

Chicken Run

How do the film makers of Chicken Run use presentational devices to reveal the good and evil in the characters of Ginger and Mrs. Tweedie?

Chicken Run is an animated film about a group of chickens trying to escape from a chicken farm. The film is a spoof of the film 'The Great Escape' and as with that film there are characters, who represent good and characters who represent evil. In Chicken Run, the character that represents good is the chicken, Ginger. The chicken farm owner, Mrs. Tweedie, portrays evil.

The film makers of Chicken Run have used presentational devices to give us clues about each character. They use camera angles, setting, costume, lighting, music, sound effects, body language and facial expressions to portray a character as good or evil. I will personally concentrate on Ginger and Mrs. Tweedie, and how the film makers depict them as good and evil.

Before delving into answering the question, it is important to give some more information about Chicken Run. In the movie, the film makers have adapted many aspects of war films, to make the movie suitable for children of younger ages, while at the same time, keeping it entertaining for older adults and teenagers. For example, as with many war films there are prisoner of war camps. In Chicken Run, this has been adapted into the Chicken Farm. Another example is the character who plays the hero. Ginger plays that role in the movie. Another character that is usually present in war films is the 'brains'. By this I mean the smartest character among the prisoners. The chicken, Mac plays this part in Chicken Run. Villains are also always present in war films. Mrs. Tweedie and Mr. Tweedie are the two who play them in Chicken Run. However, Mrs. Tweedie is the more dominant one of the two, which is also common in war films. An additional convention would be the escape plans. As with most war films the prisoners design escape plans. Chicken Run, is no different, with the chickens designing numerous plans to escape, with little success. Many war films also have victims in them. Chicken Run also has a convention for this, with Edwina the chicken being decapitated by the villain Mrs. Tweedie. Finally, the last convention I will mention is the roll call. In war films the prisoners are often told to line up for inspection, and Chicken Run adapts this, in the way the chickens have to line up to have their eggs inspected.

Moving away conventions of war films, the film also has conventions of everyday household objects. The chickens use screw drivers, hammers, and many other tools for building their contraptions which they use in their attempt to escape from the farm. Another thing would be the fact that the chickens dress much like humans do. For example the chicken, Ginger wears a hat, and the rooster on the farm a scarf. Both these conventions serve, to make the viewers feel more familiar with the chickens and therefore relate to them.

Now, moving onto the question. I will begin with how the film makers use different camera shots to portray Ginger as a good character and Mrs. Tweedie as an evil one. However, I will first describe the different camera shots. Beginning with the close-up. This camera shot is, as the name implies, a close-up of, usually, the characters face. However it can also be a close-up on an object or part of the character's body. A close-up

shot is generally used to give an object or character meaning. When it is on the character's face, it serves to show the character's emotions at the time, and can sometimes be used to isolate the character.

The next type of shot is the mid angle shot. This shot usually shows a character from the waist up, and usually allows room for other characters to be in the shot. This makes it a more sociable shot than the close-up. It can also be used to give the impression that the viewer is at the same level as the characters in the shot, therefore making the viewer more familiar with the characters.

Another important shot is the high angle shot. This shot is taken above the action and actors. It is used to make the viewer feel powerful and superior and to make the actors seem inferior and vulnerable.

The opposite of the high angle shot is the low angle shot. So, this shot is taken from below an actor. It is used to make the reader feel that the actor is looking down on them, therefore making them feel inferior and vulnerable and the actor powerful and superior.

The final type of shot I am going to mention is the establishing shot. This shot shows the location and setting of the scene, and is usually taken from above.

Now that the different camera shots are clear, I will begin with how they are used to portray Ginger as a good character. The movie begins with a high angle establishing shot of the chicken farm. The camera, then moves down into a mid angle shot inside the farm, and of the chickens. This as I mentioned earlier is used to put the viewer at that level. We are first introduced to Ginger, with a close-up shot of her foot. This type of shot is used to show the viewer that this is an important character in the movie, and to draw the viewer's attention. Throughout the whole opening sequence Ginger is constantly filmed using a mid angle shot, which is to put us at her level. Later on though there are many high angle shots of the chickens, which are used to make the viewer's feel sympathy towards them, which puts them on their side. This is a prime example of the film makers using presentational devices to portray Ginger as good.

The film makers use a completely different approach with Mrs. Tweedie. She is first introduced into the movie using a low angle shot, which makes the viewer feel inferior and vulnerable. Due to that feeling, the viewer is led to believe by the film makers that Mrs. Tweedie is evil. This method is repeated several times throughout the movie, to constantly push in the inferior feeling among the viewers. Another camera shot which the film makers use a lot on Mrs. Tweedie is the close-up. This shot concentrates on emotions and Mrs. Tweedie is often found with an angry face or a cold emotionless face. This also encourages the viewer to view her as evil. However, the shot does not only concentrate on emotions. It also concentrates on facial features. Mrs. Tweedie has very masculine features and the many close-up shots of her highlight those features, which also portray her as evil, compared to Ginger's warm feminine features which portray her as good. Another shot, which is used on Mrs. Tweedie, is the mid angle shot. However, this shot is used to concentrate on her from waist to neck, unlike the chickens, where it is from waist to head. This shows the reader how big Mrs. Tweedie is, and also shows her lack of womanly characteristics, breasts in this case. This again makes the reader feel less warmth towards Mrs. Tweedie.

Leaving camera shots behind, I will now concentrate on the setting of each scene and how it is used to depict Mrs. Tweedie as evil and Ginger as good. Starting with Mrs,

Tweedie this time. There is one main feature with the setting around Mrs. Tweedie throughout the movie. Whenever, Mrs. Tweedie is indoors it is dark, with little light, and this gives the reader the impression that she is a cold person, and pushes home the evil message. Then, when Mrs. Tweedie is outdoors, the sky behind her is always dark, or overcast. This gives the viewer the impression that the sky is afraid of her in a sense and it again pushes home the evil message from the film makers.

Moving onto Ginger and the rest of the chickens. The movie begins and there are camera shots that show the setting the chickens are in. Fences and locks give an impression of confinement, which gives the viewer a sense of sympathy towards the chickens and makes them side with them straight away. This therefore has made the chickens good in the viewer's perspective and is a good example of how the film makers have used presentational devices to portray Ginger, and the rest of the chickens as good. Also, unlike with Mrs. Tweedie, whenever Ginger is outdoors, the sky is always bright and sunny, and this adds a feeling of warmth and again depicts Ginger as good.

The next point I shall concentrate on, is the character's costume, and how that helps portray them as good or evil. Beginning with Ginger and the rest of the chickens. There is not much to say on this point, except that Ginger and the rest of the chickens all have very colourful costumes, and even colourful skin. Both these things help to project Ginger as good, because the colours represent her personality and character.

Mrs. Tweedie on the other hand is very different from Ginger and the rest of the chicken's. Her clothes are always dark, and her skin very pale and colourless. These two points are done purposely by the film makers to project the evilness of her character, because like Ginger the colours represent her personality and character. Another important part of Mrs. Tweedie's costume is her whip. The whip helps to push in her superiority, but also highlights the evilness of her character, in the way that the whip is seen as something hard and cold by the viewers.

The next presentational device that I will write about is the lighting. Lighting, like all the other presentational devices, plays a very important role in showing a character as good or evil. If the lighting around a character is bright and colourful then that shows the character is a good character. However, if the lighting around a character is dark, with lots of shadows, then that obviously shows the character as evil or mysterious. So, when the film makers of Chicken Run, make sure that the lighting around Ginger is bright and colourful, it shows that they are trying to depict her as good. The opposite applies to Mrs. Tweedie. The film makers make sure that the lighting around her is dark with no colour to represent her evil character.

Another observation would be the contrast in the lighting at the beginning of the movie and the end of the movie. At the end of the movie Ginger and the rest of the chickens have triumphed and escaped from the farm. The film makers show that this is a good thing, by making the lighting at the end very bright and colourful. At the beginning of the movie though, the chickens were still trapped in the farm, and the film makers showed this as being evil by making it dark with no light.

Music and sound effects in the movie also play a huge role in the movie, in portraying a character as good or evil. When Mrs. Tweedie is first introduced to the movie it is in her night robe. However, before she is shown, her door creaks open, and there are a few seconds of silence to add suspense and to give the viewer a sense of danger. The feeling of danger, automatically builds up a negative picture of Mrs. Tweedie

and therefore, it is done purposely by the film makers to depict her as evil. It is not only music and sound effects though, that project a character as good or evil. The character's voice is also important. Mrs. Tweedie has a very hard and emotionless voice which adds to the evilness of her character.

Concentrating on Ginger now, and unlike Mrs. Tweedie she has a very soft and warm voice which helps to highlight the goodness of her character. Also, the chickens dance to very happy 40's music in their little party, which again shows them as good. Another observation would be that whenever there are scenes where there is no talking with the chickens, the music is always happy or hopeful which again represents their goodness along with Ginger.

The final presentational device I shall talk about is character interventions and body language. Starting with Ginger and the rest of the chickens this time. Part of body language is facial expressions, and in many scenes Ginger and the rest of the chickens are seen with smiles on their faces which projects a sense of innocence and shows the goodness of their characters. Also, Ginger is obviously the leader of the chickens, like Mrs. Tweedie is the leader of the two humans. However, even though Ginger does march around and give orders like Mrs. Tweedie, she does not do it while looking down her nose at them, and is very gentle when she does it. This is again done purposely by the film makers to help show that Ginger is a good character.

Mrs. Tweedie, is to put it simply, the opposite. When she gives orders she does it while looking down her nose at the person, or with her hands on her hips to show anger and annoyance. This is also done purposely by the film makers to project her as evil. Another point, would be that many times in the film, when a character is around Mrs. Tweedie there is fear on their face. This shows that they are afraid of her, and again highlights her evilness. A third point would be that when Mrs. Tweedie is inspecting the chickens in the roll call she does so while marching with a whip in her hand. The body language here projects superiority and coldness which depicts her as evil. The final point to make would be that like in many war films good triumphs over evil at the end. So, when Mrs. Tweedie sits with her arms slumped at the end, her body language shows defeat, which means the chickens were good and they triumphed over her, which means she is evil.

In conclusion I would like to say that I have learned, from *Chicken Run*, that movies are not just about action and the different characters of a movie. There are many different techniques which film makers use to subtly tell us about a character's personality. Also as you would have noticed, instead of saying how the film makers projected Ginger as good, I answered how they projected Ginger *and* the rest of the chickens as good. I did this because I noticed that they used the same techniques on Ginger as with the other chickens. Hopefully now, after learning about film language and different presentational devices, I will now find it easier to recognize whether a character is good or evil in other movies, and maybe even enjoy the film more because I can recognize the different methods.