



**Grey Gardens**  
**(USA, 1976, 94 Minutes)**  
**Directors: Albert and David Maysles**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Filmmakers Albert and David Maysles can be credited with turning documentary film into an art form. Spanning five decades of work, the Maysles' "direct cinema", including *Salesman* and *Gimme Shelter*, have been an important part of American cultural history. Part of the Maysles' legend involves their intimate profiles of unique personalities, and the filmmakers' ability to get subjects to reveal themselves in ways they normally never would. *Grey Gardens* is a hypnotic, tragic and affectionate classic, featuring 79-year-old Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter Edie, the aunt and cousin of Jackie Kennedy. Sharing a decaying seaside mansion with countless cats and rodents, the disarmingly eccentric duo competes for attention, revealing a complex relationship, as well as some famously far-out fashion experiments.

**Themes of the film**

Aging

Disappointment

Tragedy

Character study

Family relationships

Literary Comparisons: Anton Chekov, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Miss Havesham from *Great Expectations*

**Study Questions**

- They say every family includes an eccentric relative. Who is the eccentric one in your family? How is this person treated by the family? What do people say about him/her? Is there some circumstance in this person's past that caused the eccentricity?
- Do you have certain assumptions about the upper-classes; how they live and behave?
- Do you have a favorite "reality TV" show? Why do you enjoy watching those types of shows? How do you imagine the tv show producers feel about the subjects? What purpose do these shows have?
- In documentaries where people are the focus, where do you draw the line between exploitation and homage?

**Discussion Questions**

- Is the film exploitative, or is it a loving portrayal? Support your conclusion.

- Why do you think the Maysles chose the Bouviers as documentary subjects?
- Why do you think Edie stayed with Edith for so many years?
- What did Edie mean when she said “The hallmark of aristocracy is responsibility”?
- Did Edith play a role in her daughter’s spinster status?
- Is there any correlation between madness and creativity?
- Do Edith and Edie create their own reality?
- How do you think they came to be this way?
- What do you imagine happened to the two women after the film?
- Grey Gardens is considered a cult classic film. Lines from the film are quoted often by its aficionados. What is your favorite line from the film? Why?