Doubt

**Directed by John Patrick Shanley; Starring Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams, Viola Davis**

|  |
| --- |
| witch-hunt/wiCH ˌhənt/*noun historical*1. a search for and subsequent persecution of a supposed witch.
* *informal*

a campaign directed against a person or group holding unorthodox or unpopular views. |

**DIRECTIONS:** Determine which of the details below help you to make a judgment in favor (F) or against (A) Father Flynn and which you consider irrelevant (I). Keep in mind that some of these details may have nothing to do with Fr. Flynn *directly*, but they may help you make a judgment about his *accusers*, which can be just as important and impactful. There are several discussion questions following.

**Scene One--Opening credits and first sermon**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Jimmy telling the man on the street he is an altar boy and has to get to mass

\_\_\_\_\_\_Donald asking James, “Do you think I’m fat?”

Fr. Flynn’s sermon:

\_\_\_\_\_\_ “What do you do when you’re not sure?”

\_\_\_\_\_\_ “No one knows I’m sick; no one knows I’ve just lost my last real friend; no one knows I’ve done something wrong.”

**Scene Two—The washroom after the sermon**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn alone with Donald Miller who tells him he wants to be a priest one day

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn gives Donald a toy

**Scene Three—Sr. James wakes up**

**Scene Four—The Schoolyard**

\_\_\_\_\_\_He is kind to Donald Miller, but he picks on William London

\_\_\_\_\_\_William London is called to Sr. Aloysius’ office for talking back to and touching Sr. James

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn jokes with Sr. James: “The dragon is hungry.”

**Scene Five—Sr. James’ classroom**

\_\_\_\_\_\_The quote on the blackboard: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” –FDR

**Scene Six—The nuns’ dinner table**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius subtly helps Sr. Veronica find her fork, then tenderly touches her hand VS. staring down Sr. James until she eats the meat gristle that she spit out

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius directing the nuns to be alert as she is concerned about matters at St. Nicholas

**Scene Seven—The stained glass window**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn looking up at the stained glass window that features a watchful eye

**Scene Eight—William London**

\_\_\_\_\_\_William London leaves school with a bloody nose; smirks; smokes a cigarette

**Scene Nine—Nuns chat at school lunch**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius suspects William gave himself that nosebleed to get out of school; Sr. James does not agree

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius helps Sr. Veronica with her sleeve; tells Sr. James that she is going blind

**Scene Ten—Sr. James’ classroom talk with Sr. Aloysius**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius calling the wind “peripatetic”, which means moving about in many different directions

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius complaining about ballpoint pens and “[the death of penmanship] in this country”

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius tells Sr. James to hang a framed picture in order to see behind herself during class

**Scene Eleven—Gym class with Fr. Flynn**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn’s long nails

**Scene Twelve—The priests’ dinner table**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Three priests boisterously talking and laughing, smoking and drinking VS. nuns sitting silently drinking milk

**Scene Thirteen—Mass/the rectory**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Donald Miller, from the top of the stairs, watching Jimmy speak with Fr. Flynn in the rectory

**Scene Fourteen—Sr. James’ classroom**

\_\_\_\_\_\_William London flirts with Noreen during class; Sr. James catches him using the framed photo as a mirror

\_\_\_\_\_\_Donald Miller gets called to the rectory to see Fr. Flynn

**Scene Fifteen—“Blame it on the Bossanova” (aka: dance lessons)**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James sees Fr. Flynn place a shirt in Donald Miller’s locker

**Scene Sixteen—Sr. James’ classroom**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Jimmy watches Sr. James talk to Donald Miller; we do not see Donald’s face or hear what he says

**Scene Seventeen—the garden**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James indicates that there might be something going on between Fr. Flynn and Donald Miller

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius does not seem surprised: “So it’s happened.”

**Scene Eighteen—Fr. Flynn chats with the boys**

**Scene Nineteen-- Sr. Aloysius’ sitting room**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_** We learn that Fr. Flynn was alone with Donald; Donald came back to class acting strangely and with alcohol on his breath

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Cat catches the mouse: “Sometimes it takes a cat.” “Yes, it does. Yes, it does.”

**Scene Twenty—Sr. James’ bedroom on a stormy night**

\_\_\_\_\_\_She cannot sleep and seems frightened

**Scene Twenty-One—The garden after the storm**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius speaks to the gardener: “The wind has changed…”

**Scene Twenty-Two—Sr. Aloysius’ office with Fr. Flynn and Sr. James**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Referring to Sr. Veronica tripping over a tree branch, Sr. Aloysius says, “It’s the habit. It catches us up more often than not. We go down like dominoes.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn sits in Sr. Aloysius’ chair

\_\_\_\_\_\_He takes 3 sugars in his tea, wants secular songs in the Christmas pageant

\_\_\_\_\_\_At the mention of Donald Miller, Sr. James is startled, Fr. Flynn is not

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn says Donald drank the wine on his own

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James to Sr. Aloysius: “You just don’t like him!”

**Scene Twenty-Three—Mass**

\_\_\_\_\_\_New altar boy

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sermon on gossip—the feather story

**Scene Twenty-Four—Garden bench**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James admits she can’t sleep (bad dreams)

\_\_\_\_\_\_Camera angle changes during the discussion of whether or not Fr. Flynn is guilty

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn: “There’s nothing wrong with love.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James admitting she doesn’t believe he is guilty: “I don’t believe it.”

**Scene Twenty-Five—Hallway**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn ignores Donald; he immediately gets hassled in the hallway by other kids

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn helps and hugs him

**Scene Twenty-Six—Sr. James’ classroom**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James is hard on Donald Miller for not knowing the answer to the question; Jimmy goes to principal

**Scene Twenty-Seven—Sr Aloysius office with Mrs. Miller**

\_\_\_\_\_\_She’s listening to the radio

\_\_\_\_\_\_We learn she had a husband who was killed in WWII

\_\_\_\_\_\_Mrs. Miller says Donald admitted to stealing the wine and that his father beat him for it

**Scene Twenty-Eight**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James yells at Jimmy for talking back; makes him cry; feels guilty

**Scene Twenty-Nine—A walk with Sr. Aloysius and Mrs. Miller**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius admits: “I can’t be certain.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_Mrs. Miller confides that her son’s “nature” makes her suspect that he is gay; says, “My son needs some man to care about him and to see him through the way he wants to go.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_Mrs. Miller wants Sr. Aloysius to let it go; Sr. Aloysius is shocked and dismayed

\_\_\_\_\_\_The wind picks up as Sr. Aloysius heads back to the school

**Scene Thirty—Sr. Aloysius’ office with Fr. Flynn**

\_\_\_\_\_\_They argue

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Fr. Flynn shouts, “You have no proof!” Sr. Aloysius replies, “But I have my certainty!”

\_\_\_\_\_\_She tells him to “Confess and resign.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_We find out that she has called a nun at his former parish and learned that he has been in 3 parishes in 5 years

\_\_\_\_\_\_He tells her she has no right to break the chain of command

\_\_\_\_\_\_They discuss sin and admit they are both guilty of mortal ones

\_\_\_\_\_\_He repeats that he is innocent

\_\_\_\_\_\_He agrees to resign

\_\_\_\_\_\_He leaves her the flowers from his Bible

**Scene Thirty-One—Farewell sermon**

\_\_\_\_\_\_Fr. Flynn goes down into the congregation to shake hands

\_\_\_\_\_\_Donald cries

\_\_\_\_\_\_William London smirks

**Scene Thirty-Two—Snowy day in the garden (Christmas)**

\_\_\_\_\_\_We learn that Sr. James was away visiting family when Fr. Flynn resigned

\_\_\_\_\_\_We learn that Fr. Flynn was given a promotion to a more prestigious church/school and the Monsignor didn’t believe the accusations against him

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James tells St. Aloysius that she wishes she could be like her so she could sleep at night; Sr. Aloysius responds by telling her that perhaps people aren’t supposed to sleep so well

\_\_\_\_\_\_We learn that Sr. Aloysius never called Fr. Flynn’s parish; she lied in order to catch him

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius says, “His resignation was his confession. He was what I thought he was.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. Aloysius says, “In the pursuit of wrongdoing, one must step away from God. Of course, there is a price.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_She cries and says, “I have doubts. I have such doubts.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_Sr. James comforts her

**# of Fs \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ # of As \_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Now, think about and be ready to discuss the following:**

1. Surely, you doubted the innocence of Fr. Flynn at some point in the film. When did you first doubt? Be honest.

2. Does it make a difference that Donald Miller is black? How would it be different if he were white? Does his

being black work for or against Fr. Flynn, or is it irrelevant? Or is this simply the author employing 1960s zeitgeist?

3. Consider the repeated motif of wind. What symbolic role might it play?

4. Is Sr. Aloysius a good nun?

5. Why is the characterization of William London important?

6. What difference does it make, if any, that Sr. Aloysius and Sr. James are so vastly different in character?

6. Who is the protagonist of the film? Why does that make a difference in deciding whether or not Fr. Flynn is guilty?

7. Notice that the film is dedicated to Sister Margaret McEntee, formerly known as Sister James…does this make a difference?

8. Do you think Fr. Flynn is guilty of what he being accused? **Yes No** Do your numbers of Fs and As match up with this conclusion? If they do not match up, why do you think that might be?