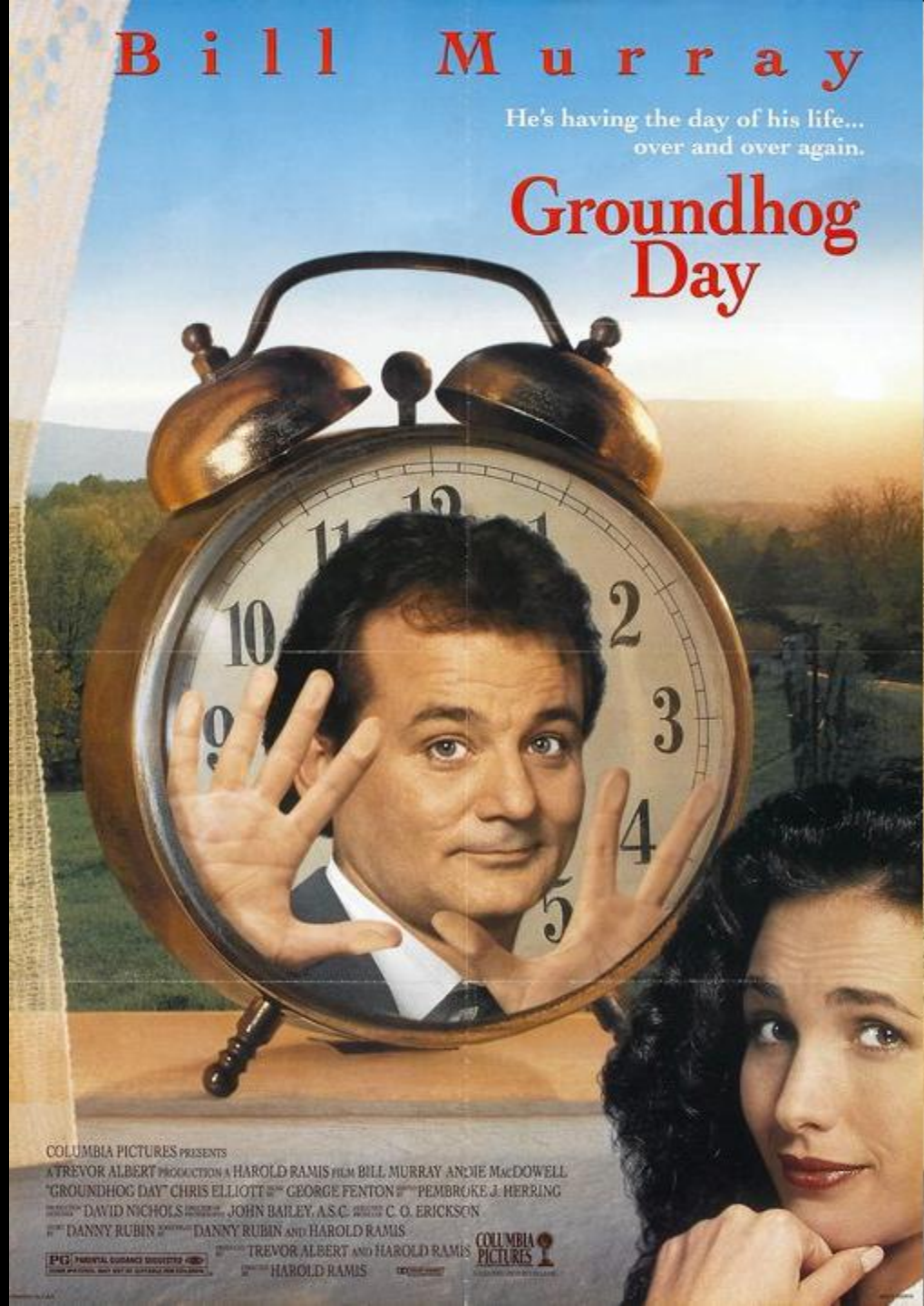


A Hero's Journey

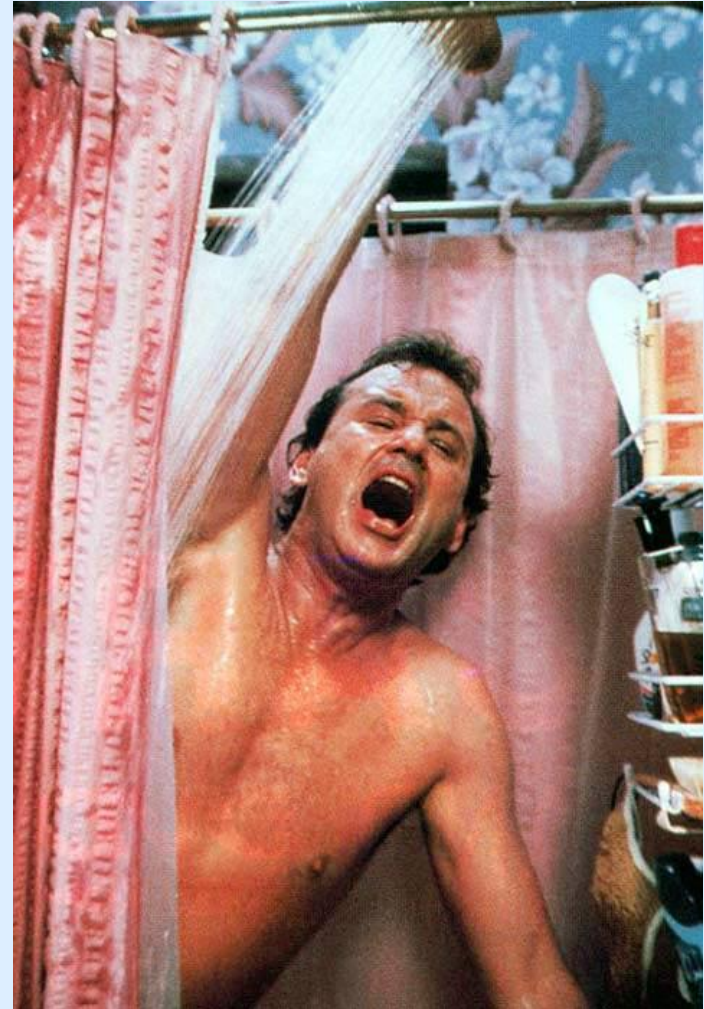
Sample



Phil Connors

Bill Murray plays, an egocentric Pittsburgh TV weatherman who, during a hated assignment covering the annual Groundhog Day event in Punxsutawney, finds himself repeating the same day over and over again. After indulging in hedonism and numerous suicide attempts, he begins to reexamine his life and priorities.

THE HERO



Groundhog Day is an excellent film for looking at the *Hero's Journey*. Let's begin with the initiate's (Phil Connor) *call*.

It demonstrates both types of the Call Refused. First Phil has already (before the film begins) refused the call to growth and maturity. Phil's childish ego, with all of its self-centered attitudes, dominates his life. Then Phil is placed in a situation (as a television weatherman) where he has the power to do great benefit for the community, but he, like King Minos, chooses to exploit the situation for his own gain.



THE JOURNEY

On the surface, most of the stages of Phil's journey are clear, However, on a deeper level, there is an underlying complexity. There are many interpretations for the journey itself, including the length of Phil's journey, Considering all of Phil's experiences and skills he must be in Punxsutawney for years. Phil learns to flip cards into a hat, and to ice sculpt. Phil learns to play the piano and to play Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini (a difficult piece) and Jazz Piano. But most importantly Phil learns to genuinely love Rita and himself.

(Some says the journey is a couple of years while others suggest it is thousands of years.)

The background of the image is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise. The sun is a bright, glowing orb positioned just above the horizon line, which is roughly in the middle of the frame. The sky is a deep blue at the top, transitioning through orange and yellow to a dark, almost black, at the bottom. The water in the foreground is dark and reflects the colors of the sky and the sun. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

The Eight Steps of Transformation

THE CALL

Before the film begins it is obvious that Phil has already refused *the call* to shed his childish ego for growth and maturity. He exhibits all the characteristics of the “child-adult” Phil is self-centered, sarcastic, demanding, intolerant, self-pitying, bitter, mocking and defensive.

On a physical level *the call* occurs when Phil goes to Punxsutawney, a town which represents everything Phil hates in life and in himself.

On a more psychological level, Phil's *call* comes when he sees Rita for the first time and falls in love with her. Phil denies interest and in fact is sarcastic toward her. The rest of the film, essentially is Phil learning to handle this new, genuine love.

We see this clearly late in the story, when Phil tell the sleeping Rita,

“The first time I saw you something happened to me. I never told you ... I knew that I wanted to hold you.”

THRESHOLD GUARDIAN

The *threshold guardian* is the state policeman who is closing the road out of Punxsutawney because of the blizzard. He says to Phil, “You can go back to Punxsutawney, or you can go ahead and freeze to death. It’s your choice.”

Essentially *the threshold guardian* is telling Phil that he can go back and get his life right or he can continue the way he’s going and suffer the living death of a frozen soul.

Note: The storm is a classic symbol for separating reality from fantasy or the known from the unknown.



THE THRESHOLD

The threshold is the frontier between the known and the unknown. Some say that Phil's decision to return to Punxsutawney is the *Threshold*. However, a better case could be made for the "next" morning, when Phil wakes up to find himself in an unknown situation because until then, everything has been rational, explainable and known.

HELPERS

Phil has no real *helpers*. No one wants to help him. Phil uses people and his manipulative, destructive behavior just doesn't work. It take Phil nowhere but deeper into his child-adult labyrinth. The first "help" that Phil encounters are the two drunks, who help him realize that he is living in a world where there are no consequences.

MENTOR

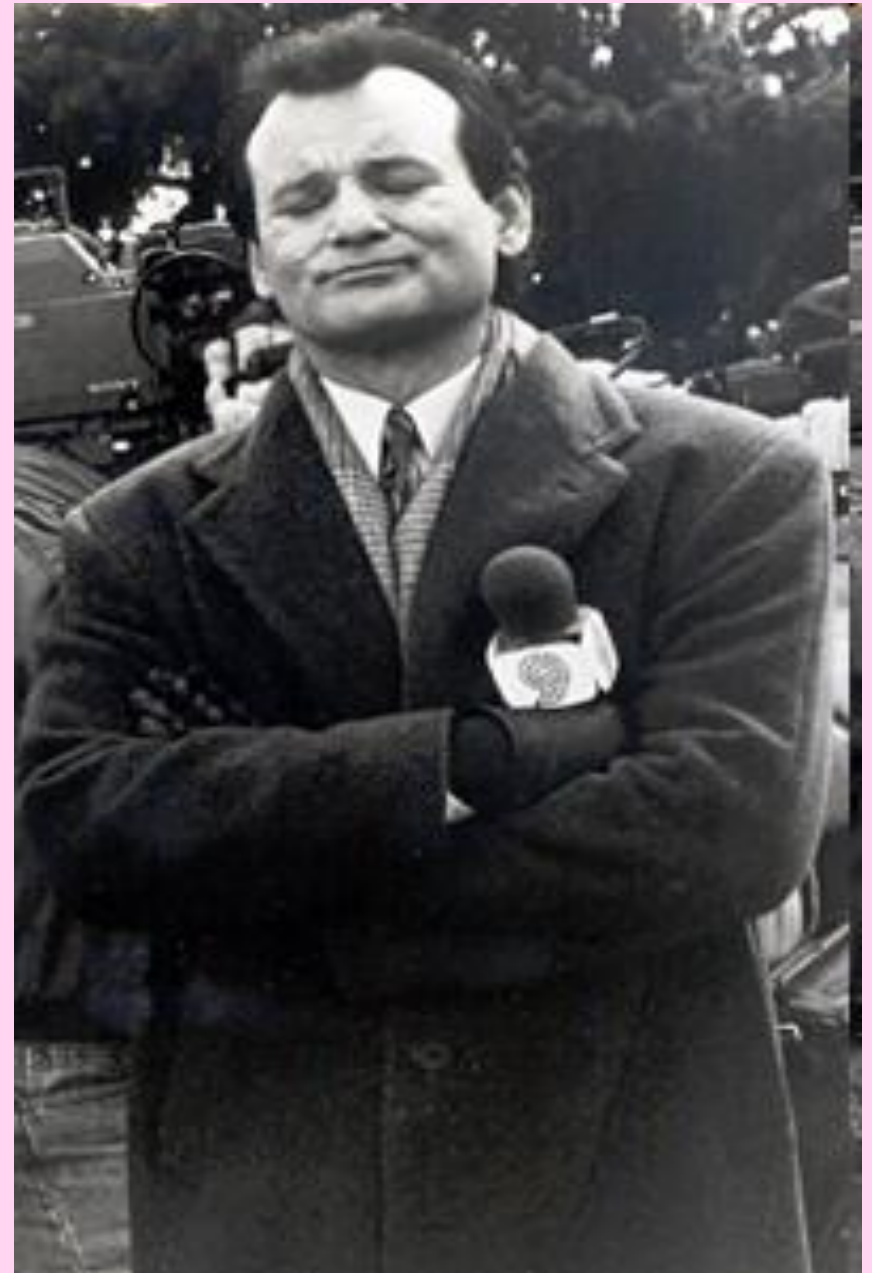
Clearly, Rita is Phil's Mentor. In a mythological sense, she represent the Goddess, the incarnation of purity, beauty and peace. The Mentor's main job is to keep the initiate on track and Rita does this with Phil.



At one point Rita lists the qualifications of her “ideal” man, and Phil, sarcastically, begins measuring himself by those standards and plotting to use the knowledge to seduce her. However, Rita rejects Phil’s advances, thereby forcing him to confront the demons of his own nature. Then, once the “*old Phil*” has disintegrated, Rita points the way to “salvation” and a new self, when she helps Phil see the positive side of his situation.

CHALLENGES

When Phil discovers that there are no consequences, he lets his immature self run rampant. In Eastern philosophy, one would say that his Yang has to go to its extreme to give birth to his Yin and establish a balance.



CHALLENGES AND TEMPTATIONS

The challenges and temptations in *Groundhog Day* are crystal clear because they keep repeating themselves. We measure Phil's growth by the gradual changes in his reactions to the same situations. The most obvious challenges are his changing reactions to Ned Ryerson, the insurance salesman and to the old homeless man.



When one has refused *the call*, it is because they are still operating with a “Child” ego. Phil reverts to a child when the two drunks help him realize that there are no consequences”

“It’s the same your whole life. Clean your room. Stand up straight. Pick up your feet. Take it like a man. Don’t mix beer and wine ... ever.” and later, “I’m not going to live by their rules any more.

CHALLENGES

Phil refuses another *call* by violating the “trust” of his new situation. He takes advantage of both people and situations: Phil punches Ned Ryerson, sets up Nancy Taylor ...



... pigs out on pastries, robs an armored car and generally turns Punxsutawney into his own amusement park.





After Phil has conquered everything else, he begins to work on Rita. Phil uses his repeated day to be cunning and deceptive, to win Rita by trickery. Phil doesn't know how to give voice to the genuine love he feels, in fact, he may not even be able to admit to having feelings of genuine love.

When Phil fails for the final time, he walks back to his bed and breakfast, passing a row of ice sculptures, symbolic of his own frozen existence.



THE ABYSS





THE ABYSS

In a sense, Phil bangs against the abyss of his own childish nature repeatedly, but his ego is too strong to allow him to enter. Only when his ego is worn away is he ready to enter the abyss, and he does so when he decides the only way to end the cycle is to kill the groundhog.

Symbolically, when he crashes through the gate into the quarry, he is crashing into the abyss. His suicide is the total disintegration of the childish self (ego) Phil has given up on his self and is surrendering himself to whatever comes, even death.

REVELATION



After the series of unsuccessful suicide attempts, the old Phil has been disintegrated and he is ready for the *revelation* (a different way of seeing oneself and life.)

We see this in the café when Phil tells Rita that he thinks he is immortal, a god. For the first time, Phil speaks genuinely to her. Phil wonders about his own nature. His tone is not arrogant nor manipulative. Even when Phil shows Rita his “powers,” he is really asking for her help.

That evening, in his hotel room, while they're throwing cards, Phil's new attitude is evident. He admits that he is a jerk. Rita objects, but only politely.

**“It doesn't make any difference.”
he tells her. “I've killed myself so
many times I don't exist any more.”**

Rita falls asleep, but Phil doesn't try to take advantage of the situation. He expresses, for the first time, a genuine sense of love and caring.

The next day we see the life-altering *Revelation* as Phil sits in the diner, reading, and he hears the piano music on the radio. Phil decides to learn piano for himself. Phil is no longer concerned with impressing Rita, instead he has a genuine need for growth and new experience.



TRANSFORMATION

The decision to learn to play the piano begins the second stage of Phil's *transformation*. We see this clearly when Phil meets the heavy-set man just outside his room. Instead of greeting him with sarcasm and insults, Phil quotes poetry and leaves the man feeling good. Phil becomes Rita's "ideal" man, but isn't contrived. Just as apples are a natural "consequence" of being an apple tree, so Phil's generosity and caring are a natural consequence of his new nature.

ATONEMENT

One can make a strong case that *atonement* occurs when Phil accepts the fact that he can't save the homeless old man. At this point he has swung from the extreme of exploitation to the extreme of altruism.

In Punxsutawney, Phil is a demi-god, saving people, performing miracles. When unable to save the old man, Phil realizes and accepts that there are some things he simply cannot change, that life is temporary and that we must make the most of it while we can.



Atonement, traditionally, is with a father figure, and Phil, at one point, calls the old man “father.”

The morning “after” the old man’s death, Phil’s broadcast is profound and touching. It shows his complete *transformation* and *atonement*, is acceptance of himself, his world and of life.



THE RETURN

One must view Phil's *return* occurring on the night of the Groundhog day party. At this point Phil has been transformed and is bringing his gifts to the people of Punxsutawney.

In classical myth, the hero *returns* with a magical sword, a golden fleece, a new religion, or the keys to the kingdom, Phil too *returns* with gifts.



Phil brings life to the boy who falls from the tree and the man who is choking in the restaurant.



Phil brings joy with his piano playing.

PHIL'S GIFTS

Phil brings love to the young couple who are getting married.

Phil brings health to the man who's back he fixed.

Phil brings security to the two older ladies with the flat.

When Phil makes the snow sculpture of Rita, he is able to give the gift he has wanted to give all along: genuine love.

Some would say that Phil's return actually occurs on the morning of February 3. However, Phil was back into the "normal" time flow the moment he could be genuine and honest with Rita. Waking up on February 3 was just the result of what occurred the night before.

This sample presentation covered only the basics of the project, the Eight Steps of Transformation.

The Introduction and Conclusion of the project have not been presented here.

A man and a woman are shown in a close embrace on a porch. The woman, on the left, has long, dark, curly hair and is wearing a blue sweater. The man, on the right, has short brown hair and is wearing a dark sweater. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background shows a white railing, a yellow wall, and a dark door. The ground is covered in snow.

The End