those walls dissolve away” represents in a physical way the prisoners' feeling of freedom. The music gives them the mental and emotional escape that the walls of Shawshank deny them. Throughout the film the motif of a bird is used to symbolise freedom. This recurring symbol is used to represent freedom as a bird is seen to be a majestic animal that can go anywhere, at anytime with no real restraints. The walls of Shawshank constrain the prisoners just like a caged bird.

This symbolic representation of freedom is seen in Red's description of the effect of the music played over the public address system when he says, “ It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away. ” Red uses the same symbol after Andy's escape to describe his effect on the prisoners. I have to remind myself that some birds aren't meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright, and when they fly away the part of you that knows it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice, but still the place you live is that much more drab and empty now that they're gone.

I guess I just miss my friend. The image of a bird is often used to symbolise peace and freedom. The use of the same image in Red's quotes represent the need and desire to be free. This effect is increased through the incorporation of emotive language. Words such as " rejoice", " bright" and " drab" put a greater emphasis on the importance of freedom to the prisoners. The way in which Red describes freedom through the motif of the bird represents the prisoners' need to maintain their hope for freedom. For the long-term inmates of Shawshank, the institution has become all they know.

The ongoing lack of freedom causes them to become reliant on the system as the challenges of freedom become too much to manage. This institutionalisation can be seen in the character of Red as he faces his eventual freedom. He displays a strong sense of courage in overcoming the challenge of freedom as he faces his fears in the world outside Shawshank. Brooks and Red are amongst the oldest inmates in Shawshank and have become reliant on the institution. On their release, both face the same challenge and fear of freedom. The film intentionally has the same setting for the releases of both of these characters.

For both, the film echoes scenes on the bus, in the half-way house and in the grocery store. We see the emotions they both experience when faced with freedom. This allows the audience to make a direct comparison between the way both Brookes and Red handle life outside Shawshank's walls. While Brookes suffered from an overwhelming sense of institutionalisation and ended up committing suicide in the half-way house, Red overcomes his negative feelings even after he is tempted to return to the emotional security of Shawshank.

This idea is represented thorough the scene in which he is standing in front of a shop window, casting his eyes over an assortment of compasses and hand guns for sale. Here, the gun symbolises hopelessness, because he has to make a choice whether to breach his parole and give in to institutionalisation or move on with his life. On the other hand, the compass is a symbol for hope and direction, because it needs to be used to find the oak tree which Andy had previously mentioned.

This highlights the choice between hopelessness and hope: Red can either return to Shawshank where he has always lived or hope for a better life and find Andy. This sense of hope is reflected in Red's narration when he says, " 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 repetition of the word " hope" also indicates that he has a changed mindset and opinion, because in prison he speaks negatively of the concept of hope.

The sense of hope Andy has given Red throughout the film allows him to overcome his institutionalisation. While daunting, Red's choice to embrace his freedom represents a basic human need. Every prisoner in Shawshank prison was determined to be free and always strived for freedom from the confining walls of Shawshank. Andy was determined to breakout, he did. Red strived to be free through the given hope by Andy. Brookes was different, everyone else's freedom was his nightmare. Happiness and well-being was inside the prison for him because there was nothing on the outside for him.

The thought of being released caused Brookes to take measures into his own hands. Brookes was willing to take the life of one of his friends to stay with in the comfort and safety of Shawshank. Red expresses the effect of institutionalisation on Brookes when he says, “ I am telling you the walls are funny, first you hate them then you get used to them, enough time passes you get so you start to depend on them that’s institutionalised. ” We also see Brookes’ dependence on the institution as he is released. We are shown a close up of him on the bus as he is leaving from the prison.

The close up shot shows his emotions of sadness and sense of fear. These emotions can be seen by his hands held tightly to the seat not wanting to let go into a world that he doesn’t know. Brookes is the only person in the film that is against freedom, this leads to his suicide. He couldn’t cope with what other prisoners called freedom. His suicide was his mental release. The overwhelming thoughts of freedom caused Brooks to take his life, as he thought there was no hope for him outside Shawshank.

“ They send you here for life and that’s exactly what they are taking from you. The mental release that Brooks gains from his suicide is the first sight of Brooks being happy, seconds before he takes his life. Institutionalisation had a detrimental effect on Brookes, the realisation of freedom was too much for Brooks to handle and caused him to take his life. The Shawshank Redemption explores both a sense of freedom and the desire to remain in the security of the institution. The feeling of freedom gives an individual a sense of control over their world, and in turn gives them a reason to live.



The walls of Shawshank have the power to repress the hope and sense of self-worth of individuals, and change the direction of their life. A sense of freedom, even when denied actual physical freedom, allows the prisoners to escape the confining walls of the gaol. This revitalises the human spirit in each of them, giving them a sense of confidence and hope which enables them to reach their potential. In The Shawshank Redemption, the desire for freedom gives the prisoners a sense of purpose. This freedom gives them a reason to live, whether they are imprisoned inside the walls of Shawshank or confronted by the freedom of the outside world.