Bryn Loftness Worksheet

1. What could the “pod people” represent? Try to think of more than one way to interpret this theres not necessarily one “correct” answer. Use examples (scenes, characters, dialogue, concepts) from the film to support your interpretations.

In the movie, Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956), the “pod people” represent the seeds of communism and its spread, the seeds of uncertainty with the possibilities of extra-terrestrial life and space in general, as well as seeds of unrest with the ambiguity and insecurity of the time. The infiltrative assault delivered by the pod people was silent and almost all encompassing, if it hadn’t been for Miles. When discussing the origin of these pods, Miles states “it may be the results of atomic radiation on plant life, or animal life. Some weird alien organism – a mutation of some kind.” (Invasion of the Body Snatchers 1956) This quote brought me, the viewer, back to reality, as I was feeling a little lost in the cinema— this quote provides context to the time period of the film and the uncertain climate. The silent invasion and subtle ‘body-snatches’ correlates these incidents to the thoughts surrounds the spread of communism. People who caught onto the “communist agenda” were hard to spot, they looked the exact same and acted the same, just their personalities changed a bit. This was a similar situation with the pod people.

1. Why does Miles resist the pod people so strongly? More specifically, why does he not want to become one of them, even if it would be easier to do so?

Miles resisted the pod people so adamantly because he wanted to be human—he wanted love, and grief, and to experience beauty. He had seen in his job as a doctor how easy it is to let ones humanity slip, “I’ve seen how people have allowed their humanity to drain away. Only it happened slowly instead of all at once. They didn’t seem to mind” (Invasion of the Body Snatchers 1956). He feels very strongly about keeping himself pure, “only when we have to fight to stay human do we realize how precious it is to us, how dear.” (IOTBS 1956) His relationship with Becky was authentic and full of love. Love is one of the most human of feelings, and he didn’t want to let go of that.

1. Think about the ways we usually tend to think about small towns in American life, particularly in the context of the 1950s. Compare/contrast those ideas with what we see in the film. Use specific evidence from the film to illustrate your analysis.

In this film, small town life was exemplified perfectly. Everyone knows each other, he says hello to the children running on the street by name, he shows up to the gas station and asks the owners to put it on his tab while addressing them by name. Everything is very personal and close-knit. The fact that this movie was set in a small town really drove the entire plot— it was crucial to how events unfolded.

1. What is the film’s view of human nature? Refer to specific characters, scenes, and ideas form the film to support your analysis.

This question really builds off of Question 2 in regards to Mile’s reference to people “allowing their humanity to drain away” (IOTBS 1956) Everyone, for the most part, wants the full life—the fair share of love, happiness, and joy, as well as pain, grief, and hardship. However, as Miles puts it, after a while “all of us – a little bit – we harden our hearts, grow callous.” (IOTBS 1956) Some give in to the easiness of being controlled, becoming hosts to external factors – alien or otherwise. On the other hand, there are still some who fight for their humanity and the humanity of others despite it all.

1. Compare/contrast this film’s representation of women characters with that of The Day the Earth Stood Still. Use examples to support your analysis.

The female representation in Invasion of the Body Snatchers is overwhelmingly more subservient, passive, and overall fragile. It’s definitely more old-fashioned, customary female-role based. They are always seen clutching onto their man, vulnerable and afraid. They can’t keep up, with the action and stamina of the male lead. Becky, when she and Miles were running from the pod people to the pod people, couldn’t keep up, couldn’t stay awake, and ended up falling victim to the body snatchers. She was almost his down fall, “He’s in here! He’s in here! Get him! Get him!” (IOTBS 1956)

1. To complement and add to the ideas discussed in our readings this week, in your own time, go online to do some basic research (using reliable sources) into the following 1950s issues. List your sources (author, title, URL). Without plagiarizing, briefly explain each issue in 2-4 sentences. Then in a separate paragraph, combine all four issues to explain how they might be related to the allegorical meaning of Invasion of the Body Snatches:
2. The Red Scare
   1. <http://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/red-scare>
   2. <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-6>
   3. http://www.ushistory.org/us/47a.asp
3. Joseph McCarth/McCarthysim
   1. <http://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/joseph-mccarthy>
   2. http://www.ushistory.org/us/53a.asp
4. HUAC (the House Committee on Un-American Activities)
   1. <http://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/huac>
   2. <https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teachinger/glossary/huac.cfm>
   3. http://www.pbs.org/opb/thesixties/topics/politics/newsmakers\_4.html
5. Conformity in the 1950s
   1. <http://www.ushistory.org/us/53f.asp>
   2. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/culture-magazines/1950s-pop-culture-explodes-decade-conformity>
   3. <http://www.flowofhistory.com/readings-flowcharts/the-world-since-1945/the-post-war-world-1945-60/fc142>

The Red Scare is the term associated with the mass anti-communist hysteria that was invoked by Joseph McCarthy in the early 1950s. The Red Scare and McCarthyism was often used similarly and interchangeably during the time.

Joseph McCarthy was a U.S. Senator from 1947 until 1957 who, during the early 1950s, was a prominent public figure denouncing communism and causing widespread panic from unsupported allegations of several politicians, public figures, as well as groups in and outside of the government being communist-sympathizers, guilty of treason, or other crimes.

The HUAC (House Committee on Un-American Activiites) was a committee formed in 1938 to investigate events, persons, or groups, who may be involved in communism to any degree.

Conformity in the 1950s was an uncertain, and contradictory theme. On one hand, you had some people grasping onto the dwindling conservatism and pre-modern/traditional values while you had others doing everything to diverge from the accepted norms. All aspects of pop culture, entertainment, and social situations for all Americans, male and female, were impacted by this dichotomy.

Joseph McCarthy, the Red Scare, the HUAC, and the theme of conformity in the 1950s are all very connected and play a huge role to the allegorical meaning of Invasion of the Body Snatchers. The fear of neighbors becoming communist sympathizers was synonymous with the fear of neighbors becoming hosts to alien lifeforms. Both situations change their personalities and points of view to something unfamiliar— something most all were unable to comprehend. The film brought up the concerns of what normal was and wasn’t during the time and who could define such, what behaviors were nonstandard or aberrant and if it was acceptable, and the possible repercussions for falling victim to external controls/forces. It played on the widespread fears of McCarthyism and the Red Scare within all individuals spanning across the country by representing it in a small town, one where this incident would be likely to happen anywhere.