



Rashomon
(Japan, 1950, 88 minutes)
Director: Akira Kurosawa
Study Guide

Synopsis

Rashomon depicts the retelling of a rape and murder from several different points of view, each claiming a different version of who committed the murder. There is the woodcutter, who claims to have witnessed the crime, the bandit, the raped woman and the dead man, speaking through a medium. The film is framed with the telling of the tale by the woodcutter and a priest, both present at the inquest, to a stranger while they are all taking shelter in a torrential rainstorm at Rashomon gate. The popularity of the film and the short stories has led to the naming of the “Rashomon Effect or Rashomon Principle” used as a model in anthropology and journalism in measuring objectivity. Kurosawa’s films have inspired numerous homage, rip-offs and remakes in cinema history. For the closest homage to *Rashomon*, see *Pulp Fiction* and *Courage Under Fire*.

Themes in the film

Japan recovering from devastation in the 12th century and after WWII
Objectivity and the search for the truth
Rashomon Principle: truth is relative
Human nature
The role of women, class and religion in Japanese society

Study Questions

- What is a fact? How do you define “truth,” and what is objectivity?
- How are these issues of objectivity dealt with by journalists, anthropologists and historians?
- What was the mood of the Japanese after WWII?

Discussion Questions

- Whose story did you find most believable and why?
- How does each version reflect the biases of each person recounting the story?
- What details are common to all accounts of the crime?
- What is the role of women in Japan as reflected in the film?
- What are the metaphors used to show the decline of the Japanese empire?