Hope and Despair in “The Shawshank Redemption”

1. The Power of Hope
2. What Gives Andy Hope?
3. Hope Turns to Despair
1. The Power of Hope

- Hope is one of the most powerful themes in all of human existence
- What is hope?
“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu
“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.
JFK & RFK

“There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?”
“Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it.”

Barack Obama, 2008
2. What Gives Andy Hope?

“There are places in this world that aren't made out of stone. There's something inside that they can't get to, that they can't touch, that's yours.”
Rocks

• Andy tells Red “I’m a rock hound, at least I was in my old life, I’d like to be again at least on a limited basis.”

• Andy’s rocks are an example of symbolism
• Rocks are shaped naturally over millions of years
• Andy shaping the rocks into chess pieces, etc. represents the very long time he has spent in prison
They also symbolize Andy’s struggle and determination to hold on to the life he had before he came to prison.
Music

“That's the beauty of music. They can't get that from you. Haven't you ever felt that way about music?”
• Music represents Andy’s humanity
• He says that the music he hears in his head is something that belongs to him that the guards can’t touch or take away from him
• Through music, Andy gives the other prisoners their humanity back, if only for a few moments

• Red says...
“It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away, and for the briefest of moments, every last man in Shawshank felt free.”
Tommy

- Tommy represents Andy’s faith and hope in the future.
- He wants to help Tommy get his high school diploma because he has hope that Tommy can change.
Tommy ends up giving Andy a hope that he never imagined...the hope that he may gain his freedom after 19 long years!
3. Hope Turns to Despair

• But we know that Andy’s hopes are crushed by Warden Norton
• It seems as though Andy has finally reached the end of his hope
• Was Red right all along?
“Let me tell you something my friend. Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane. It’s got no use on the inside. You better get used to that idea.”
“Hope is the worst of evils, for it prolongs the torments of man.”
Friedrich Nietzsche
What Do You Think?