

# Study Guide for *Rear Window*

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Universal Pictures. Released 1954.

## Cast

James Stewart—L. B. “Jeff” Jeffries  
Grace Kelly—Lisa Carol Fremont  
Wendell Corey—Lieut. Tom Doyle  
Thelma Ritter—Stella  
Raymond Burr—Lars Thorwald  
Judith Evelyn—Miss Lonelyheart  
Ross Bagdasarian—Songwriter

Georgine Darcy—Miss Torso  
Sara Berner—Woman on Fire Escape  
Frank Cady—Man on Fire Escape  
Jesslyn Fax—Sculptress  
Rand Harper—Newlywed Man  
Irene Winston—Mrs. Anna Thorwald  
Havis Davenport—Newlywed Woman

## Filming Techniques and Thematic Considerations

Note how the film establishes Jeff’s emotional point of view in the opening sequence and maintains that perspective for most of the movie. What is the effect of this point of view? When does it shift away from Jeff and why?

Several key sequences have little or no dialogue, all involving action in the apartments across the courtyard. How does Hitchcock develop plot and character in purely visual terms. Note the extensive use of reaction shots: Jeff sees something, the audience sees him watching, and then it sees his reaction to the action. Also, keep an eye out for hallmark images and actions: Lisa’s first appearance, Hitchcock’s cameo as a clock winder, the brandy warming scene, and the flashbulb scene and effect.

*Rear Window* makes great use of Hitchcock’s concept of the MacGuffin, something pursued by characters in the film but having little meaning to the audience or relevance to the film except as a plot contrivance. What is this film’s MacGuffin and how is it used? Here is a hint: in this film the MacGuffin is an action, not a physical object.

A recurring psychological theme in Hitchcock’s films is voyeurism—deriving pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure, from watching rather than doing—and this theme is more overt in *Rear Window* than in other Hitchcock films. Who are the peeping Toms, and what are the thematic implications of characters’ watching rather than doing, of looking outward rather than inward? Look beyond the obvious level of spying out the window. On two occasions, for example, Jeff watches Lisa model clothing for him. What do you read into such actions? On a related note, what are the ethical responsibilities of spying on one’s neighbors? At one point, Jeff says to Lisa, “I wonder if it’s ethical to watch a man with binoculars and a long-focus lens. Do you suppose it’s ethical even if you prove he didn’t commit a crime?” How would you answer his question? Apply the ethical question to Jeff’s job as a photographer, someone who invades people’s privacy with his camera. Similarly, how are filmmaking and film viewing voyeuristic activities?

Consider the range of characters Jeff spies from his window. What do they have in common, what do they represent, and what is their connection to Jeff and Lisa?

Throughout the film, other characters do Jeff’s legwork for him. How is this pattern significant? For instance, how does Jeff react to Lisa’s placing herself in dangerous situations? What is the thematic significance of her wearing Anna Thorwald’s ring?

How do you interpret the final sequences of the film? Consider the final actions that take place in the other apartments. What does the final shot imply? Consider Jeff’s placement onscreen and what he is doing.