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The Joker Viewing Guide

1. Summarize the major events of the movie (write in any information about scenes that you think are important to the overall story but keep it to no more than 5-6 sentences).

Arthur lives in a run-down part of Gotham city with his mother during an economic downturn and therefore a massive increase in crime that everyone is dealing with. Arthur is very lonely and he fantasizes a life where he is known by others, or has someone to love. Things start to go wrong after he loses his job because of a coworker, and he shoots three men who beat him up on the subway. A movement of people dressed in clown masks starts, and Arthur becomes even more deranged after he learns that his mother was in a mental hospital, he was adopted, and then she allowed her boyfriend to abuse him to a point where he had head trauma that created his forced laughing "disorder" that she called it. Arthur then realizes that he actually believes that it is funny that people who deserve to die, died and this is where he then kills his mother, kills his mom's favorite TV show host Murray, when he names himself the Joker after Murray's jokes at him, and then becomes the leader of the rioters, dressed in clown masks, who all support him in killing people whom they believe deserve it.

2. What is Arthur Fleck's personality like?

Arthur has the overwhelming desire for connections with others. He does not like to be alone, and he does not like to constantly be put down by others. He smiles to cover up his torment inside that he lets out with fits of rage, like the scene after his boss tells him he needs to bring back the sign that was stolen from him. He puts on a happy face because he was always told to smile and make people happy, but he smiles and laughs at dark and morbid thoughts that he has, as well as death later in the movie. He believes that his laughing is because he finds humor in things that others, especially people that are bad people, like Wayne and Murray, would see as not funny, because it has to do with someone dying. He has no happiness in his life or around him so he makes happiness out of what is around him (hate and anger).

3. Which labeling theory that you learned about in class do you think applies to Arthur? Why?

The labeling theory that I found most applicable to Arthur was Howard Becker's Dimensions of Deviance Theory. This theory explains that outsiders are labeled by "normal" people of society as deviant based on their beliefs as to what society ideals should be. Arthur is labeled as deviant by Wayne, law enforcement, and by Murray and people on Murray's show because of the unusual humor he finds in dark subjects. Murray portrays the outsider from that world because only people from his world, the rioters, the forgotten, the lonely people, the poor, can understand his jokes or his intentions because only they would understand what he has gone through. The Joker is seen as a pure deviant, he has been labeled by the mental hospital, his coworkers, the men on the subway, Wayne, and Murray as a "Joker", a "freak", a "creep", he is placed into a category where he is labeled deviant along with all of the clown-mask wearing people because they don't agree with what the "proper society" believes in. He is a pure deviant

because he disobeys these rules and he is seen by society as doing so (Schram & Tibbetts, 2021, pg. 275).

4. Provide examples (at least two) of Arthur's escalating violence over the course of the movie.

When Arthur started his "bad week" from losing his job because his coworker told his boss that he had bought a gun from him, which he took the hospital with him, he was angry at him for deceiving him and he was in a thought process of the angry world he lived in. When he got on the subway, his violence escalated when he shot three men who made fun of him and started to beat him because of his forced laughter. These men, he believed were part of the problem because they represented the people who made the rules of society and what is deemed "funny" or not. His anger is now aimed at those that deserve, in his opinion, punishment.

Another example of his escalated violence is when he shoots Murray on the talk show because Murray is a source of what society expects of people. In Arthur's journal, he wrote "people expect you to behave as if you DON'T", which fits with the fact that he feels like an outsider in his society because of his condition, his family history, and his anger. He also mentioned to Murray on the talk show that if he was dead, people would just walk right over him, compared to the three men who were killed on the subway who everyone is upset over. Arthur wanted to express to Murray that because of expectations from people like him, people like Arthur will always be outsiders, and this is his reasoning behind killing those people and others to come.

5. What social factors may have influenced Arthur's behavior?

Many social factors influenced Arthur's behavior including the economic downturn, the incessive crime increase, physical dilapidation, heterogeneity with low trust between people, and anger because of social classes. Arthur lived in a poor area with a lot of crime, that he experienced by being beaten up twice in the movie, and a lot of distrust and anger from people that he just tried to make smile, like the mother who told him to leave her child alone when he was just trying to make him smile. Arthur fantasizes of being known, like on the Murray show, but then he sees the true reality of his laughter and his social position. He feels that he has never felt happy, only that he was always told to be happy, he feeds off of the killing of the three men and the support of the neighboring people around him that it is people like those three men, Wayne, and Murray that put us in this place of being outsiders. This is where he then goes on to be the Joker and justifies his killings with the fact that those people are bad in his mind.