

La Mort aux trousses

un film d'Alfred Hitchcock



La Mort aux troussees

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DVD Warner Bros.

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Sommaire

p. 03 | Introduction

p. 04 | Fiche technique du film

p. 05 | Dans les programmes

p. 06 | Séquencier du film

p. 10 | Activités pédagogiques

- **p. 10** | 1 - Travail d'anticipation :
suspense and expectations
- **p. 12** | 2 - Understanding the film
- **p. 20** | 3 - PRL: Asking questions
- **p. 21** | 4 - Discover Mount Rushmore
- **p. 22** | 5 - Tâches finales

p. 23 | Corrigé des activités



Qui n'a jamais vu les images légendaires de Cary Grant poursuivi par un avion ou suspendu au-dessus du vide au Mont Rushmore ?

La Mort aux trousses, chef d'œuvre d'Alfred Hitchcock de 1939, nous tient en haleine du début jusqu'à la fin, alors que les personnages s'engagent dans une folle course poursuite à travers les États-Unis, menés d'une fausse piste à l'autre par une intrigue aussi complexe que passionnante. Alors que les protagonistes cherchent à fuir vers les grands espaces du Nord et de l'Ouest américain, l'enfermement inlassablement les rattrape, les piégeant dans des identités et des vérités fausses dont ils peinent à s'affranchir.

Hitchcock est ici au sommet de son art narratif et technique, mariant action et humour sans laisser au spectateur la moindre seconde de répit. Le réalisateur nous prouve ici qu'un film de divertissement hollywoodien « classique » peut à la fois être tout public et extrêmement exigeant du point de vue de la mise en scène, puisque comme toujours chez Hitchcock, chaque plan relève d'un cadrage ou d'un éclairage signifiant.

C'est avec plaisir que nous ferons découvrir ce grand classique du cinéma de l'âge d'or hollywoodien à nos élèves. Si l'humour, voire le sexisme de certaines répliques peuvent leur sembler désuets, cela ne pourra que nourrir la discussion sur l'évolution de la place de la femme au cinéma comme dans la société. Beaucoup moins effrayant que *Psychose* ou *Les Oiseaux*, *La Mort aux trousses* pourra être visionné par des collégiens dès la classe de quatrième. Nul doute qu'ils se laisseront à leur tour happer par cette grande aventure d'espionnage, d'amour et de suspense.



Fiche technique

LA MORT AUX TROUSSES

Titre original : *North by Northwest*

Un film de : Alfred Hitchcock

Avec : Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint...

Année : 1959

Langue : Anglais

Pays : USA

Durée : 136 minutes

Éditeur du DVD : Warner Bros.

Bonus du DVD : Making-of du film, commentaire audio du scénariste, piste musicale seule, bande-annonce originale du film

Synopsis

Un riche homme d'affaires new-yorkais voit sa vie basculer le jour où il est subitement enlevé par de mystérieux espions qui le prennent pour un dénommé George Kaplan. Il parvient à s'échapper mais, lorsqu'il se rend à la police, personne ne le croit. Il décide alors de retrouver le véritable George Kaplan et de lever la vérité sur toute cette étrange histoire d'espionnage. Une terrible course poursuite s'engage, menant notre héros d'une fausse piste à l'autre à travers le nord et l'ouest des États-Unis, pour aboutir à la scène mythique du Mont Rushmore sur les visages sculptés dans la pierre des présidents passés. Maître du suspense et du rebondissement, Hitchcock nous livre ici l'un de ses meilleurs films d'action.



Enseignement	Niveau	Dans les programmes
● Anglais	4 ^e -3 ^e	Les monuments célèbres (le Mont Rushmore), Le cinéma hollywoodien classique (Alfred Hitchcock)
● Anglais	2 ^{nde}	Imagerie collective et sentiment d'appartenance : le Mont Rushmore, l'art patriote
● Anglais	Cycle terminal	Mythes et héros : Alfred Hitchcock, Cary Grant et l'âge d'or hollywoodien Espaces et Échanges : grands espaces et enfermement dans <i>La Mort aux Trousses</i>

Chapitre	Minutage	Descriptif
1	00:00:00-00:02:23	Générique de début
2	00:02:24-00:04:47	George Thornhill, éminent publicitaire new-yorkais, discute de son planning avec sa secrétaire tout en se rendant à un rendez-vous d'affaires important.
3	00:04:48-00:07:09	Arrivé à l'hôtel où il a rendez-vous, Thornhill est kidnappé par deux hommes armés.
4	00:07:10-00:11:02	Thornhill est emmené contre son gré chez un certain M. Townsend qui est persuadé qu'il est en réalité George Kaplan.
5	00:11:03-00:13:59	Thornhill refuse de coopérer, les hommes de main de Townsend l'obligent à ingurgiter une énorme dose de bourbon.
6	00:14:00-00:16:59	Les espions abandonnent Thornhill, fin saoul, au volant d'une voiture volée sur une route sinueuse dans l'espoir qu'il se tue, mais il parvient à en réchapper. La police l'arrête, semant ses poursuivants.
7	00:17:00-00:21:34	Au commissariat, personne ne croit Thornhill, toujours en état d'ébriété.
8	00:21:35-00:25:37	Le lendemain matin, sa mère le fait libérer. Le juge donne 24 heures à la police pour éclaircir les faits. Thornhill les conduit chez les Townsend où l'épouse prétend qu'il était invité à dîner chez eux la veille, et est reparti ivre. Personne ne croit à son histoire de kidnapping.
9	00:25:38-00:28:23	Thornhill retourne à l'hôtel, se fait passer pour George Kaplan et fouille sa suite pour tenter de trouver des indices.
10	00:28:24-00:30:59	Thornhill interroge la femme et le valet de chambre pour en savoir plus sur Kaplan.
11	00:31:00-00:33:22	Thornhill reçoit un coup de fil de Townsend et essaie de le traquer, mais ce sont les tueurs qui l'attendent dans l'ascenseur. Sa mère fait diversion.
12	00:33:23-00:35:21	Il s'enfuit en taxi à l'ONU, où il espère retrouver M. Townsend.
13	00:35:22-00:37:04	Il rencontre le véritable M. Townsend, qui n'est pas celui qui l'a fait kidnapper la veille, mais celui-ci se fait assassiner et Thornhill est le suspect idéal. Il s'enfuit.





Chapitre	Minutage	Descriptif
15	00:39:57-00:42:43	Thornhill décide de s'enfuir en train mais il est recherché pour meurtre. Il est reconnu au guichet mais parvient à se fondre dans la foule de Grand Central Station.
16	00:42:44-00:44:46	Il monte dans un train pour Chicago où une jolie blonde l'aide à échapper aux policiers qui le suivent.
17	00:44:47-00:49:38	Dîner au wagon restaurant avec la belle blonde, Eve Kendall. Elle n'est pas dupe sur son identité.
18	00:49:39-00:52:52	La police arrête le train. Eve aide Thornhill à se cacher dans sa cabine.
19	00:52:53-00:55:17	Ils s'embrassent.
20	00:55:18-00:57:40	Le contrôleur les interrompt, il se cache dans la salle de bain.
21	00:57:41-01:00:17	Arrivés à Chicago, Thornhill se déguise en porteur de bagages pour échapper à la police qui l'attend.
22	01:00:18-01:03:29	Pendant qu'il se change, Eve contacte les tueurs pour connaître la suite du plan.
23	01:03:30-01:06:10	Elle l'emmène à son hôtel et l'informe d'un (faux) rendez-vous avec George Kaplan.
24	01:06:11-01:08:33	Thornhill attend Kaplan à un arrêt de bus au milieu de nulle part.
25	01:08:34-01:11:21	Un avion agricole essaie de le tuer. Thornhill se cache dans un champ de maïs.
26	01:11:22-01:12:44	L'avion l'arrose de pesticides, il doit sortir de sa cachette. Thornhill parvient à attirer l'avion sur un camion transportant de l'essence. Il se crashe et explose.
27	01:12:45-01:15:48	Thornhill vole un pick-up et rentre à Chicago. Il comprend qu'Eve Kendall l'a trahi.



Chapitre	Minutage	Descriptif
28	01:15:49-01:19:44	Thornhill confronte Eve dans sa chambre d'hôtel. Elle doit se rendre à un rendez-vous.
29	01:19:45-01:21:50	Thornhill suit Eve à son insu pour savoir avec qui elle a rendez-vous.
30	01:21:51-01:24:30	Il la retrouve avec les tueurs dans une vente aux enchères.
31	01:24:31-01:26:05	Confrontation avec Vandamm.
32	01:26:06-01:30:10	Les tueurs essaient de le capturer mais Thornhill sème le chaos dans la salle d'enchères pour se faire arrêter par la police.
33	01:30:11-01:32:10	Les policiers reçoivent un ordre mystérieux de l'emmener non pas au commissariat mais à l'aéroport.
34	01:32:11-01:36:35	L'espion américain lui révèle la vérité sur George Kaplan et le convainc de les aider à coincer Townsend.
35	01:36:36-01:42:11	Thornhill donne rendez-vous à Vandamm et Eve au Mont Rushmore. Eve le tue et s'enfuit.
36	01:42:12-01:47:55	Thornhill n'est pas vraiment mort. Eve refuse de renoncer à sa mission pour partir avec lui.
37	01:47:56-01:51:23	Thornhill fait mine de coopérer avec les espions américains mais s'enfuit par la fenêtre de son hôtel.
38	01:51:24-01:54:19	Thornhill se rend à la résidence de Vandamm et observe les tueurs de l'extérieur.
39	01:54:20-01:57:57	Il tente de prévenir Eve car il la sait en danger de mort.
40	01:57:58-02:02:24	Il parvient à entrer dans la maison et à faire passer un message à Eve.



Chapitre	Minutage	Descriptif
41	02:02:25-02:04:02	La domestique le repère et lui tire dessus, mais à blanc.
42	02:04:03-02:05:34	Il parvient à se sauver, emmenant Eve juste avant qu'elle ne prenne l'avion de Vandamm.
43	02:05:35-02:06:50	Poursuite sur le Mont Rushmore.
44	02:06:51-02:09:10	L'espion glisse et meurt.
45	02:09:11-02:10:13	Eve est sauvée d'extrême justesse. Thornhill la demande en mariage.
46	02:10:13-02:10:46	Happy end dans le train.



Activité 1

Suspense and expectations: anticipating the story

Afin de rendre hommage au maître du suspense qu'était Alfred Hitchcock et de se mettre dans l'ambiance du film, nous vous proposons plusieurs activités d'anticipation pour préparer le visionnage du film.



Avec une classe de lycée, on en profitera pour réviser l'expression de l'hypothèse en rappelant les amorces :

- It must be...
- I think it could be...
- This man may be...
- This lady must be...
- In this film there might be...
- It has to be a film about /set in...

I/ North by Northwest in music

Le DVD de *North by Northwest* offre la possibilité d'entendre la piste musicale seule (à choisir dans les options audio du menu du DVD). En masquant l'image, vous pouvez faire écouter à la classe quelques extraits choisis de la bande originale du film. Cette courte activité permettra de définir d'emblée le genre du film.

When you hear this music, what sort of film does it make you think of? Why?

On pourra s'amuser à faire écouter Cary Grant lorsqu'il sifflote "Singin' in the rain" pour faire croire qu'il prend une douche (01:21:00) :

**Do you know this air?
Which other film does it refer to?**

II/ North by Northwest in pictures

**group work (2-3 pupils)
preparation : approximately 15 minutes**

Choose one of the following pictures from the film and try to imagine the story behind it.

Try to understand the 5 WH- questions :

WHO are these people?

WHERE are they?

WHAT are they doing?

WHEN is this happening?

WHY?

Then show your picture to the rest of the class and present your version of the story.

À ce stade, on veillera à ne rien révéler sur la véritable intrigue, que les hypothèses des élèves soient valides ou non. Les fausses pistes faisant partie prenante du film, on encouragera au contraire la classe à faire preuve d'imagination et de fantaisie.



III/ Watching the theatrical trailer

Disponible dans les bonus («special features») du DVD.

Nous vous conseillons de n'exploiter que sommairement cette vidéo, de peur de ne gâcher tout le suspense du film (presque toute l'intrigue y est dévoilée !).

On pourra se concentrer sur, au choix (selon que l'on a fait ou non les autres activités) :
la musique / le genre / l'époque / les personnages principaux / les lieux.

L'objectif est ici de faire repérer qu'il s'agit :

- d'un film d'action, de suspense et d'amour
- d'un film américain, hollywoodien,
tourné aux USA (repérage du Mont Rushmore)
- d'un film des années 1950-1960 (1959)
- d'un film d'Alfred Hitchcock, avec Cary Grant



IV/ Getting to know Alfred Hitchcock

A/ Alfred Hitchcock's career in film

CE / enrichissement lexical

Read the following text and find the right synonyms for the underlined words and expressions:

Alfred Hitchcock was born in London in 1889. He had a strict upbringing. As a lonesome child he developed a vivid imagination.

Very early he was interested in film making and he started his career as a set designer. He directed silent movies in the twenties, but it was in the thirties that his sound films earned him praise and fame in Britain and the United States: *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935), which is considered the best film of his early period, and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938).

During the Second World War, he left England for Hollywood, California, where he was to direct all his films from then on. Hitchcock shot *Rebecca* (1940), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Spellbound* (1945), and *Notorious* (1946) which were quite successful, but his most productive years were yet to come. The films he shot in the fifties and the early sixties met with considerable commercial and critical success, namely *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Dial M for Murder* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958) which was regarded as one of his best movies ever. Three other recognized classics followed: *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960), and *The Birds* (1963).

Hitchcock skillfully chose the shots he used. He believed that if viewers were to understand all the emotions his characters felt, it was necessary to involve them in the scene.

Once a renowned film director, Hitchcock made it a point to appear very briefly in each of his films.

Shortly before he died in 1980 he was appointed Sir Alfred Hitchcock.

Words and expressions from the text	Synonyms
a. An upbringing	1. with talent and precision
b. Lonesome	2. films with no recorded sound
c. A set designer	3. an education
d. Silent movies	4. spectators
e. Sound films	5. for example
f. From then on	6. to be nominated
g. He shot	7. to implicate
h. The shots	8. to try to do something every time
i. Namely	9. talking films
j. Skillfully	10. a person who chooses objects for movie interiors
k. Viewers	11. lonely
l. To involve	12. starting from this moment
m. To make it a point to	13. he directed
n. To be appointed	14. the scenes



B/ Spot the cameo!

Hitchcock was a very playful director. He loved cameos, that is to say appearing in his own films for just a few seconds in a secondary role. He did so in *North by Northwest*. Will you manage to spot him? Open your detective's eyes!

Some of Hitchcock's famous cameos



From left to right and top to bottom :
- *Lifeboat* (1944)
- *Strangers on a train* (1951)
- *Rear Window* (1954)
- *The Man who knew too much* (1956)



Activité 2

Watching North by Northwest



I/ Misleading identities: who's who?

Explain who these three characters are: their real and fake identities, their jobs and how they relate to the other two.

II/ Right or Wrong?

1. George Kaplan stayed at the hotel but no one saw him.
2. Eve Kendall is an American spy.
3. Vandamm is an art dealer.
4. Thornhill works in advertising.
5. The killers are after Thornhill.
6. Mr. Townsend has a wife.
7. Mr. Townsend is shot dead at the UN.
8. The final scene takes place in a train.
9. Mount Rushmore is in Alaska.
10. There is a microfilm hidden in the statue.



Activités additionnelles pour le lycée

III/ The tone of the film

1. Is *North by Northwest* a violent film? Justify your answer by quoting specific scenes.
2. Is there humor in the film? When? Quote comic characters and scenes. What is the double purpose of humor in this film?
3. Sum up the Thornhill / Kendall relationship. Why is there romance in this film?
4. What is Hitchcock's strategy to get the viewer hooked / caught into the action?

IV/ Filming North by Northwest

Look at the following pictures and comment on the composition of the shots.

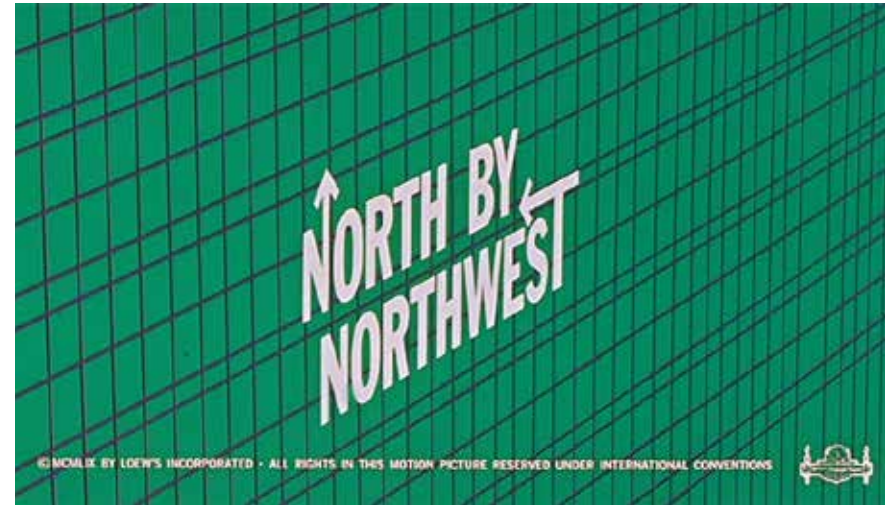
What was Hitchcock trying to express with this type of framing? How does it relate to the characters' situation and feelings?

Try to quote as many scenes as you can remember when Thornhill is held captive.

In the film, are open spaces really open? Do they convey a sense of infinite freedom, as opposed to the city maze, as is usually the case in film and literature?







Activité 3

PRL: Asking questions

North by Northwest is a film in which questions are constantly raised: who is who? can people be trusted or not? who is telling the truth? Thornhill himself is interrogated twice: by Vandamm (pretending to be Townsend) and by the police when he is drunk. He too needs to become an interrogator to try to unveil the truth about his uncanny situation: he asks the fake Mrs. Townsend about her husband, the hotel staff about Kaplan, Eve about everything. Only the mysterious American spy seems to know everything, except of course what he is after: the contents of the microfilm Vandamm is trying to escape with.

In this context, we find it only natural to offer an activity about question building.

A/ Find the question corresponding to each answer:

1. They met on a train to Chicago.
2. The killers are after George Kaplan.
3. A microfilm has been hidden in the statue sold at the auction.
4. Thornhill escaped in a stolen car.
5. Vandamm believed Thornhill was a spy too.
6. He pretended that he was having a shower.
7. He called his mother from the police station.
8. Townsend was stabbed when he was talking to Thornhill at the UN.
9. Eve called Vandamm to ask him what to do with Thornhill in Chicago.
10. In the final scene Thornhill proposes to her.

B/ Now write 3 very difficult questions about the plot of the film on a piece of paper.

Exchange papers with your classmates and try to answer their questions.





Activité 4

Discover Mount Rushmore

I/ Mount Rushmore in North by Northwest

(02:05:35-02:10:25)

This monument plays a central role in *North by Northwest*. From what you heard in the film, can you tell its name? in which American state it is located? what the nearest city is (this is where Thornhill's plane lands)?

What does this monument represent?
What do you know about these four men?

Watch again and sum up the scene on Mount Rushmore. Why do you think Hitchcock chose to stage his final scene on this monument?

Do you think Hitchcock shot the scene on location?
What makes you think so?

II/ Find out more!

web search / group work

Choose a partner and pick a topic below. Search the web for more information about:

- The carving of Mount Rushmore, «the biggest sculpture in the world»
- George Washington
- Theodore Roosevelt
- Thomas Jefferson
- Abraham Lincoln
- How Hitchcock shot his Mount Rushmore grand finale in *North by Northwest*

Make a poster with text and pictures to present your findings to the class.



Activité 5

Tâche Finales

A police investigation:

Interaction / niveau collège / rebrassage des questions et du prétérit en V -ING

The scene takes place at a police station. Write a dialogue between a policeman and a suspect. The policeman wants to know where the suspect was last night, with who and what he was doing. The suspect gives him his alibi.

Make sure to check the pronunciation of new words and rehearse your dialogue to make it convincing. Perform it in front of the class.

A change of perspective:

Expression écrite / lycée / rebrassage du discours indirect et des pronoms

Rewrite the Chicago hotel scene from Eve's point of view. What was she thinking and feeling when she saw Thornhill come back alive, and suspicious of her?

Selon le niveau de la classe on pourra soit leur repasser simplement la scène du film ou leur proposer une version écrite de la scène perçue du point de vue de Thornhill.

The critic:

Expression écrite / lycée / le récit d'évènements passés, la comparaison, expression de l'opinion

Write a review of another film in which the main character is also the victim of a misunderstanding / chased and mistaken for someone else / wrongly accused of crimes he did not commit. First describe the plot of this film, then compare it (story / characters, direction) to *North by Northwest*. Finally, say which one you liked best, and why.



Voici quelques exemples de films dont l'intrigue est comparable à celle de *La Mort aux Trousses* (confusion d'identité / accusation d'un innocent) :

- *The Bourne Identity*, de Doug Liman (et ses suites)
- *The Fugitive*, d'Andrew Davis
- *Minority Report*, de Steven Spielberg
- *The Dark Corner*, de Henry Hathaway
- *The Green Mile*, de Frank Darabont
- *The 39 Steps*, d'Alfred Hitchcock
- *Face Off*, de John Woo
- *The Great Dictator*, de Charlie Chaplin



Corrigé Activité 1

Suspense and expectations: anticipating the story

I/ North by Northwest in music

Genres : mystery / adventure / action / suspense / thriller

Quelques exemples de morceaux emblématiques :

générique de début : action, effervescence

00:15:00 : course poursuite / action

00:53:00 : séduction / romance

01:21:00 : suspense

01:39:00 / 01:51:00 : menace, danger imminent

02:07:00 : romance tragique

IV/ Getting to know Alfred Hitchcock

A/ Alfred Hitchcock's career in film

a-3 ; b-11 ; c-10 ; d-2 ; e-9 ; f-12 ; g-13 ; h-14 ; i-5 ; j-1 ;
k-4 ; l-7 ; m-8 ; n-6

B/ Spot the cameo!



Hitchcock appears very quickly as a man stepping into a bus in New York City, at the very beginning of the film, just after the credits (00:02:17).



Corrigé Activité 2

Watching North by Northwest

I/ Misleading identities : who's who?

The first man, played by Cary Grant, is Roger Thornhill. He is a successful businessman living in NYC. He has been married twice. He is mistaken for George Kaplan, an American spy followed by killers. In reality, George Kaplan does not exist. He was invented by American spies (FBI? CIA? we don't know) to protect their real agent, Eve Kendall. While Vandamm is after Kaplan, he does not suspect his mistress to spy on his activities.

Eve Kendall is Philip Vandamm's mistress. She accepted to spy on him to protect her country, the USA. She seduces Thornhill on Vandamm's order but eventually falls in love with him for real.

Philip Vandamm is a spy. We don't know which country he is working for but with references to the Cold War we can assume that it must be Russia. At the beginning he usurps the identity of a real man, Mr. Townsend, to abduct Thornhill, whom he thinks is George Kaplan, an American spy on his track. He pretends to collect art (see the auction scene) but he uses artifacts to smuggle microfilms and other classified information. He does not suspect his lover, Eve Kendall, until his assistant tells on her and he decides to murder her.

II/ Right or Wrong?

1. George Kaplan stayed at the hotel but no one saw him.

Wrong. George Kaplan does not exist.

2. Eve Kendall is an American spy.

Right. She has been recruited to spy on her lover's suspicious affairs.

3. Vandamm is an art dealer.

Wrong. He uses works of art to conceal secret intelligence.

4. Thornhill works in advertising.

Right.

5. The killers are after Thornhill.

Wrong. They are after Kaplan, the US spy who does not exist.

6. Mr. Townsend has a wife.

Wrong. The real Mr. Townsend is a widower. The Mrs. Townsend the police interviews is a fake.

7. Mr. Townsend is shot dead at the UN.

Wrong. He is stabbed in the back.

8. The final scene takes place in a train.

Right. The happy couple kiss in a sleeping car.

9. Mount Rushmore is in Alaska.

Wrong. It is in North Dakota.

10. There is a microfilm hidden in the statue.

Right.



III/ The tone of the film

1. Is *North by Northwest* a violent film? Justify your answer by quoting specific scenes.

Yes, it is a violent film. A man is murdered, a plane crashes into a truck making two casualties, killers are after Thornhill and in the end one of the spies falls down Mount Rushmore. There is much chasing, fighting and shooting (even if only with blank bullets).

2. Is there humor in the film? When? Quote comic characters and scenes.

The most humorous character is Thornhill's mother. She treats him like a child and never believes him, which creates a comic effect. Hitchcock resorts to classic comic effects: the drunk man (when Thornhill is made to drink bourbon), the chase with the police in the Chicago station (with all the porters wearing the same uniform), the old lady taking on gangsters (the mother in the elevator). Humor is also ever present in the dialogues, especially in the Thornhill-Kendall exchanges. The heroes always keep their cool and are quick-witted and smart.

What is the double purpose of humor in this film?

Here are two examples of Thornhill's typical lines :

«I didn't realize you were an art collector. I thought you just collected corpses.»

«I may go back to hating you. It was more fun.»

You'll find more *North by Northwest* quotes on : <http://www.imdb.com>

3. Sum up the Thornhill / Kendall relationship. Why is there romance in this film?

Their relationship endures many twists and turns, just like all the other plots in the film. Their first attraction is based on lie and manipulation, but as it is revealed as fake, we soon find out that it was genuine. Like everything else, it is based on misunderstanding (who is Eve Kendall? a femme fatale? a double agent? a manipulator or a woman in love?). The lovers' loose morals are redeemed in the end by a marriage proposal (the film was released in 1959). The romance gives more twist possibilities to the plot and is aimed at pleasing both male and female viewers: men will love a bold, dangerous, gorgeous blonde while the

women will enjoy the romantic ending. Again, romance is also here to divert our attention from violence and introduce a softer, and sexier side to the story. Finally, Cary Grant was perceived as a womanizer (see the short scene in which he crosses a girl's bedroom and she begs him to stay) so the audience would expect his character to seduce a beautiful, hard-to-get woman.

4. What is Hitchcock's strategy to get the viewer hooked / caught into the action?

He makes sure that nothing is ever certain: names are wrong, identities shift, good and evil are blurred. Besides, people are always on the move, creating a dynamic rhythm. Action scenes are carefully inserted to keep us entertained, with humorous and romantic pauses to let us breathe in between.

IV/ Filming *North by Northwest*

The composition of the shots show a strong sense of geometric symmetry. The lines confine the characters, right from the title credits. The characters are trapped into a plot they don't understand, like Thornhill, who is constantly held captive in this film: first he is abducted by Vandamm, then he is held captive by the American spies, not to mention the numerous times he has to hide in a locked place (the train's restrooms, Eve's sleeping cot and bathroom, the hotel bathroom, the corn field, the police car...). From the moment he is mistaken for George Kaplan, he is no longer a free man and his space becomes restricted. Paradoxically, he is taken on an adventure that brings him out of the buzzing city to the wide open spaces but these wild landscapes are framed too: Mount Rushmore is lined with the threat of falling into the emptiness and the corn field is no better than a straw house to protect him from dusting. So even open spaces are trapped and entrapping and only convey the false hope of escape.



Corrigé Activité 3

PRL: Asking questions

1. Where did Eve and Thornhill meet?

They met on a train to Chicago.

2. Who are the killers after?

The killers are after George Kaplan.

3. What has been hidden in the statue sold at the auction?

A microfilm has been hidden in the statue sold at the auction.

4. How did Thornhill escape?

Thornhill escaped in a stolen car.

5. Who did Vandamm believe Thornhill was?

Vandamm believed Thornhill was a spy too.

6. What did Thornhill pretend to be doing?

He pretended that he was having a shower.

7. Where did Thornhill call his mother from?

He called his mother from the police station.

8. When and where was Townsend stabbed?

Townsend was stabbed when he was talking to Thornhill at the UN.

9. Why did Eve call Vandamm?

Eve called Vandamm to ask him what to do with Thornhill in Chicago.

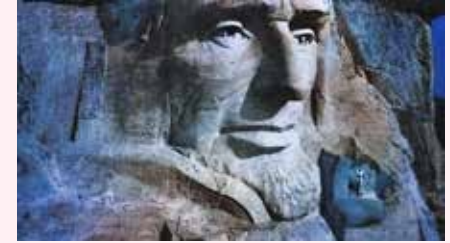
10. When does Thornhill propose to her?

In the final scene Thornhill proposes to her.



Corrigé Activité 4

Discover Mount Rushmore



I/ Mount Rushmore in North by Northwest

Mount Rushmore is located in South Dakota, near Rapid City. It represents four famous US presidents: George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. George Washington was the first US president, Lincoln abolished slavery, Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence and Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Hitchcock wanted an iconic setting for his final scene. He chose an all-American monument anyone could recognize immediately and identify with patriotism / American Pride, which fits the Cold War theme of the film. The heights and slopes enable dramatic effects during the chase: the characters slip, stumble and fall, creating suspense and unexpected twists. The final chase is a game of hide and seek on the faces of the presidents, with the imminent threat of a fatal fall down the monument.

Hitchcock originally wanted to shoot on location but he could not get the necessary authorizations so he had the monument built in a Hollywood studio. It enabled him to set his camera whenever he wanted, thus creating very original angles from which to view the statue (see examples below). You can tell the scene was shot in studio when the heroes are dangling above the emptiness; their muscles are lax when they should be tense. The scene was shot in front of a green screen.

II/ Find out more!

Here are a few links to help you in your search :

About Mount Rushmore :

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/>

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mont_Rushmore

About the shooting of *North by Northwest*:

www.imdb.com

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/rushmore-hitchcock>

