



# TEN FILMS

THAT SHOOK THE WORLD



# PSYCHO

## STUDY GUIDE

## TEACHERS' NOTES

This study guide is aimed at students of GCSE Media Studies, A Level Media Studies, A Level Film Studies and GNVQ Media: Communication and Production (Intermediate and Advanced).

The guide looks at Alfred Hitchcock as a director and producer; narrative structure; characterisation; the use of music, motifs and irony; promotion of the film and problems of censorship.

Psycho: Certificate 15. Running Time 109 minutes.

## MAJOR CREDITS FOR PSYCHO

Psycho 1960 (Paramount)

Producer:	Alfred Hitchcock
Director:	Alfred Hitchcock
Screenplay:	Joseph Stefano
Director of Photography:	John L. Russell
Editor:	George Tomasini
Music:	Bernard Herrmann
Art Directors:	Joseph Hurley Robert Clatworthy
Cast:	Anthony Perkins Janet Leigh Vera Miles John Gavin Martin Balsam John Meintire
Oscar Nominations 1960:	Best Director Best Supporting Actress (Janet Leigh) Best B/W Cinematography Best B/W Art Direction



## INTRODUCTION BY DEREK MALCOLM

Many filmmakers would say that there's no such thing as a movie capable of shaking the world. But some still attempt to make them. Those who succeed are rare, and the strange thing is that even the lucky ones don't appear to know they are doing it at the time. In fact, it sometimes takes years to realise what really is a great film or what may have looked wonderful at the time but was just a momentary flourish.

Most of the films on this particular list didn't so much shake the world as become memorable because, when you look back on them, they seem so much better than we may have thought at the time. But memories are short and the opportunity to see the full flowering of cinema history is denied to all but a few. So the list looks a little unbalanced to me, who has been luckier than most in looking further into the past and at world cinema rather than just Hollywood.

What we get here are films that were certainly important in their time, and still look good today- movies that have remained in people's affections ever since they first saw them. If there aren't really enough from the first two-thirds of cinema history, no matter. Its good at least to know that some of the greatest directors in the world are represented and that their artistry, often the equivalent of any great playwright, painter, author or composer of the twentieth century, continues to be appreciated. Most of these films will live longer than we do.

## PSYCHO

If Welles was a master, so was the far more prolific Alfred Hitchcock, once thought of as merely a great but shallow entertainer. He was a subtle craftsman who elevated his low cunning into high art. Psycho may not have been his best or most sophisticated film but it has become one of his most popular and successful. It has been described as the mother of the modern horror movie. But, if so, she's spawned some odd children. What isn't often recognised is that Psycho was a distinct change of pace by Hitchcock, who reverted to black and white from colour and had to put up with the kind of constraints that were imposed upon him by his TV series, Alfred Hitchcock Presents. The result really did shake the world, with its black sense of humour and its textbook example of how to manipulate an audience into fear and loathing. But the film was also a critique of the cruelty of life – it was actually based on the history of the cannibalistic Wisconsin killer Ed Gein, as was the much later Texas Chainsaw Massacre. But again, this is a collaborative effort. Even the famous shower scene, put together by Saul Bass, would have been much less effective without Bernard Herrmann's nerve-wracking score. Hitchcock was a dab hand at perversity, but he had some pretty able helpers.

*Derek Malcolm*

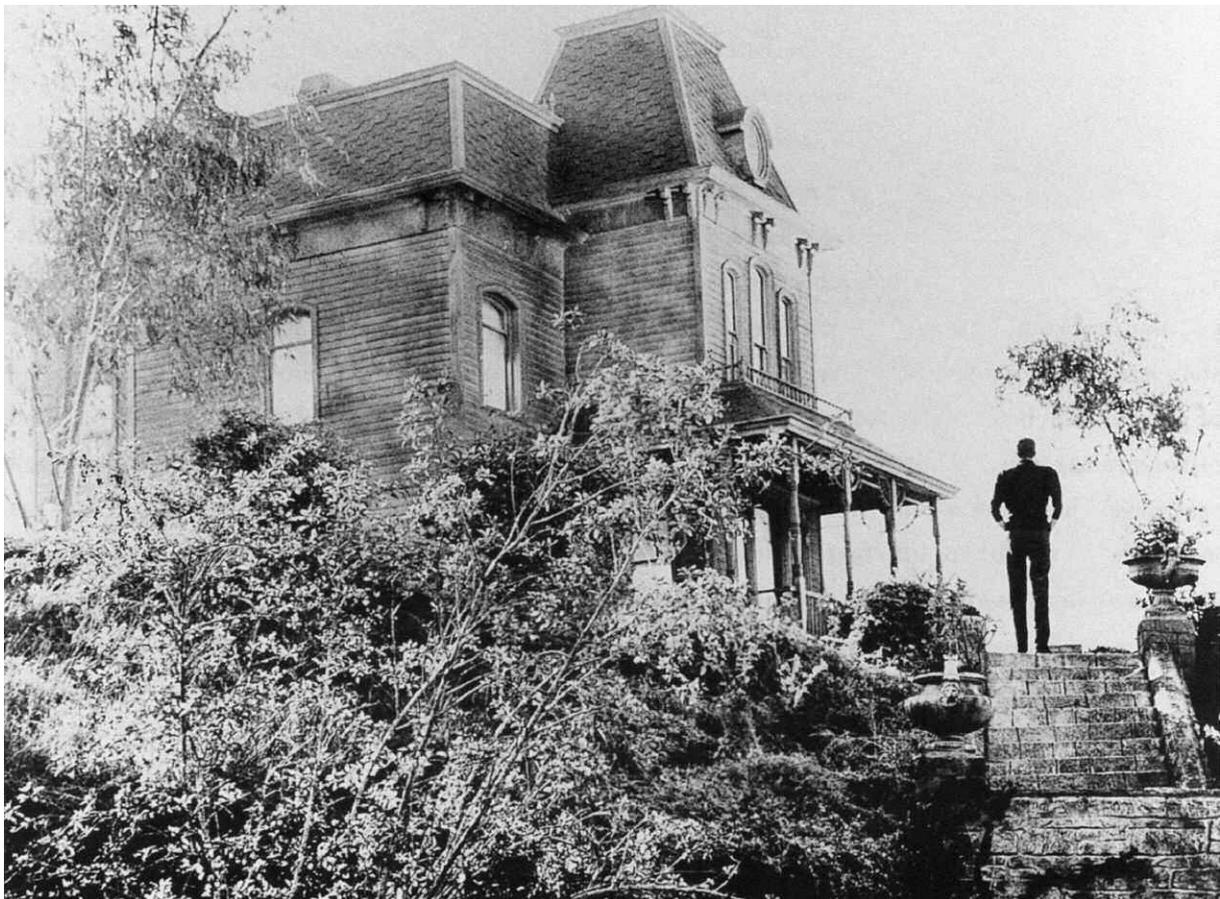
## ☆ INTRODUCTION ☆

Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* was first screened in New York on 16 June 1960. It was an immediate box-office success. From the start, expectant filmgoers began queuing in Broadway at 8.00am setting a pattern for audiences worldwide. By the end of its first year, *Psycho* had earned \$15 million – over fifteen times as much as it cost to make.

*Psycho* was a watershed in many ways. As well as making Alfred Hitchcock a multimillionaire, it was to win huge critical acclaim and enshrine him as a master filmmaker. It generated two sequels itself and set down a formula for 'madman with knife' films, shamelessly copying its film techniques. It also influenced the makers of many of the most well-known modern horror and suspense films, ranging from *Halloween* to *Fatal Attraction*.

*Psycho*'s commercial success was due, in part, to a superbly orchestrated publicity and marketing campaign that set new standards for audience manipulation. Hitchcock insisted people alter their cinema-going habits if they wished to see his film, and in doing so, he helped create film-viewing conventions that we now take for granted.

It is claimed that the film reflected, or contributed to, a growing permissiveness in society: its violence, sexual content and even the flushing of a toilet on screen, all breaking new ground for mainstream Hollywood film. Its themes struck at many cherished American values; mother love, in particular, would never be quite the same again. Following its release, *Psycho* was even blamed in court for being the cause of a number of horrible murders, stimulating a debate about the links between screen violence and anti-social behaviour that continues unabated to this day.



## ☆ EXPECTATIONS ☆

It is impossible to recreate the experience of the audiences who first flocked to see Psycho, unsure of what they were about to witness. Even if you have not already seen Psycho, you may well have heard a great deal about it – even its ending – but before you watch it in class, try to describe what expectations you have of the film.

### Task

*What ideas does the title 'Psycho' bring to mind? What emotions does the title create in you – excitement, dread, curiosity? Try to explain your response.*

*Look at the poster for the film on the cover of this guide. What do you notice about the lettering in the title graphics? What effect does the word 'psycho' have on you? Does it add to your expectations of the film? What does it suggest about the mind of or behaviour we can expect from the person it refers to?*

*Psycho was released in 1960. Do you expect that it will be old fashioned? In what ways?*

## ☆ HITCHCOCK - DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER ☆

When you hear the name Steven Spielberg, what kind of film would you expect to see? If you can answer this question, you will understand the similar power that Alfred Hitchcock had over the cinema-going public in 1959, when he decided to make Psycho, his 47th film.

Hitchcock's directing career started in 1922. By 1959 he was one of Hollywood's best-known personalities. His films often contained a short personal appearance by him as an extra, sometimes carrying or wearing something that drew attention to his size or made him look silly. In Psycho he is the man in the Stetson standing on the street, who glances at Marion Crane as she returns late from her long lunch break with Sam. His television programme, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, was amongst the top ten shows then being screened and his humorous, but rather twisted introductions to these Sunday night mystery dramas, further increased his reputation for the unusual and the macabre.



The book by Robert Bloch based on the real-life killings of psychopath Ed Gein in Plainfield, Wisconsin, had already been rejected by Paramount Studios as 'impossible to film', when Hitchcock paid \$9,000 for the film rights. Paramount were horrified that Hitchcock should consider Psycho suitable material, and did everything they could to put him off; even claiming that there was no Paramount studio space available for him to use.

Hitchcock was determined to film Psycho and came up with a financial formula that even Paramount could not refuse. He agreed to pay for the film himself and give up his usual \$250,000 director's fee. He even arranged to make the film using facilities at Paramount's rival studio, Universal International. In exchange, Paramount agreed to promote and distribute the film and give Hitchcock sixty per cent ownership of the final negative.

☆ THE FILMING OF PSYCHO ☆

In his role as both director and producer, Hitchcock was in the privileged position of having a great deal of involvement in the actual planning and filming of Psycho. His originality in this area contributed greatly to the unique nature of the film.

*Task*

*The following section of the Psycho script describes Lila's approach to the Bates' house from the motel, near the end of the film. The words in capital letters are the camera instructions that Hitchcock added. Compare it to the actual sequence in the film. How similar is the screenplay to the finished product? What differences can you see? What does this tell you about Hitchcock's pre-planning before the filming began? (A subjective shot reproduces the viewpoint of the character; it is as if we are looking through their eyes). What does the music add to the scene?*

EXTERIOR. REAR OF MOTEL - S.C.U. [SUBJECTIVE CLOSE-UP] - DAY  
Behind the motel Lila hesitates. She looks ahead

LONG SHOT - DAY  
The old house standing against the sky.

CLOSE-UP  
Lila moves forward.

LONG SHOT  
Lila approaches the house.

CLOSE-UP  
Lila glances towards the back of Norman's parlour. She moves on.

LONG SHOT  
The house coming nearer.

CLOSE-UP  
Lila looks up at the house. She moves forward purposefully.

SUBJECTIVE SHOT  
The house and the porch [come into view].

CLOSE-UP  
Lila stops at the house and looks up. She glances back. She turns to the house again.

SUBJECTIVE SHOT  
[Lila] mounts the steps of the porch.

CLOSE-UP  
Lila puts out her hand.

SUBJECTIVE CLOSE-UP  
Lila's hand pushes the door open. We see the hallway.  
Lila enters.  
[LILA ENTERS] PAST CAMERA

*How different would this scene have been if Hitchcock had put the camera in one place and filmed Lila as she walked up to the house from one position only? What would be lost from the sequence?*

*Take another short sequence from anywhere in the film in which there is no sound (e.g. Marion packing to leave with the money).*

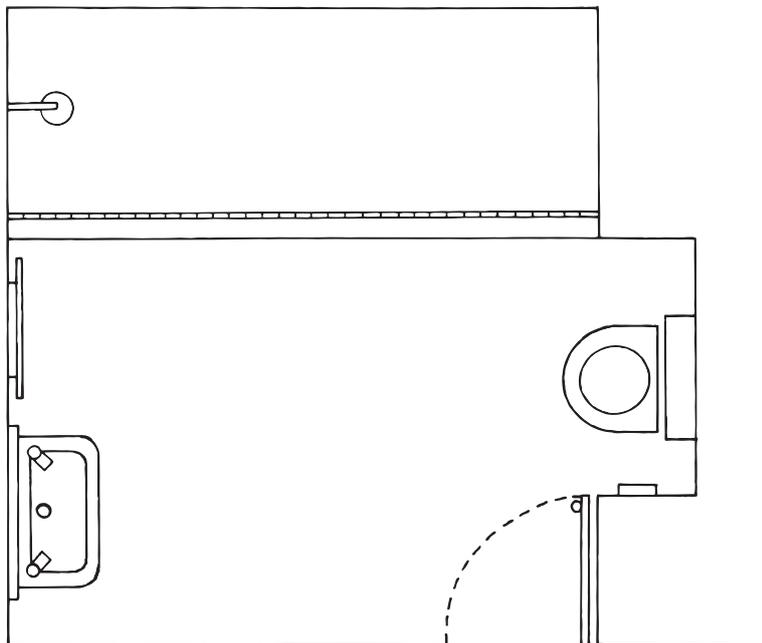
*Create your own bit of Psycho screenplay by describing the things you see and adding the camera instructions.*

Hitchcock made no secret of his methods of using the camera to tell a story and affect the emotions of his audience:

*'The point is to draw the audience right inside the situation instead of leaving them to watch it from outside, from a distance. And you can do this only by breaking the action into details and cutting from one to the other, so that each detail is forced in turn on the attention of the audience and reveals its psychological meaning.'*

My Own Methods, Hitchcock, 1937.

In Psycho this approach reaches its peak of perfection in the two murder scenes. There were censorship reasons that made the quick-fire cutting of the shower scene necessary, but Hitchcock's principal concern was to disturb the audience and to suggest terrible violence and bloodshed without actually showing very much.



*Task*

*Use the plan below of the bathroom in Psycho to work out where the camera had to be positioned during the filming. Run the shower scene and freeze it at various points. Put a number on the plan corresponding to the camera position needed to catch each shot. What technical problems can you imagine the film crew had to overcome?*

There were actually 78 separate camera set-ups needed for the shower scene and it took seven days to film. Among the technical headaches were the problems of keeping pieces of moleskin glued to Janet Leigh (Marion) to prevent her appearing nude; filming the head-on shots of the water pouring out of the shower (solved by blocking some of the central shower holes and using a long lens to prevent the camera being soaked, although the camera crew were less fortunate) and filming 'Mother' from inside the shower. The walls on each side of the shower were detachable to enable the crew to film Marion's demise from every possible angle.

★ THE MUSIC ★

Music plays a crucial part in Psycho. The score was created by Bernard Herrmann and is never more effective than in the shower scene. In fact Hitchcock had wanted the sequence to appear in silence and later on it was proposed jazz music should accompany the images. Herrmann had the idea of just using string instruments, violins played at a very high pitch evoking the stabbing actions of the knife and Marion's screams.

*Task*

*Watch the shower sequence with the volume turned down. What is missing from the scene? In what ways does Herrmann's music complement the actions of 'Mother', the reactions of Marion and the way the film is edited?*

★ THE FORM OF PSYCHO ★

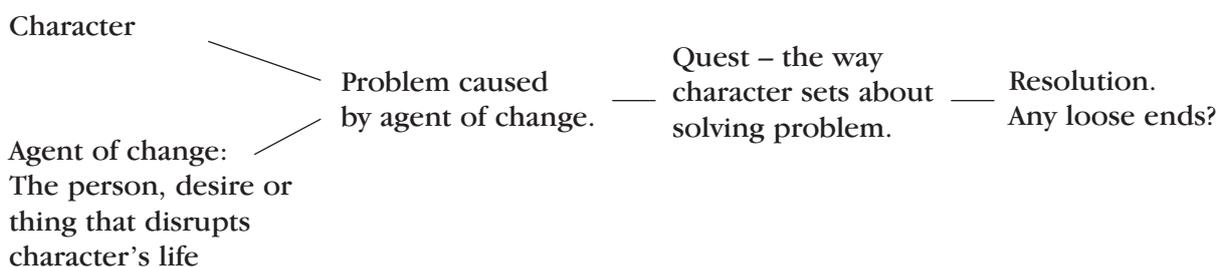
When a work of art such as a film like Psycho is said to have form, it is the overall relationship, the shapes and patterns created by the various elements that make up the film, which is being referred to. One reason for Psycho's popularity is the fact that it is a very complex film, it is full of links and connections, and because of its intricate form it's usually possible to see something new each time you watch it.

## THE STORY STRUCTURE

The idea of starting the story with a woman escaping with money, who comes to a sticky end in a motel shower, was in the original Robert Bloch novel, but it was Hitchcock's screenwriter Joseph Stefano who really recognised the shock potential of this story structure. It was he who decided to devote nearly a third of the film to her and her problems, getting the audience on her side, only to bump her off and leave everyone unsure of where they were or with whom to identify.

*Task*

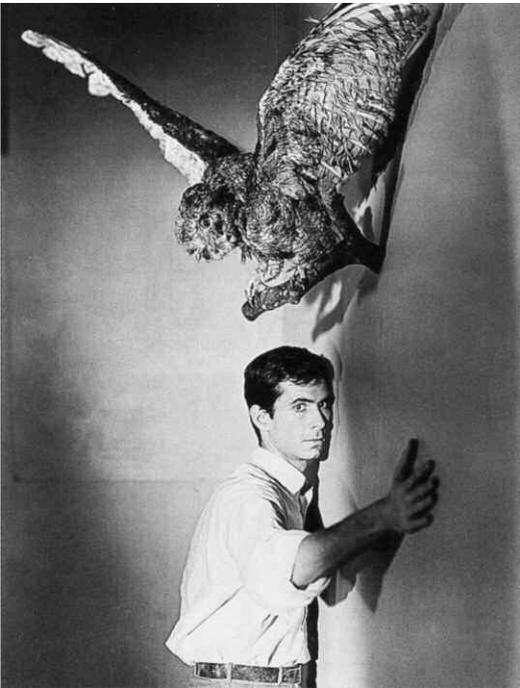
*Psycho is unusual in having not just one story, but also several, some of which lead to complete dead ends. Put this to the test by using the diagram below and fill in the specific story elements for the following characters: MARION CRANE, MILTON ARBOGAST (the private investigator), NORMAN BATES (from the moment he discovers Marion's body) and LILA CRANE.*



☆ CHARACTERISATION ☆

The people we see on screen in Psycho are characters created at first by a writer and then interpreted by actors cast to play the roles. This may seem a painfully obvious point. But the fact that their performances can convince or move us is a tribute to the lines they are given to speak and their capacity to represent their characters effectively.

What this means is that they present the formal elements that make up a character - voice, expressions, body language etc. - in a consistent and meaningful way. If Anthony Perkins (Norman Bates) began winking at us or kept reminding us that he was not really a murderer, then we would quickly cease to be involved in the drama of his situation and probably start to laugh at these Monty Python-like developments.



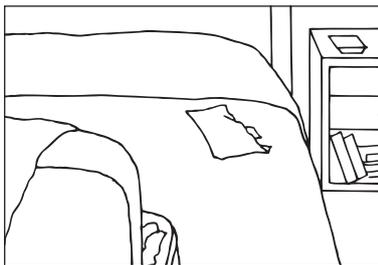
*Task*

*Look at the following point-of-view shots.*

*Remember that at each moment we are meant to feel we are seeing things through the eyes of a character. What emotions do we experience alongside them and how do the shots contribute to our feelings for the character? Are we made to experience sights that implicate us, make us share the guilt or voyeurism of certain characters?*

SHOT

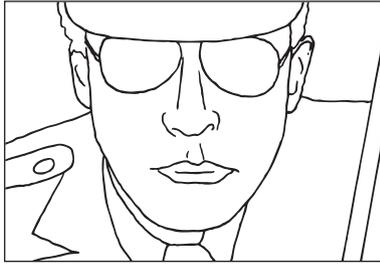
EMOTIONS CHARACTER/AUDIENCE SHARE



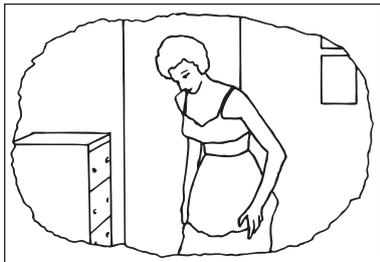
*Marion's view of the stolen money on her bed*



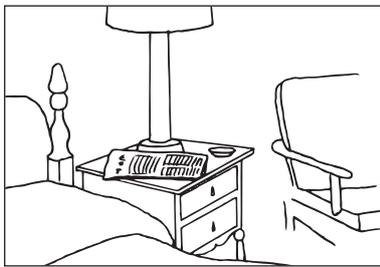
*Marion's car window view of her employer*



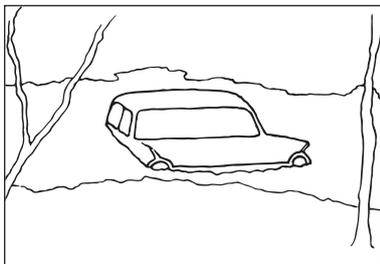
*Marion's view of policeman*



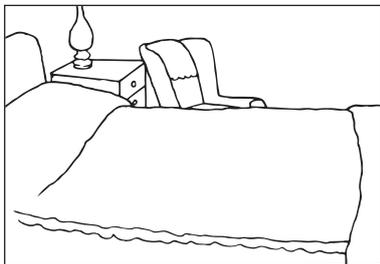
*Norman's peephole view of Marion*



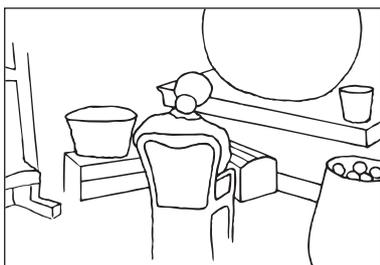
*Norman's view of newspaper*



*Norman's view of car failing to sink*



*Lila's view of Mrs Bates' bed*



*Lila's view of Mrs Bates*

☆ REPETITION ☆

Hitchcock planned every part of *Psycho* long before the filming began and little that is in the film is there by accident. To give a story shape, a director may often include repetitions; events, themes or even objects that keep turning up. *Psycho* is full of such repetitions or motifs. Motifs are often a helpful way of discovering the deeper meanings of a film and *Psycho* is no exception. For instance, what significance can you spot in the change of Marion's underwear before/after her crime?

One of the most significant motifs concerns the theme of doubleness and centres on mirror images.

*Task*

*Fast forward through the film and watch the following scenes in which mirrors occur:*

- ☆ *Marion packing her bags*
- ☆ *Marion in the second-hand car lot's lavatory*
- ☆ *Marion's view of her eyes in the rear view mirror as she drives*
- ☆ *Marion as she checks into the Bates' Motel*
- ☆ *Arbogast as he questions Norman about Marion's disappearance*
- ☆ *Lila and Sam as they check into the Bates' Motel*
- ☆ *Lila in Mrs Bates' bedroom*

*At each of these moments ask yourself what the character is thinking, planning or pretending to be, just as a double image of them is on the screen. What is the big difference between Lila's reaction to her mirror image and Marion's response to hers? What does this reveal about their characters?*



*Task*

*Look out for other repetitions in *Psycho*, for instance the discussion of marriage in the office scene when Marion returns to work after her long lunch break with Sam, or movements involving anyone talking of or actually being watched and observed. How do these motifs add to an understanding of the character, their behaviour or the overall atmosphere of the film?*

*Task*

*Repetition also has a great deal to do with the way in which Hitchcock builds suspense in *Psycho*. When Lila explores in the Bates' home, half the tension is created by what we have already seen happen in that spooky house. Look at her exploration and think how what we already know or have seen adds to our sense of dread.*

## SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE

A film that constantly repeats itself might become very dull. Think how much less scary Arbogast's murder would be if he had been stabbed having a shower too. When Sam goes to the Bates' Motel to look for Arbogast for the first time and finds the place deserted, Hitchcock films Norman standing by the swamp. He avoids showing a second sinking car scene, leaving it to our imagination and memories to fill in the gaps.

A formal device used to give a film shape without making it predictable is the repeated use of something in different circumstances or for different purposes. The 'something' can be a gesture, an expression, an object, a set of actions, anything.

*Task*

*Discuss the different jobs and functions that the following objects perform during Psycho. Part of the function of a motif might be the effect it has on us or the contribution it makes to the atmosphere of the film.*

- ☆ newspaper Marion buys at the used car lot
- ☆ shower curtain
- ☆ birds

*Task*

*Critics have pointed out that in keeping with the visual motif of reflections, the whole film is like a mirror with the events in the Marion part being duplicated in the Norman section of the film. If so, then the Norman side of the mirror offers a very distorted image of Marion's world in which similar actions take on an altogether more disturbing aspect. The join between the two worlds can be pin-pointed at the moment Marion hesitates and signs a false name in the register followed immediately by Norman's inexplicable hesitation and then selection of the key for room number one.*

Study the scene in which Marion packs her bags and then the scene in which Norman clears up the murder. What similarities can you spot and in what ways do the similar actions or events have very different meanings in the two worlds. In particular, how does the money change in significance after Marion's death?

## IRONY

Another powerful tool for lending a film or any story shape is irony. Dramatic irony is created when an audience knows more about events than the characters in a film and can anticipate what is about to happen. Irony can also occur when something acquires a greater significance on second hearing or seeing because it seems to hint at what is going to occur later on.

*Task*

*Discuss moments in the film when you know more about what is going on than a character or characters. How does this 'knowledge' contribute to your experience or enjoyment of the film? Does it add to the suspense? Even though you know more than a character such as Arbogast as he climbs the stairs, what does Hitchcock do to ensure that we still experience shock in this scene? How important is dramatic irony in a suspense film?*



*Task*

*The following is a list of some of the ironic lines that pepper the script. In each case, comment on the added significance of the line now you know the whole film.*

SCENE	SCRIPT	IRONIC EFFECT
Marion to Sam in hotel room	<i>'Checking out time in these kinds of hotels is 3.30 and when your time's up...'</i>	
Traffic cop to Marion	<i>'There are plenty of motels in this area...I mean...just to be safe.'</i>	
California Charlie to Marion	<i>'The first customer is always the most trouble...'</i>	
Marion imagining Cassidy's fury on the Monday after the theft	<i>'I'll get it back and if any of it's missing, I'll replace it with her fine soft flesh.'</i>	
Norman excusing his mother's 'outburst' to Marion	<i>'What's the phrase...she isn't quite herself today.'</i>	
Norman to Marion during their supper together	<i>'A boy's best friend is his mother.'</i>	
Old lady in Sam's store talking to assistant about insect poison	<i>'Death should always be painless.'</i>	
Norman to Arbogast	<i>'Old habits die hard...'</i>	

Irony does not have to be verbal. Psycho is full of ironic visual hints also that add to the enjoyment of the film each time you see it.

*Task*

*Study the still of Marion in her office being shown the \$40,000 and the long shot of Norman near the swamp. Look at the bottom of the picture just seen on the wall behind Marion. Can you see a link between this and the place where Norman is standing? What do these landscapes say about the characters and their circumstances and how does the picture ironically hint at Marion's fate? What does the tree resemble? Can you think of any significance in its shape to the character of Norman?*



☆ PROMOTING THE FILM ☆

Some films succeed by chance. Word of mouth creates good audiences and profits. Other films are heavily advertised and promoted then vanish without trace. In the words of William Goldman, when it comes to guessing which films will work or not: 'Nobody knows anything.' At the first screening of Psycho in a rough-cut version without the Herrmann soundtrack, Hitchcock was allegedly so disappointed with the film that he wanted to cut it down and make it into a television show. Luckily, he was dissuaded.

On the other hand, Hitchcock was a master of publicity and the promotion of Psycho was to prove a masterclass of audience manipulation.

Hitchcock's publicity tasks started as soon as he bought the rights to Robert Bloch's novel. Publicity can be generated at all phases of the film production process. It can occur in pre-production when the screenplay is being written and the actors and technicians are being contracted. It can happen during production of the film and it is essential in post production when it ties in with the distribution of the film to generate the audiences for the cinemas showing it.

**KEY OBJECTIVES**

Hitchcock's first task was to keep the story of Psycho a secret during filming, but at the same time generate curiosity about the project. Secondly, he needed to ensure that the film critics and first audiences did not give the story away so as to keep the film's shocking end a surprise and to ensure the film had legs - growing audience interest after the initial opening.

*Task 1*

*Divide into groups and share out the responsibilities of promoting Psycho during the three main phases of its creation, bearing in mind the key objectives mentioned on the previous page. Be as specific as you can; if you decide to create a poster; what images from the film would you use and why?*

*Task 2*

*The following is a list of various publicity stunts that might have occurred during the making and distribution of Psycho. Using your judgement, decide at which stage in the film such events might have happened: pre-production, production or post production and which of them are true or false.*

The actors were made to swear an oath of secrecy on the first day of filming.

Hitchcock refused to let Paramount's studio photographers onto the set to take publicity shots.

Hitchcock insisted that if cinemas were to show Psycho they would have to control the way the audience saw the film. The conditions were made part of the contract that cinema owners had to agree to before receiving a print of the film to screen. [At a time when a film programme might involve a newsreel, a support film or B-movie, and the main feature, audiences were used to turning up at any time during a programme and sitting through it until it went full circle.] Hitchcock demanded that Psycho should be shown at specific times, and that tickets for each separate performance could be pre-booked. He also demanded that no one be admitted once the film had begun. This inevitably led to long queues outside cinemas showing the film, a kind of publicity in its own right, and ensured that no one could see the film from half-way through, thus ruining the effect of the shower scene.

When he bought the film rights to Psycho he sent his aids to bookstalls to buy up as many copies of the book as they could.

Hitchcock made a series of misleading statements to the press. At one time it was thought he was filming a version of the Greek myth of Psyche, and he told one Hollywood reporter: 'It's the story of a young man whose mother is a homicidal maniac.'

The film poster, on page one, avoided showing anything of the murders, but concentrated on the sexual explicitness contained in the film with a prominent picture of Janet Leigh in a bra and John Gavin (Sam Loomis) with a naked chest.

As people left the cinema a tape recording of Alfred Hitchcock asking them not to reveal the ending of the film because 'it's the only one we've got' was broadcast in the foyer. Hitchcock tried explicitly to make his public part of the publicity strategy.

Hitchcock produced a six-minute trailer in which he acted as tour guide to the Bates' motel and house. He referred to the two murders and to Norman's mother, but otherwise he described everything in a vague and suggestive way, pretending to be too squeamish to divulge certain details.

Contacted by the manager of Woods Theatre in Chicago who was worried that rain was infuriating crowds standing outside the cinema, Hitchcock suggested they should be bought umbrellas and a publicity stunt could be generated out of the event. The story made headlines the following day.

Hitchcock did not allow critics to see the film at special screenings. They had to join the queues and see the film along with ordinary cinemagoers. In their press packs they were specifically asked not to reveal the film's ending. In a famous review of Psycho written in 1968 when the film first appeared on television in Britain, Kenneth Tynan (critic felt that Hitchcock bruised critics' egos by treating them in this way and that this was one cause for the film's many bad initial reviews.

Janet Leigh refused to attend the film in a public theatre because she felt her presence would detract from the film's effect.

Managers at cinemas were sent a publicity pack, with advice on how to go about hiring security guards to keep the crowds in order, and how to screen the film. Instructions included keeping cinemas dark for thirty seconds after the film's screening and shining green light on people as they left the auditorium.

Hitchcock had a chair on set throughout filming with the name 'Mrs Bates' on the back. He even posed in the chair himself for publicity shots. Other pictures had characters staring fearfully at an empty rocking chair.

### Task 1

*Write a script for Hitchcock's famous trailer in which he goes on a tour of the Bates' motel and house. Where would you go and what would you say without revealing too much but whetting the appetite of the public?*

### Task 2

*You are Alfred Hitchcock writing a letter to Herb Steinberg, Head of Publicity at Paramount, setting out the publicity strategy for Psycho. You are welcome to borrow from the actual promotion tactics employed and add your own ideas. Include any poster designs or merchandising ideas you feel might work.*



☆ CENSORSHIP ☆

In 1960 censorship in America was much stricter than today. All screenplays and films had to gain approval from the Motion Picture Association that enforced a code of ethics, originally established in 1930 by the Hayes Office (named after its first boss, ex-postmaster general, Will H. Hayes). If a film failed to be approved, it was very unlikely to be shown in most cinemas and probably would not even be made. In 1960 the Hayes Office was run by Geoffrey Shurlock. In addition there were non-governmental groups such as the Catholic League of Decency which could mount considerable opposition to films with scenes or themes of which they did not approve.

Hitchcock had had dealings with the censors on other films of his and his experience proved invaluable in that *Psycho* survived more or less intact. There is evidence that he actually included shocking elements in the screenplay, for instance an explicitly sexual quip by oil man Cassidy in reaction to Marion's intention of spending the weekend in bed, which he was happy to lose and which he hoped would distract the censors from the really risqué elements of the film. In addition, the original screenplay included clear reference to Norman's having had a sexual relationship with his mother which had to go and the elaborate pooh-poohing by the psychiatrist of the idea of Norman's being a transvestite was a direct sop to the censors for whom such bizarre sexual practices were taboo in public entertainment.

The shower scene also proved very problematic, but Hitchcock's clever editing seems to have outmanoeuvred Shurlock's people, who could not decide whether there was actual nudity in the scene or not. In the face of initial reservations, Hitchcock is reported to have pretended to re-edit the sequence but actually re-submitted it unaltered to the censors. Hitchcock even offered to re-film the unprecedented, shocking opening scene with Sam and Marion embracing semi-nude on a bed in exchange for approval of the shower scene, but representatives of the Shurlock office failed to turn up on set for the re-shoot and finally they approved both scenes.



## Task

According to the ethics in operation in 1960 the following provisions applied to films.

- ☆ *The sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin*
- ☆ *Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embracing, suggestive gestures and postures were unacceptable*
- ☆ *Explicit nudity was unacceptable*
- ☆ *Swearing such as the use of 'damn', 'god' and 'hell' was unacceptable*
- ☆ *Brutality and possibly gruesomeness had to be treated within the careful limits of good taste*

What effect do you feel each of these provisions might have had on Psycho? Do you feel Hitchcock got away with a lot? If Psycho were made today, in what ways would it differ?

It can be argued that Psycho is a better film for not being explicitly violent. The shower scene's editing arose in part from the need to suggest rather than show Marion's nakedness and death. Some people claimed that the scene was actually filmed in colour; so shocking was its original effect. Do you think Psycho is a better film for not showing us everything and leaving some things to our imagination? For instance, what does Lila see in the book that she looks at in Norman's bedroom?

In Britain, Psycho is available as a two-disc set on DVD, rated 15 certificate.. Do you think it deserves this certificate? Should anyone be able to see it? Explain your view.

Does the certificate system stop teenagers seeing 'unsuitable' films? A 1993 report for the British Board of Film Classification indicated that by the time teenagers reached 15, many parents had ceased trying to control their viewing. Does your experience match this and do you feel adults should play a bigger part in controlling their children's viewing? How?

Which do you find more disturbing: the sex in Psycho or the violence? Which did

Hitchcock portray more graphically and what, if anything, does this reveal about the censorship laws in the early 1960s? Do you think the depiction of sex and violence ought to be treated in the same way by the censors? What are the 'limits of good taste'? Who decides?

## ☆ READING LIST ☆

Books or articles specifically about Psycho:

**Film guide to Psycho**, James Naremore (Indiana University Press, 1973)

**Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho**, Stephen Rebello (Mandarin, 1990)

**Psycho and the Roller Coaster**, David Thompson, in *Overexposures: The Crisis in American Film Making* (William Morrow and Co., 1981)

**Shouts and Murmurs**, Kenneth Tynan (Observer, 21 April 1968)

Books and articles about Alfred Hitchcock:

**Alfred Hitchcock: The Hollywood Years**, Joel Finler (B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1992)

**Hitchcock: The Authorised Biography of Alfred Hitchcock**, John Russell Taylor (Abacus, 1981)

General Reading:

**Film Art**, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (Addison-Wesley, 1980)

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