

“The Cranes Are Flying” starring Tatyana Samoylova, Aleksey Batalov, Vasiliy Merkurev, 1957, NR, 97 minutes

Major themes:

- War
- Love
- Family
- Hope
- Waiting
- Sacrifice
- Kindness
- Passion
- Betrayal
- Choices

Major characters:

- Veronika
- Boris
- Fyodor Ivanovich
- Mark
- Irina
- Volodya
- Stepan
- Babushka
- Chernov
- Anna Mikhajlovna

Background info:

- One of the most notable features of the film is cinematographer Sergey Urusevskiy's then ground-breaking use of hand-held cameras.
- When the film was released in the Soviet Union, it caused a sensation amongst audiences who had previously only been exposed to propaganda films. For the first time, audiences were able to weep at the pain of losing millions of their population in the war. It was also the first time that subjects like draft dodging, war profiteering and the black market had been expressed on film.
- Stalin's death in 1953, and more particularly Khrushchev's famous denunciation of "*the cult of personality*" at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in February 1956, resulted in a "*thaw*" that was felt throughout Soviet society and culture. In film, the benefits of the thaw were especially far-reaching, as filmmakers abandoned the monotonous clichés and rote optimism of the Stalin era and opened the private lives of ordinary people to a cinematic scrutiny that embraced ambivalence and uncertainty.
- Anton Chekhov, Russian playwright and short story writer, who is considered to be among the greatest writers of short fiction in history, wrote these lines in his play, "*Three Sisters*": "*Surely mankind must believe in something, or at least seek for the truth, otherwise life is just emptiness, emptiness... To live and not to know why the cranes are flying, why children are born, why there are stars in the sky... Either you must know why it is you live, or everything is trivial - mere pointless nonsense.*"
- This is the only Russian film to win the Palme d'Or, the highest prize awarded at the Cannes Film Festival.

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Scriptures:

Ecclesiastes 9:17 – 18 (The Message) – *“The quiet words of the wise are more effective than the ranting of a king of fools. Wisdom is better than warheads, But one hothead can ruin the good earth.”*

Isaiah 30:18 (NLT) – *“So the LORD must wait for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion. For the LORD is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for his help.”*

Psalms 68:5 – 6 (NLT) – *“Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—this is God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy. But he makes the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.”*

Romans 8:22 – 26 (NIV) – *“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”*

1 John 3:16 – 19 (The Message) – *“This is how we’ve come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God’s love? It disappears. And you made it disappear. My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality.”*

Deuteronomy 30:19 (NLT) – *“Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life.”*

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Discussion points:

1. In this film we see one character try to force “love” on another. Is it possible to force someone to either receive or give love? Why or why not?
2. Various characters were faced with difficult choices in this film. Describe one choice that you disagreed with – what would you have done, and why?
3. Boris was willing to help a friend who was unable to muster the strength to go on. Is it always worth it to help another, no matter what price we pay for it?
4. What did you notice about the way the chief doctor talked to the suicidal soldier at the hospital?
5. Discuss the significance of cranes and squirrels in this film.
6. After this film’s release in Russia in 1957, one reviewer wrote that “*the silence in the theater was profound, the wall between art and living life had fallen . . . and tears unlocked the doors.*” How can art impact life in the culture and time in which we live?
7. What is significant about Veronika’s actions in the final scene?