

Tsotsi (2005) Knowledge Organiser

Institutional information	
Director:	Gavn Hood
Release:	17 March 2006 (UK)
Production company:	The UK Film & TV Production Company, Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa
Country of production:	South Africa, UK
Starring:	Presley Chweneyagae, Terry Pheto, Mothusi Magano, Zola,
Genres:	Crime; drama; teen drama; coming-of age.
Other information:	Won Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film of the Year. Adapted from a novel by Athol Fugard.

Characters

Tsotsi:	Protagonist: Shows the most growth and reflects the themes the most clearly. Runs away from home after he is left with his abusive father due to his mother dying from an undefined disease (but heavily hinted at being AIDS). As a young child he lives with other homeless children in concrete pipes. The film focuses on him years later as a young adult and a gang leader, now called Tsotsi. After being involved in a murder he accidentally kidnaps a 3 month year old baby.
Miriam:	Mother to a young child, she is spotted by Tsotsi collecting water from a public tap. She is followed and threatened by Tsotsi at gunpoint who demands that she feed the kidnapped child. Shows her kindness by offering to look after the child when Tsotsi visits for a second time. Is a surrogate mother for Tsotsi too, and shows the theme of decency.
Boston:	Seen from the beginning of the film as an outsider of the group. He is an alcoholic as a way to cope with his life in the gang and life of crime. Is called 'Teacher Boy', though was never actually a teacher. Fights with Tsotsi over the murder of the man at the start of the film and is another reason for Tsotsi's change after he is beaten to near-death by the protagonist.
Butcher:	Antagonist: Has a violent nature which often creates issues for the gang. He is the one who kills the man on the train. He seems to enjoy violence and killing-his first choice in any scene involving crime seems to be to choose violence and specifically, killing. In some ways he is the version of Tsotsi he could be if he were to not change his ways.

Key Elements of Film Form (Micro elements)

Mise-en-scene:	The township is red, orange and brown; the City is grey and blue. Facial expressions during the murder scene give a clear indication of what each character is like and effectively setting up each personality, apart from Tsotsi is often shown away from the group or isolated in some way. Tsotsi's shack shows poverty, Miriam's shack shows warmth, the Dube's shows wealth, the train station shows cold alienation and lack of personality. Each is created through colour, props and the overall mise-en-scene. Costume also used as symbolism-leather jacket, white shirt, tie, all key in conveying ideas.
Cinematography (including Lighting):	Close-ups of characters hands feature early on to help establish theme of destiny through use of dice. Audience is often placed within the gang through use of camera angles, shot sizes and movement; the dolly movement is motivated by the gang's movement at the start of the film, a POV during KS1, OTS shots of Tsotsi etc. Light conveys warmth in Miriam's shack, hope as the sun rises over the township and despair at night, especially when accompanied by rain. At one point, Tsotsi is 'half-lit', suggesting duality to his character and personality.
Sound:	The 'Kwaito' music that begins as they leave provides energy and a modern feel as a hybrid between familiar black urban music and an indigenous South African sound. Later, the quiet diegetic sounds are accompanied by music which is the quiet calm of African wind instruments, contrasting with the 'Kwaito' in the opening sequence.
Editing	Flashbacks are used in the film as a narrative device but are skilfully edited into the film to provide detail. Cross-cutting is also used in a number of scenes to explore the idea of fate and duality, such as Tsotsi looking at baby David and flashing back to Tsotsi looking at his sick mother. Tension is often conveyed through the editing, with pace manipulated to develop reaction.

Context:

Won 17 awards including Academy Award. Nominated for BAFTA and Golden Globe awards.

Set in Johannesburg, South Africa. The title of the film comes from urban slang which, loosely translated, means "thug".

Adapted from novel by Athol Fugard, a South African author and playwright.

The novel, set in the 1950s, took place at the height of apartheid. The film features a contemporary setting.

The huge problem with the AIDS epidemic is also (briefly) explored.

Explores the disparity between wealth/poverty & how this links to crime.

The soundtrack features Kwaito music performed by popular South African artist Zola, who also stars in the film.

Representation:

Tsotsi	Gangster. Seen in his clothing and violence. Gang leader. In positioning in frame and in body language. Teenager. His clothing and the use of the Kwaito music in the background when he is on screen to start the film. Impoverished majority. Mise-en-scene of his shack.
The gang / criminals	Gangsters. Clothing and body language, especially in their treatment and actions towards others. The use of the Kwaito music in the background when they're on screen. Teenagers. Seen through use of mise-en-scene and sound. Lost/orphaned children. The concrete tubes and the dramatic use of the AIDS poster suggest these people have no parents. Uneducated. They have no plans/future and every choice they make is criminal.
The people of the township	Impoverished but resourceful. Soekie's bar, the water pump, the colourful shacks, Miriam's mobiles; all symbols of people who suffer with impoverished conditions but people still show their resourcefulness and creativity.
The Police	Incompetent. The police don't manage to solve the crime or find baby David, their body language and facial expression show that they are confused and... Aggressive. Their treatment of everyone aside from the Dubes is very aggressive; they resort to intimidation and aggression instead of being able to solve the crime through competence. Post-Apartheid. In having policemen who are black and white, the idea of Post-Apartheid South Africa and a move towards equality is seen. However, Captain Smit still takes charge and orders Sergeant Zuma around.
Pumla and John Dube	Affluent. Clearly the Dubes are well off, they live in a large, gated home and drive expensive, executive cars. They dress well and the mise-en-scene of their home is the complete opposite of how Tsotsi lives now and how he lived in his family shack.
Miriam	Single mother. Whilst Miriam is the only single mother we see in the film, she is clearly one of many in the township. Resourceful. She makes mobiles and other items to make money shows how she can take rubbish and turn it into money to help herself and her baby. Homemaker. In contrast to Tsotsi's home, Miriam's shack is bright, clean and warm-full of soft, warm and high-contrast lighting.

Themes/issues.

Decency:	Key theme throughout-someone having respect for themselves and others.
Crime:	Often seen as a way of life or potentially a way out of poverty; aspirational.
Family:	Seen as aspirational for many; only the Dubes are seen as a family-everyone else is searching for or longing for family.
Responsibility:	Many do not take responsibility for their actions; when Tsotsi does he changes and becomes more mature and responsible.
Redemption:	Tsotsi tries to redeem himself by putting right the things he has done wrong-there is a suggestion that others doing the same would be beneficial for them and others.
Apartheid:	Segregation still exists, especially between the impoverished and affluent-seen perhaps best in the Dube's gated house.

Key scenes:

The opening scene: (bit.ly/Tsotsi1)	Establishes character, location, tone and representation. The first scene uses the mise-en-scene to establish that these characters are poor and that one of them lives in a shack. The props of the dice also helps to show how characters pass time, what they do to earn money and how some of the characters are more intelligent than others. We then see the slum or township and the colours of the area as being quite warm but not clean. As the camera tracks the gang we get to see the poverty, the resilience and the resourcefulness of the people who live there. The next scene is key in establishing that Tsotsi is the central figure. In a long shot he is in the centre of the group and the frame, also walking slightly ahead of everyone. The slightly tighter shots of his face show that the others in the gang are out of focus behind him-indicating that they're not as important. We also see Tsotsi's clothing-a leather jacket and a 'hoody'-items seen with gang culture and crime. Finally, Tsotsi wears red which is a symbol of danger, suggesting that Tsotsi is not someone to be crossed.
Visiting Miriam's shack: (bit.ly/Tsotsi2)	There is a difference between the style of Tsotsi's shack and Miriam's. Tsotsi's shack shows crime and poverty. It is dark, untidy and for baby David it is dangerous and not somewhere he should be. Miriam's shack however, is bright, clean and the children there are safe. The use of light is key; in Tsotsi's shack there is minimal natural light, making the scene feel dark and unwelcoming. In Miriam's shack the light is bright, warm and much more even, with little in the way of dark areas of shadows. It represents light and positivity, seen in the use of the mobile made of broken glass hanging from the ceiling. The mobile made of rust is a symbol of Tsotsi's outlook and sadness.
The burglary at the house: (bit.ly/Tsotsi3)	This scene shows what each of the gang members are like. Aap's lack of education is shown in him trying to have a conversation with John about wine. His lack of understanding about wine shows his ignorance and unfamiliarity with the drink because he cannot afford it and because he only drinks beer as it's likely to be the only drink available in the township. Butcher's desire for violence can be seen in his aggressive nature towards John Dube. Finally, Tsotsi's change and path to redemption is seen in his quest to find things for baby David. The mural of the African jungle is significant, as it highlights an idea of a classic Africa and a version of a nice childhood. Tsotsi's upbringing was not like this and there is a big difference between where he grew up and this. This room is clean, tidy and welcoming.
The Ending (bit.ly/Tsotsi4)	The final scene shows how Tsotsi has changed and become someone who has taken responsibility for his actions and who wants to be a better person. This is seen in his clothing; his old gangster clothing has been replaced with a white shirt, which is a symbol of innocence, purity and also surrender, which is what he does with baby David. The use of key lights places focus on characters rather than the surrounding scenes, showing that the place and surroundings aren't necessarily important if your actions are morally correct.

Key vocabulary:

protagonist,
antagonist,
abusive,
township,
impoverished,
decency,
redemption,
affluent,
analysis