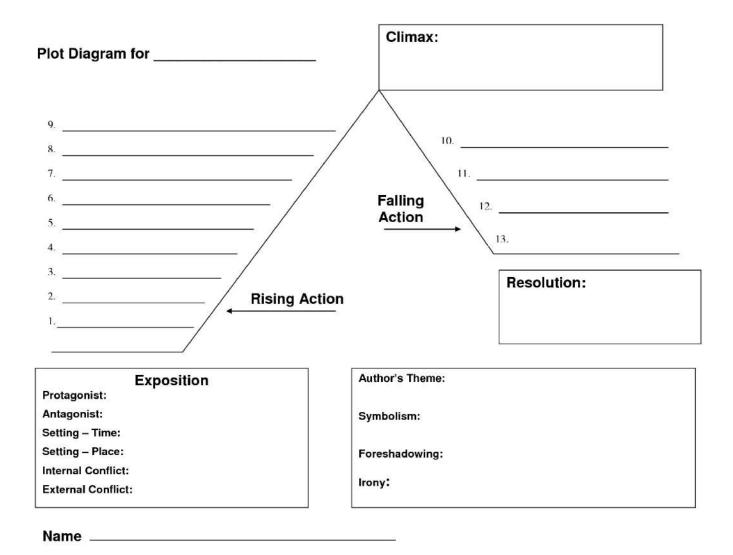# *Citizen Kane* Analysis

Film I

CITIZEN KANE (1941, RKO, 119 min.), directed and produced by Orson Welles; original screenplay by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles; cinematography by Gregg Toland; music composed and conducted by Bernard Hermann; editing by Robert Wise, special effects by Vernon L. Walker; art direction by Van Nest Polglase; with Orson Welles (Charles Foster Kane), Joseph Cotten (Jed Leland), Dorothy Comingore (Susan Alexander Kane), Agnes Morehead (Mrs. Kane), Ruth Warrick (Emily Kane), Ray Collins (Gettys), Erskine Sanford (Newspaper Editor Collins), Everett Sloane (Bernstein), William Alland (Thompson), Paul Stewart (Raymond the Butler), and George Coulouris (Thatcher).

   The Elements of a Good Story- Unified Plot (storyline)

   A. Carefully selected and arranged to make the relationship to the theme clear
   B. Sub-plots and complexities make the otherwise simple story interesting
   C. Rejection of chance, coincidental or miraculous happenings

Plot Diagram for _____

Climax: _____

9. _____
8. _____
7. _____
6. _____
5. _____
4. _____
3. _____
2. _____
1. _____

Rising Action

Falling Action →

10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____

Resolution: _____

Exposition
Protagonist:
Antagonist:
Setting – Time:
Setting – Place:
Internal Conflict:
External Conflict:

Author's Theme:

Symbolism:

Foreshadowing:

Irony:

Name _____

Film Analysis

Go to the class website, open the document link "Citizen Kane Analysis," type directly into the document—be sure to add YOUR NAME to the top of the sheet and <u>save your document</u>. **Turn in BOTH a hard copy and upload to moodle. DUE DATES ARE THE SAME.**

Choose THREE of the following questions to answer (ONE MUST BE #7) at length (around 150 words each).

1. Feature films before *Citizen Kane* tended to be very straightforward in their treatment of time. Flashbacks and flash forwards were extremely rare. A typical film of the time would have started with a very young Kane and progressed through his life, period by period, until his death. Instead, *Citizen Kane* OPENS with the death of its hero. Why do you think this was done, and what was to be gained by this narrative structure?

2. This is a film about TRUTH—it asks the question, "Can we really know the meaning of a person's life?" Kane emerges as an enigma, a question mark, because he is not presented from a single point- of-view which pretends to be "reality." Rather, his story is told in terms of a quest for knowledge (the reporter's), through the perspectives of many different witnesses. Aside from the opening death scene (through whose eyes are we seeing this?), we observe Kane through six different sets of eyes: Thompson's newsreel, Thatcher's, Bernstein's, Leland's, Susan's, and Raymond's. Discuss which facet of Kane's life is told by each "narrator," why are the narratives assigned and ordered as they are?

3. Kane is a complex character, how is he revealed over the course of the film?

4. The plot of *Citizen Kane* is held together by the search for "Rosebud." To what extent is "Rosebud" just a "red herring," a pretext for the story? Does "Rosebud" symbolize anything, and if so, what? In the end do we know what Rosebud really was?

5. *Citizen Kane* makes use of some startling transitional devices in the way it links different scenes. Perhaps its most original technique was the "sound bridge"--the use of an element of the soundtrack (a musical theme, a line of dialogue, a sound effect) as a means of bridging two scenes which may be very different in time and place. Discuss two of these "sound bridges."

6. "Montage" sequences, in which a quick succession of related shots are used to indicate the passage of time, are an effective means of compressing time and of showing the <u>effects</u> of the passage of time on characters. The most celebrated example of this effect is the "breakfast sequence," which shows the deterioration of Kane's first marriage; another would be the sequence showing the "progress" of Susan's opera career. Analyze these sequences. How do they both compress time and remain coherent units?

7. *Citizen Kane* was not successful when it appeared. However, within a decade of its release, *Kane* was already on most critics' list of greatest films of all time, and it has had a tremendous influence on filmmakers everywhere. What do you think it is about this first film by this 26-year-old *wunderkind* that has created this kind of assessment?