

Psycho Workbook

Sample Answers



Character Development in Psycho

When writing about how a character is established and developed, you can refer to a range of production elements, including: camera techniques, acting, mise-en-scene and visual composition, editing, lighting and sound (including music and dialogue).

1. How is Marion Crane established and developed as a character? Refer to the use of camera techniques, music, acting and dialogue (10 marks).

In the opening sequence of Psycho, Alfred Hitchcock uses a range of techniques to establish the character of Marion Crane, including camera techniques, music, acting and dialogue.

Dialogue is used extensively throughout this scene to establish Marion as a character, revealing that her and Sam are unable to be together because Sam is still paying his ex-wife alimony and living behind a hardware store in Fairvale. Marion is tired of their secretive relationship. "Oh, we can see each other," she says. "We can even have dinner - but respectably - in my house, with my mother's picture on the mantel, and my sister helping me broil a big steak for three." Sam professes a deep love for her, conceding that he wants to see her under any circumstance, "even respectability".

Acting also makes an important contribution to character development throughout this scene. When Sam suggests that after dinner they 'send sister to the movies and turn mamma's picture to the wall' Marion appears shocked at the suggestion. This reinforces the notion that she wants them to have a 'respectable' relationship.

Although dialogue is primarily used to establish Marion and Sam as characters, shot selection and music also makes a contribution. As the scene progresses, Marion and Sam are often shown in the same frame, which contributes to a sense of intimacy and love. When Marion declares that she wants to marry Sam, romantic strings well and they kiss passionately.

2. At the beginning of the film, Hitchcock makes the audience identify and sympathise with Marion Crane. How does Hitchcock achieve this? Your response should make reference to camera techniques, acting, mise-en-scene, editing, lighting and sound. (10 marks)

In narratives, the audience is usually encouraged to identify with the point-of-view of one or more characters. At the beginning of Psycho, Alfred Hitchcock strongly positions the audience to identify with Marion Crane. Although she has stolen a large amount of money from her employer, Hitchcock uses a range of techniques - including camera techniques, acting, mise-en-scene, editing, lighting and sound - to make the audience identify with her.

While she is packing, Hitchcock cuts to Marion taking a shirt from the closet. She turns back towards the bed and puts it on. As she does up the top button, her face is lined with concern and she looks intently towards the bed. There is a close up of the suitcase and a point-of-view shot of the envelope as she looks over her shoulder while standing in front of the mirror. Although she is clearly going to steal the money, the combination of editing and acting conveys her indecision. Point-of-view shots are a powerful technique for encouraging audiences to identify with particularly characters. Here, the repeated point-of-view shots of the suitcase, envelope of important documents and the \$40,000 all continue to build audience identification with Marion. As she closes the suitcase, Marion's face is once again lined with concern. She looks towards the \$40,000. Hitchcock once again shows an extremely close-up of the cash. Hitchcock cuts to a mid-shot of Marion who sighs, picks up her handbag and hesitantly sits next to the envelope. Hitchcock dissolves to a mid-shot of Marion sitting behind the wheel of her car. The audience hears her imagining what Sam will say when she arrives in Fairvale: "Marion, what in the world - what are you doing here? ...Of course I'm glad to see you. I always am. ...What is it, Marion?" Here, Hitchcock uses dialogue to reveal Marion's thoughts and encourage the audience to identify with her further. When Marion is waiting at the intersection, Hitchcock cuts between a mid-shot of Marion and a point-of-view shot through the windshield. When Lowery passes in front of the car and locks eyes with her, it is almost like the audience has been caught in the act of stealing the money. This point-of-view shot - along with the jarring dramatic music - strongly encourages the audience to identify with Marion's point of view.

3. How is the audience positioned to feel about Norman throughout this scene? What do you make of the shadow that divide's Norman's face in half? What does the audience see around Norman throughout this scene? Compare these shots with the shots of Marion. How are they different? (10 marks)

When Marion enters the parlour, she looks around. Hitchcock cuts to several point-of-view shots. The first shows a stuffed owl, its wings outstretched, casting ominous shadows against the ceiling. The second point-of-view shot shows a stuffed raven perched menacingly on a branch, a large shadow cast against the wall. Hitchcock cuts to a mid-shot of Norman as he places the tray on a table and is surrounded by the menacing birds.

During the conversation, Marion and Norman are framed separately. Norman is surrounded by menacing looking birds. In the top left hand corner of the frame, there is an owl - its wings outstretched as if descending on its prey. Towards the bottom of the frame, there is the shadow of a crow. Both of these birds are extremely sinister and clearly foreshadow the discovery that Norman is a brutal murderer. On the wall in the background, there are two paintings. Both of these paintings are medieval paintings of women being attacked. The shadow that divides Norman's face is a clear reference to his split personality. In the background of this shot, the frame is filled with straight lines.

In contrast, Marion is more generously lit than Norman. She is surrounded by curved lines: the milk jug, Tiffany lamp, a rounded picture frame. By itself, this use of visual composition doesn't tell the audience much about her character. Nevertheless, it creates a contrast between Norman and Marion, between murderer and victim. There are birds in this shot, too. There are several small, stuffed finches perched beneath the lamp. Whereas Norman is surrounded by sinister looking birds of prey, Marion is framed with harmless, 'passive' birds.

Throughout the parlour scene, Hitchcock is clearly using visual composition to tell the audience about the characters. Norman - surrounded by sinister birds - is clearly characterised as a murderer. Marion - generously lit and framed with small, stuffed finches - is clearly going to become his victim. Although many people don't recognise this on first viewing the film, when you watch the movie again, it is clear what Hitchcock was conveying through his use of visual composition.

4. Referring to a range of techniques - such as camera techniques, acting, mise-en-scene, editing, lighting and sound - explain how Hitchcock engages the audience when Arbogast is murdered (10 marks).

When Arbogast is murdered, Hitchcock uses a range of techniques to engage the audience - including camera techniques, acting, mise-en-scene, editing, lighting and sound.

The scene begins with Arbogast pulling up to the Bates Motel in his car. The scene unfolds at night. the lighting deliberately low key to engage audiences and create a sense of suspense. As Arbogast slides across the front seat of his car and heads towards the motel, the music is low and suspenseful in a clear attempt to engage the audience. Hitchcock cuts to a close-up of Arbogast as he steps into the parlour. There are three point-of-view shots: the stuffed crow, a ominous-looking owl and the safe. This helps to engage the audience by encouraging the audience to identify with Arbogast as he explores the motel. The sinister music and low-key lighting continue as Arbogast climbs the steps to the Bates hous. When he reaches the house, Hitchcock once again uses point-of-view shots to engage the audience by putting them in the place of Arbogast. When he enters the foyer, Arbogast looks around, deciding to ascend the stairs.

As he slowly ascends the stairs, Hitchcock cuts to a close-up of the back of Arbogast's legs. This claustrophobic shot builds suspense by not allowing the audience to see where the malevolent Mrs Bates will emerge from.

Hitchcock uses editing to engage the audience by cutting away to a door ominously swinging open.

As he climbs the stairs, the music becomes low and almost stops entirely, making the screech of violins that follows more shocking.

Throughout this scene, Hitchcock uses a range of techniques - including camera techniques, lighting, editing and sound - to engage the audience.