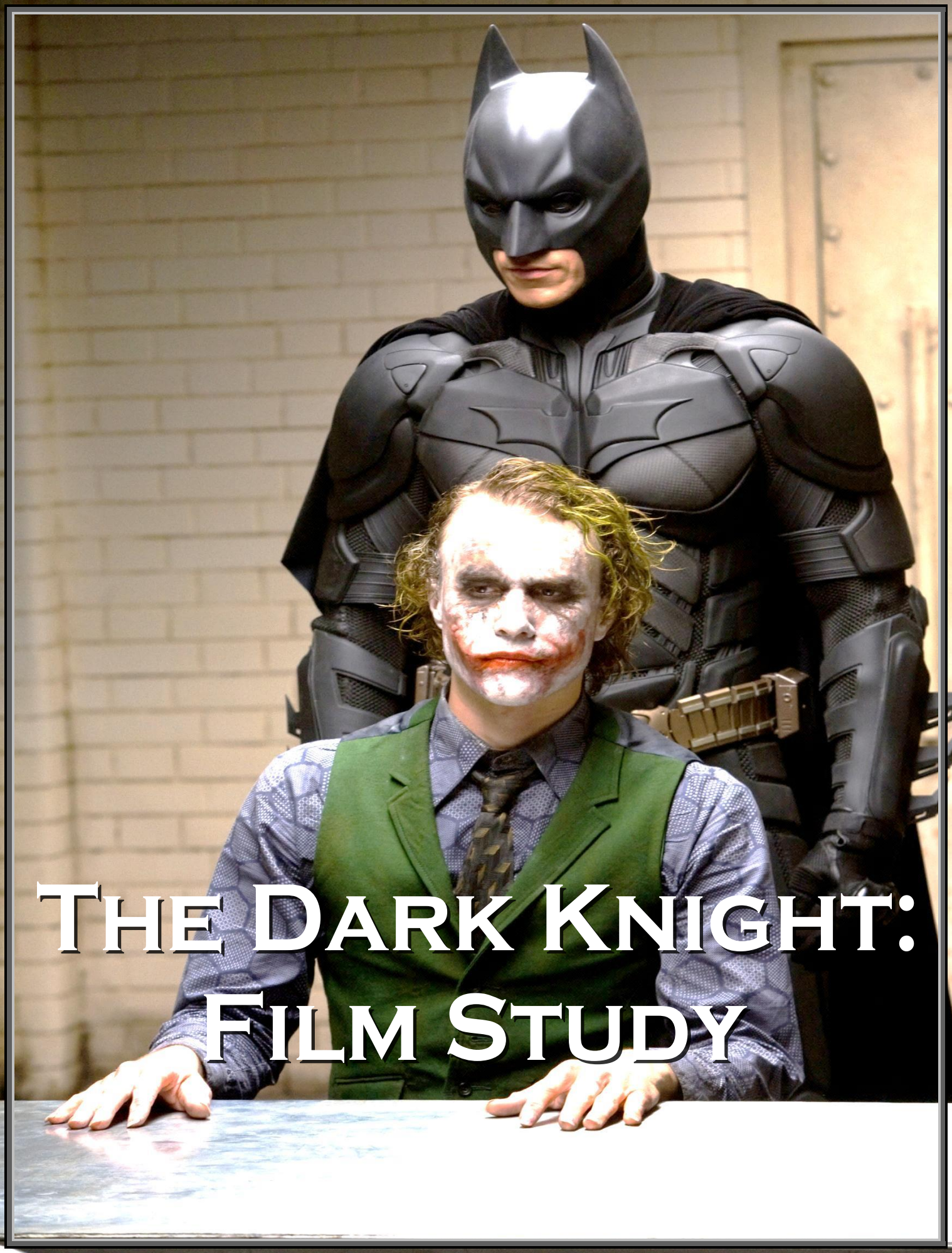

The Dark Knight: Film Study

THE DARK KNIGHT (2008)

ENGLISH 20-1 FILM STUDY

"The Dark Knight is about the struggle to remain moral in an immoral world."

With the help of Lieutenant Jim Gordon and District Attorney Harvey Dent, Batman sets out to destroy organized crime in Gotham for good. The triumvirate (from Latin, "of three men") proves to be effective, but they soon find themselves prey to a rising criminal mastermind known as the Joker, who thrusts Gotham into anarchy and forces the Dark Knight ever closer to crossing the fine line between hero and vigilante.

DIRECTOR	GENRE	THEMES	ELEMENTS
Christopher Nolan	Action/Crime/ Drama/Thriller	• The triumph of *good* over *evil* • The line between *anarchy* and *order* • The terrible logic of *human nature*	Intense sequences of violence and some menace.
RUNNING TIME	**CLASSIFICATION**		
152 minutes	14A		

Cast	Character
Christian Bale	Bruce Wayne / Batman
Heath Ledger	The Joker
Aaron Eckhart	Harvey Dent / Two-Face
Michael Caine	Alfred Pennyworth
Maggie Gyllenhaal	Rachel Dawes
Gary Oldman	Lt. / Commissioner James Gordon
Morgan Freeman	Lucius Fox

CURRICULAR OBJECTIVES

INSTRUCTIONS & TABLE OF CONTENTS

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

1. Critically view The Dark Knight; utilizing applicable film terminology when discussing.
2. Recognize the role The Dark Knight plays in exploring the *Speculative Fiction* genre.
3. Explore the essential question—*Does having a choice mean making a compromise?*—and how it applies to the ideas presented in the film.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

The study guide is broken up into four sections exploring different issues raised by the film. Each section includes some explanation (of terms or concepts), questions for discussion, and three activities (Previewing, Viewing, and Post-Viewing). You are responsible for completing each section (at its appropriate time) while watching the film. Failing to do so will not only impact your grade but your ability to participate in class discussions and further enrichment activities.

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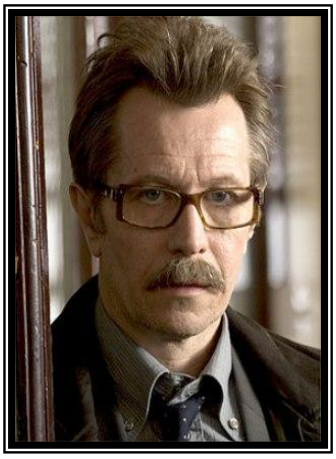
The Character of a Man

PREVIEWING ACTIVITY FOR PART I



VIGILANTE

CHARACTERISTICS OF A . . .

ACTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING A . . .

HERO

VILLAIN

CHARACTERISTICS OF A . . .

ACTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING A . . .

CHARACTERISTICS OF A . . .

ACTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING A . . .

Where does the character of Harvey Dent fit in?

Film Analysis of Part I: "The Symbol of Hope"

1. INTIMIDATE MODE (00:10:20)

Fake Batman: *"What gives you the right?! What's the difference between you and me?!"*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

Remember, the choices examined should either be those of Batman / Bruce Wayne, Jim Gordon, or Harvey Dent.

2. UNKNOWN LIMITS (00:11:52)

Alfred Pennyworth: *"Know your limits, master Wayne."*
Bruce Wayne: *"Batman has no limits."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

3. THE LAST GAME IN TOWN (00:15:38)

Rachel Dawes: *"Harvey, you're Gotham's D.A.—if you're not getting shot at, you're not doing your job."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

Remember, the choices examined should either be those of Batman / Bruce Wayne, Jim Gordon, or Harvey Dent.

4. PROTECTOR'S MANTLE (00:19:22)

Harvey Dent: *"Well, I guess you either die a hero or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

5. HONG KONG HOLIDAY (00:26:12)

Jim Gordon: *"We're going after the mob's life savings. Things will get ugly."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

Remember, the choices examined should either be those of Batman / Bruce Wayne, Jim Gordon, or Harvey Dent.

6. HERO WITH A FACE (00:45:32)

Bruce Wayne: *"Harvey is that hero. He locked up half the city's criminals, and he did it without wearing a mask. Gotham needs a hero with a face."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

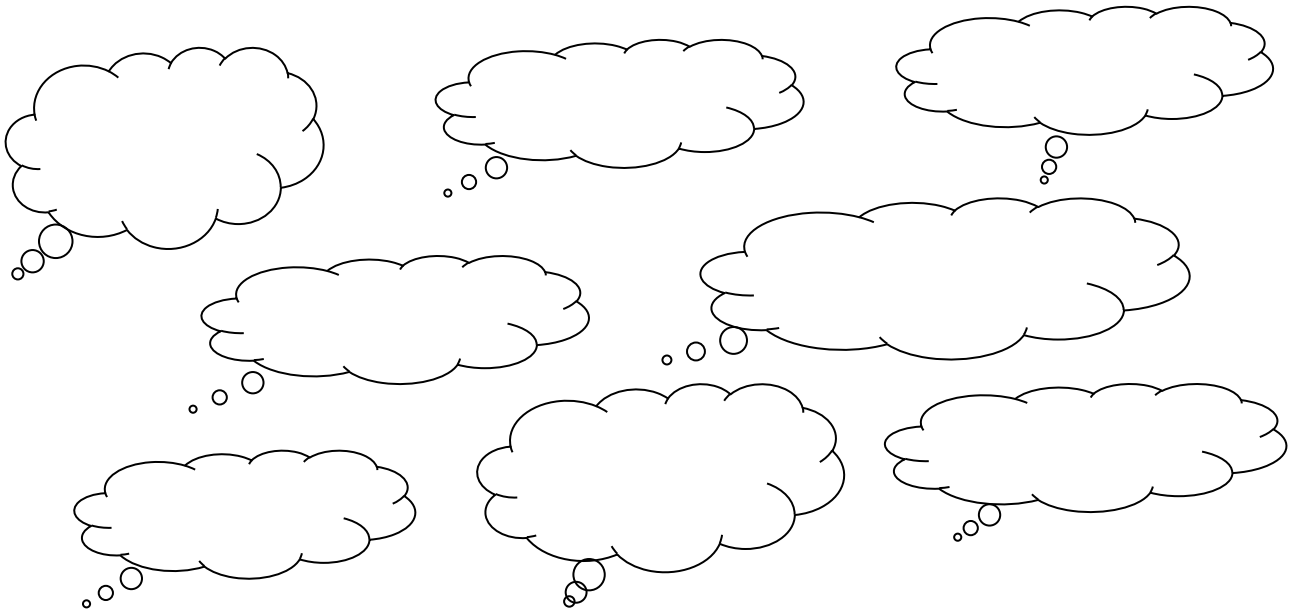
"Why We Need to 'Believe in Harvey Dent'"

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY FOR PART I

Whether Christopher Nolan (the director of The Dark Knight*) intended it or not, his sequel to* Batman Begins *can really be viewed as an insight into, and development of, the Harvey Dent character. He is the real centerpiece of the film—a man who is singularly everything that is good about Gotham—and although he starts as its savior, he ultimately becomes its biggest threat.*

In the first half of the film, Dent inspires the citizens of Gotham by being one of the only people who has the guts and determination to stand up to the mob. At one point, even Bruce Wayne (Batman) considers hanging up his cape and letting Gotham's "White Knight" continue taking down the criminals.

So, what are some of the characteristics that we look for in our elected officials? What qualities do you need to see in someone to "follow them to the end?" Outline your own personal campaign for "believing in Harvey Dent."



"Wanna Know How I Got These Scars?"

PREVIEWING ACTIVITY FOR PART II

"I'm not exactly sure what happened. Sometimes I remember it one way, sometimes another… If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!"

—The Joker, "The Killing Joke," 1988

THE JOKER'S COMIC ORIGIN: *In comic lore, as revealed in Detective Comics #168 (1951), the man who would become the Joker first masqueraded as a criminal known as the Red Hood. During a botched robbery at a Gotham chemical plant, the Hood jumped into a vat of hazardous chemicals in order to escape Batman. Upon emerging from a drainage pipe, he discovered that his skin had been bleached white, his hair had turned green, and his mouth was permanently distorted into a large grin with bright red lips. The chemicals caused him to go insane, thus transforming him into the Joker.*

The importance of an origin story is not the literal details it recounts but the underlying truth and meaning it conveys. By this point in the film, the Joker has already revealed one version of his "origin story" (i.e. his father was a drinker), and he will soon reveal another. As the film progresses, we note that his story continually changes. While the particular reason for this remains unclear, what is evident is that origins are organic and ever changing as it stems from an individual's understanding of self. Oh, the power of perception…

Consider your own origin story (i.e. your life until this point). What details would you include? Which details would you leave out? How do the inclusion (or exclusion) of these details shape who you are today? In the space provided, highlight one of the most significant events of your "origin story" (or if you feel up to the challenge, create the entire story and attach it here).

Film Analysis of Part II: "The Night is Darkest Just Before the Dawn"

7. WATCH THE WORLD BURN (00:53:51)

Alfred Pennyworth: *"You crossed it first, sir. You've hammered them, squeezed them to the point of desperation. And now, in their desperation they've turned to a man they don't fully understand."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

Remember, the choices examined should either be those of Batman / Bruce Wayne, Jim Gordon, or Harvey Dent.

8. NO RULES (01:02:40)

Harvey Dent: *"Heads—you get to keep your head. Tails… not so lucky."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

9. RIGHT CHOICE (01:09:36)

Alfred Pennyworth: *"Endure, Master Wayne. Take it. They'll hate you for it, but that's the point of Batman... he can be the outcast. He can make the choice no one else can face. The right choice."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

Remember, the choices examined should either be those of Batman / Bruce Wayne, Jim Gordon, or Harvey Dent.

10. I AM THE BATMAN (01:10:48)

Harvey Dent: *"One day, the Batman will have to answer for the laws he's broken—but to us, not to this madman."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

11. GOOD COP, BAD COP (01:25:31)

The Joker: *"The only sensible way to live in this world is without rules. Tonight you're going to break your one rule."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

"The Interogation Scene"

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY FOR PART II

By the time you have entered high school, you probably have watched thousands of movies and subconsciously, understand the basic tools and conventions of the medium. Although you may still treat it chiefly as passive entertainment, you can often be sophisticated interpreters of the interplay of sound and image. You know—often without knowing you know—that the close-up on an actor's face signifies something different emotionally from a long shot of an actor across a distance. In fact, you may know how to interpret film better than you know how to interpret literature. Some teachers feel showing movies is a waste of time when students have such a reading deficit already. This is true—but only if students watch film passively.

In this activity, you need to prove to us that you have been "actively" watching The Dark Knight by answering some simple film questions. Good luck!

IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF LIGHTING USED:

WHY IS GORDON FRAMED IN THIS WAY (*i.e. how does it help to establish about where he is*)?

IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF LIGHTING USED:

WHY IS THE JOKER FRAMED IN THIS WAY?

WHY IS BATMAN NOT YET FULLY IN FOCUS (*i.e. why is he a blur in the background, and what does it do to help establish what he is about to do*)?

CONSIDER THE *MISE-EN-SCENE* OF THIS SCENE. WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

WHY IS BATMAN THE ONLY THING WE CAN SEE?

WHAT DOES THIS SUGGEST ABOUT HIS INTENT IN THIS SCENE?

IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF LIGHTING USED:

WHY ARE THE COPS FRAMED IN THIS WAY?

WHY MIGHT THE DIRECTOR WANT TO ESTABLISH THIS CONTRAST BETWEEN THE POLICE AND BATMAN?

WHY IS THE JOKER'S FACE OUT OF FRAME?

WHAT DOES THIS SUGGEST ABOUT HIM (*i.e. can he ever truly be contained*)?

"I Hear They've Got a Different Name for Me Down at M.C.U."

PREVIEWING ACTIVITY FOR PART III

Consider the word, "two-faced." What does it signify, and more importantly, if Dent is Gotham's "White Knight," why do they refer to him as such?

TWO-faced

The Word Concept

It is . . .

It is not . . .

A dictionary definition of the word is . . .

A sentence I wrote using the word is . . .

Reason why the Major Crime Unit *called Harvey Dent "Two-faced"?*

Film Analysis of Part III: "I'm Not a Monster . . . I'm Just Ahead of the Curve"

12. BURNED DOWN (01:36:41)

Alfred Pennyworth: *"You have inspired good. But you spat in the face of Gotham's criminals—didn't you think there might be casualties? Things were always going to have to get worse before they got better."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

Remember, the choices examined should either be those of Batman / Bruce Wayne, Jim Gordon, or Harvey Dent.

13. BETTER CLASS OF CRIMINALS (01:42:03)

The Joker: *"All you care about is money. This city deserves a better class of criminal, and I'm going to give it to them."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

14. AGENT OF CHAOS (01:46:58)

The Joker: *"Introduce a little anarchy, you upset the established order and everything becomes chaos."*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

Remember, the choices examined should either be those of Batman / Bruce Wayne, Jim Gordon, or Harvey Dent.

15. TOO MUCH POWER (01:54:12)

Lucius Fox: *"Beautiful. Unethical. Dangerous. You've turned every phone in the city into a microphone…"*

SUMMARY OF SCENE:

CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:

OUTCOME OF DECISION:

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

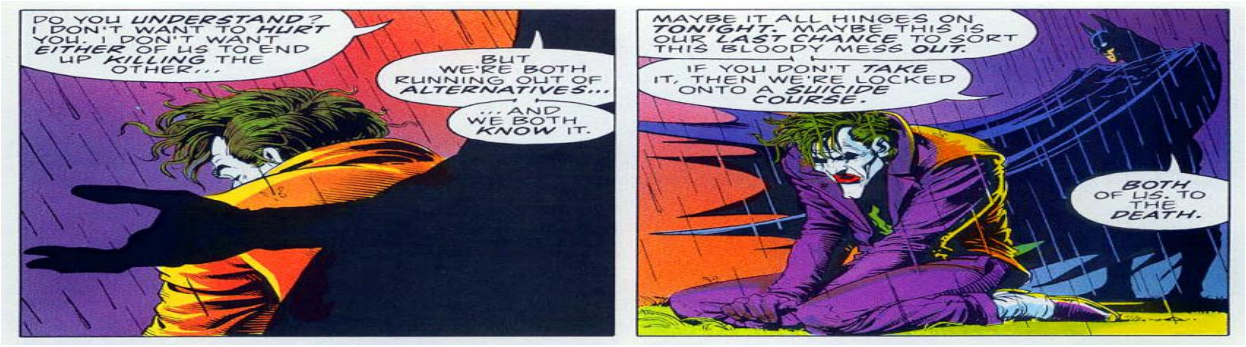
16. BATTLE FOR GOTHAM'S SOUL (02:12:23)	**CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:**
The Joker: *"You won't kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness."*	**OUTCOME OF DECISION:**
SUMMARY OF SCENE:	**POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:**

"Why Doesn't Batman Kill the Joker?"

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY FOR PART III

In the last several decades, the Joker has transformed himself from the Clown Prince of Crime to a heinous murderer without rival. Most notoriously, he killed the second Robin, Jason Todd, beating him to a bloody pulp before blowing him up. The Joker shot Barbara Gordon—Jim Gordon's adopted daughter and former Batgirl—in the spine, paralyzing her from the waist down, and then tormented Jim with pictures of her lying prone, naked and bleeding. And let us not forget the countless ordinary citizens of Gotham City!

Every time the Joker breaks out of Arkham Asylum, he commits depraved crimes. Of course, Batman inevitably catches the Joker and puts him back in Arkham. Batman knows that the Joker will escape, and that he will likely kill again. So why doesn't Batman just kill the Joker? Turn to the next page and consider the scenario.



BATMAN should not kill THE JOKER

REASONING FOR THIS DECISION:

CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH ACTION:

BATMAN should kill THE JOKER

REASONING FOR THIS DECISION:

CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH ACTION:

"You've Got to Have an Ace in the Hole"

PREVIEWING ACTIVITY FOR PART IV

It's interesting that The Dark Knight *is structured as though it has four acts. Of course, the typical drama will be written with three: having a beginning, middle, and an end. This convention works very well for delivering a suspenseful rise and fall in the story. By opting for four acts, instead,* The Dark Knight *actually has a beginning, a middle, an end/middle, and finally an end. Sound confusing? There are a lot of people out there who were unhappy with how* The Dark Knight *was structured, but on some level it's defensible.*

If The Dark Knight *was a conventional film, it should have ended after the Joker was captured trying to destroy the police convoy, with Rachel Dawes being killed, and Harvey Dent being disfigured and loosed on an unsuspecting public. Similar to* Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, had* The Dark Knight *ended with the fate of Dent in the balance (like Han Solo frozen in Carbonite), the movie could have easily ended on a cliffhanger and segued into a sequel. Two-Face could have come back to be Batman's new villain for the third picture.*

Consider the reasons why the director (and screenwriters) structured The Dark Knight *the way they did (i.e. why there is a fourth act and not a cliffhanger ending). Does this fly in the face of the typical screenplay structure (see page 21)? How does your perception of the way a typical film should end not work for a film like this?*

FROM A **PLOT** STANDPOINT:

FROM A **DIRECTOR'S** STANDPOINT:

FROM A **THEME** STANDPOINT:

Film Analysis of Part IV: "He's the Hero Gotham Deserves"

17. DARK KNIGHT (02:15:19)	**CHOICE BEING ASKED TO BE MADE:**
Batman: *"You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain. I can do those things because I'm not a hero, like Dent. I killed those people. That's what I can be."* **SUMMARY OF SCENE:**	**OUTCOME OF DECISION:**
	POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND / OR UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES:

"It's All Part of the Plan"

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY FOR PART IV

THE FIVE KEY TURNING POINTS OF ALL SUCCESSFUL SCRIPTS

Hollywood movies are simple.

Though writing a successful Hollywood movie is certainly not easy, the stories for mainstream films are all built on only three basic components: character, desire, and conflict.

Plot structure simply determines the sequence of events that lead the hero toward this objective. And here's the good news: whether you're writing romantic comedies, suspense thrillers, historical dramas or big budget science fiction, all successful Hollywood movies follow the same basic structure.

In a properly structured movie, the story consists of six basic stages, which are defined by five key turning points in the plot. Not only are these turning points always the same; they always occupy the same positions in the story. Therefore, what happens at the 25% point of a 90-minute comedy will be identical to what happens at the same percentage of a three-hour epic. (These percentages apply both to the running time of the film and the pages of your screenplay).

The Dark Knight *is no different. Turn to the next page to plot out the key elements of the film.*

Six Stage Screenplay Plot Structure

ACT I		ACT II		ACT III	
STAGE 1: SETUP	**STAGE 2:** NEW SITUATION	**STAGE 3:** PROGRESS	**STAGE 4:** COMPLICATIONS & HIGHER STAKES	**STAGE 5:** FINAL PUSH	**STAGE 6:** AFTERMATH
Turning Point #1 **OPPORTUNITY**	Turning Point #2 **CHANGE OF PLANS**	Turning Point #3 **POINT OF NO RETURN**	Turning Point #4 **MAJOR SETBACK**	Turning Point #5 **CLIMAX**	

THE POWER OF PERCEPTION:

Does having a choice mean making a compromise?