

Instructor: Justin Aukema
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“Scene from the film *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)”

Warm-up Questions:

1. What are some dreams (i.e. things you really want to do in life) that you have? What is stopping you from doing these things?
2. Have you ever overcome great difficulties or challenges?
3. Have you ever underestimated your own abilities or the abilities of others?
4. Have you ever been accused of something that you didn't do?
5. What are some reasons you have to be hopeful for the future?

Background:

The *Shawshank Redemption* takes place in the 1940s and 50s in the U.S. state of Maine. Main character, Andy Dufresne, is a banker who has been wrongly convicted of the murder of his wife and her lover, and he is sentenced to two life terms in prison at the Shawshank State Penitentiary. There he meets Ellis “Red” Redding who is an expert at secretly getting items within the prison. He gets Andy a small hammer and a larger poster. Meanwhile, Andy is used by the guards to illegally launder their money and the handle the finances for the prison. Eventually, another prisoner, Tommy Williams, reveals that he knows the true killer of Andy's wife. However, the prison guards want to cover up this information so that they can keep using Andy, and so they have Tommy killed. The situation truly seems hopeless for Andy and Red. Nevertheless, Andy never gives up hope that he will someday get out of prison and be free.

Dialogue:

Andy: You think you'll ever get out of here?

Red: Me? Yeah. One day when I got a long, white _____ and two or three marbles rolling around upstairs they'll let me out.

Andy: I'll tell 'ya where I'd go. Zihuatanejo.

Red: Say what?

Andy: Zihuatanejo. It's in Mexico. Little place on the Pacific Ocean. You know what the Mexicans say about the Pacific?

Red: No.

Andy: They say it has no _____. That's where I want to live the rest of my life. A warm place, with no memory. Open up a little hotel, right on the beach. Buy some worthless old boat and fix it up new. Take my guests out charter fishing.

Red: Zihuatanejo, huh?

Andy: You know, in a place like that, I could use a man who knows how to get things.

Red: I don't think I could _____ it on the outside, Andy. I've been in here most of my life. I'm an institutional man now. Just like Brooks was.

Andy: Well, you underestimate yourself.

Red: I don't think so. In here, I'm the guy who can get things for 'ya sure, but outside all you need is the Yellow Pages. Hell, I wouldn't even know where to _____. Pacific Ocean? Shit. 'Bout scare me to death, something that big.

Andy: Not me. I didn't shoot my wife, and I didn't shoot her lover. Whatever mistakes I've made I've paid for them and then some. That hotel, that boat? I don't think that's too much to _____.

Red: I don't think you oughta be doin' this to yourself, Andy. These are just shitty pipe dreams. I mean, Mexico is way the hell down there, and you're in here, and that's the way it is.

Andy: Yeah, right. That's the way it is. It's down there, and I'm in here. I guess it comes down to a simple _____, really. Get busy living or get busy dying.

Comprehension questions:

1. Does Red think he will eventually get out of prison? If so, when?
2. What is Andy's dream when he gets out of prison?
3. What does Andy invite Red to do?
4. How does Red respond to Andy's invitation and to his dream?
5. Will Andy give up his dream? How do you know?

Discussion questions:

1. If you were in this situation, which character would you agree with more? Why?
2. What do you think of the characters? How would you describe them?
3. How would you respond to a friend who told you about a dream that seemed impossible?
4. What do you think about Andy's line "get busy living or get busy dying"?

5. Do you think it is realistic that an innocent person would be put in prison? Discuss some of the potential flaws with the justice system in Japan. How might these things be improved?

Activity:

1. Imagine that you and your friend are in prison for a crime that you didn't commit. Person A wants to try to escape, but person B thinks it is too dangerous. Person A, what would you say to try to convince person B? Person B, how would you respond?
2. Tell a partner an impossible dream that you have. Practice asking questions and responding by giving encouragement.