**Plot**

In 1947, banker Andy Dufresne ([Tim Robbins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Robbins)) is convicted of murdering his wife and her lover, and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences at Shawshank State Penitentiary. Andy quickly befriends [contraband](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contraband) smuggler Ellis "Red" Redding ([Morgan Freeman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan_Freeman)), an inmate serving a life sentence. Red procures a [rock hammer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geologist%27s_hammer) for Andy, allowing him to create small stone chess pieces. Red later gets him a large poster of [Rita Hayworth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rita_Hayworth), followed in later years by images of [Marilyn Monroe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marilyn_Monroe) and [Raquel Welch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raquel_Welch). Andy works in the prison laundry, but is regularly assaulted by the ["bull queer"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison_sexuality) gang "the Sisters" and their leader, Bogs ([Mark Rolston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Rolston)).

In 1949, Andy overhears the brutal chief guard Byron Hadley ([Clancy Brown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clancy_Brown)) complaining about taxes on a forthcoming inheritance and informs him about a financial loophole. After another vicious assault by the Sisters nearly kills Andy, Hadley severely beats Bogs resulting in Bogs being sent to another prison. Andy is not attacked again. Warden Samuel Norton ([Bob Gunton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Gunton)) meets with Andy and reassigns him to the prison library to assist elderly inmate Brooks Hatlen ([James Whitmore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Whitmore)), a pretext for Andy to manage financial duties for the prison. His advice and expertise are soon sought by other guards at Shawshank and from nearby prisons. Andy begins writing weekly letters to the state government for funds to improve the decrepit library.

In 1954, Brooks is freed on parole, but unable to adjust to the outside world after 50 years in prison, he hangs himself. Andy receives a library donation that includes a recording of [*The Marriage of Figaro*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Marriage_of_Figaro). He plays [an excerpt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sull%27aria...che_soave_zeffiretto) over the public address system, resulting in his receiving [solitary confinement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solitary_confinement). After his release, Andy explains that he holds onto hope as something that the prison cannot take from him, but Red dismisses the idea. In 1963, Norton begins exploiting prison labor for public works, profiting by undercutting skilled labor costs and receiving [kickbacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kickback_(bribery)). He has Andy [launder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money_laundering) the money using the alias "Randall Stephens".

In 1965, Tommy Williams ([Gil Bellows](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gil_Bellows)) is incarcerated for [burglary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burglary). He joins Andy's and Red's circle of friends, and Andy helps him pass his [General Educational Development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Educational_Development) (G.E.D.) examinations. In 1966, after hearing the details of Andy's case, Tommy reveals that an inmate at another prison claimed responsibility for an identical murder, suggesting Andy's innocence. Andy approaches Norton with this information, but the warden refuses to listen. Norton places Andy in solitary confinement and has Hadley murder Tommy, under the guise of an escape attempt. Andy refuses to continue with the scam, but Norton threatens to destroy the library and take away his protection and preferential treatment. After Andy is released from solitary confinement, he tells Red of his dream of living in [Zihuatanejo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zihuatanejo), a Mexican Pacific coastal town. While Red shrugs it off as being unrealistic, Andy instructs him, should he ever be freed, to visit a specific hayfield near [Buxton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buxton,_Maine) to retrieve a package.

The next day at [roll call](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll_call), upon finding Andy's cell empty, an irate Norton throws one of Andy's rocks at the poster of Raquel Welch hanging on the wall. The rock tears through the poster, revealing a tunnel that Andy had dug with his rock hammer over the previous two decades. The previous night, Andy escaped through the tunnel and the prison's sewage pipe with Norton's ledger, containing details of the money laundering. While guards search for him the following morning, Andy, posing as Randall Stephens, visits several banks to withdraw the laundered money. Finally, he sends the ledger and evidence of the corruption and murders at Shawshank to a local newspaper. The police arrive at Shawshank and take Hadley into custody, while Norton commits suicide to avoid arrest.

After serving 40 years, Red receives parole. He struggles to adapt to life outside prison and fears he never will. Remembering his promise to Andy, he visits Buxton and finds a cache containing money and a letter asking him to come to [Zihuatanejo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zihuatanejo). Red violates his parole and travels to [Fort Hancock, Texas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Hancock,_Texas) to cross the border to Mexico, admitting he finally feels hope. On a beach in Zihuatanejo, he finds Andy, and the two friends are happily reunited.

**Cast**

* [Tim Robbins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Robbins) as Andy Dufresne
* [Morgan Freeman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan_Freeman) as Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding, Andy's best friend and the film's [narrator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrator); convicted of murder in 1927. Before Freeman was cast, [Clint Eastwood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clint_Eastwood), [Harrison Ford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrison_Ford), [Paul Newman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Newman), and [Robert Redford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Redford) were each considered for the role. Although written as a middle-aged Irishman with greying red hair (as in the novella), Darabont cast Freeman for his authoritative presence and demeanor; he could not see anyone else as Red.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shawshank_Redemption#cite_note-CommentaryDarabont-3) The short dialogue with Andy is a jest towards this casting decision, as when asked about the origin of his nickname, Red answers, "Maybe it's because I'm Irish."
* [Bob Gunton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Gunton) as Warden Samuel Norton. He is well versed in the [Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible) and presents himself as a [pious](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pious), devout [Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian) and reform-minded administrator, while his actions reveal him to be corrupt, ruthless, and remorseless.
* [William Sadler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Sadler_(actor)) as Heywood, a member of Red's gang of long-serving convicts.
* [Clancy Brown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clancy_Brown) as Capt. Byron Hadley, chief of the guards. Hadley is a sadistic guard who thinks nothing of delivering beatings to the inmates to keep them in line. When cast for the role, Brown declined the offer to study real-life prison guards as preparation for his role, because he did not want to base it on any one person.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shawshank_Redemption#cite_note-4)
* [Gil Bellows](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gil_Bellows) as Tommy Williams, a young convict whose experiences in a previous prison hold the truth about Andy's innocence.
* [Mark Rolston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Rolston) as Bogs Diamond, the head of "The Sisters" gang and a [prison rapist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison_rape).
* [James Whitmore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Whitmore) as Brooks Hatlen, prison librarian/trustee and one of the oldest convicts at Shawshank, having been in prison since 1905. Darabont cast Whitmore because he was one of his favorite character actors.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shawshank_Redemption#cite_note-CommentaryDarabont-3)
* [Jeffrey DeMunn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_DeMunn) as the prosecuting attorney in Andy Dufresne's trial.

**Themes**

[*Chicago Sun-Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Sun-Times) film reviewer [Roger Ebert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Ebert) suggested that *The Shawshank Redemption* is an allegory for maintaining one's feeling of self-worth when placed in a hopeless position. Andy Dufresne's integrity is an important theme in the story line, especially in prison, where integrity is lacking.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shawshank_Redemption#cite_note-5)

Isaac M. Morehouse suggests that the film provides a great illustration of how characters can be free, even in prison, or unfree, even in freedom, based on one's outlook on life.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shawshank_Redemption#cite_note-Moorhouse-6)