

Exploring Literature and Film

You can use these general questions to facilitate any discussion, no matter what books you read or films you watch.

Close-Up

- 1 Ask each member of the group to share two or three phrases or lines of dialogue to describe the main character. What do these short descriptions say about the character's personality?
- 2 What relationships are important in this story? How do they move the plot forward?
- 3 Do the characters in this book or film ever surprise you? If they do, are their actions believable?
- 4 How are characters and events influenced by the past in the story or film you're examining?
- 5 Setting a story in a particular time and place can profoundly influence characters and events. How big a role does the setting play in this novel or film?
- 6 Imagine the events in the story unfolding at a different historical time and in a different location. How would that change the plot, and how would it affect the characters in the story?
- 7 If you are discussing a book, choose several short passages to read aloud that seem characteristic of the writer's style. What strikes you about the way the writer uses language? If you are viewing a film, what scenes are emblematic of the director's or screenwriter's vision of the story?

The Artist's Craft

- 1 How does the writer use language and the filmmaker use images to create mood? How are description and dialogue handled? Do the style and the subject matter suit each other or do they seem at odds?
- 2 Novels often focus on the inner lives of their characters, allowing us to enter their thoughts and feelings. A film must translate this interior world into visual images. How does this particular film portray the inner reality of its characters?

- 3 What challenges do you think the filmmaker faced when adapting this novel to film?
- 4 What enduring themes are explored? What lasting images, lessons, or messages did this novel or film leave with you?
- 5 Based on your reading or viewing of this one work, what might you presume to know about its creator?
- 6 What questions about morality does this work of literature or film raise? Are any answers offered?

The Big Picture

- 1 Do you think there is such a thing as an “essential self” — a unique individual identity — or do you think identity is the result of life experience? What influences do forces such as socioeconomic class, gender, race, religion, and family background exert upon the characters in this story?
- 2 A work of literature or a film can offer us the chance to experience a world different from our own. Did this work expose you to new attitudes, points of view, people, environments, or cultures? What did you learn?
- 3 If you’re reading this book or seeing the film for a second (or third) time, how has your response to it changed? What do you think has caused that shift?
- 4 What flaws do you see in this book or film? If you were acting as an editor, producer, or director of this work, what would you have added, changed, or eliminated?
- 5 Some books and films are unforgettable, and others entertain us but leave no lasting impression. Which kind of work was this for you?
- 6 What did you think of this story’s ending? Was it satisfying to you? Why or why not? If not, how would you have changed it?
- 7 Ask group members to share a favorite scene in the book or film with the group. What makes it powerful, interesting, shocking, funny, or otherwise memorable?

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