



Z
(Algeria/France, 1969, 127 minutes)
Directed by Costa-Gavras
Study Guide

Synopsis

Costa-Gavras' *Z*, winner of the 1970 Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, is a classic political thriller, combining intrigue with raw emotional power. The story turns on the investigation of the assassination of a left-wing Greek politician (Yves Montand), and his government's attempts to cover up the murky circumstances. Montand receives death threats as he prepares to give a speech condemning the government, and is then run down in front of numerous witnesses. Jean-Louis Trintignant plays the judge assigned to the investigation, who gradually discovers how far the state will go to rid itself of political opposition. When he is warned off the case by his superiors, the judge becomes even more determined to discover the truth, no matter where it might lead. *Z* is a classic of political intrigue and social consciousness.

Themes In the Film

Political Corruption
Journalistic vs. Official Investigation
Fascism vs. Free Elections/Democracy
Assassination and Cover-Up
Book by Vassili Vassilikos

Study Questions

- Who was Grigoris Lambrakis? Some examples of political assassinations in recent world history: Mahatma Gandhi (India 1948), Patrice Lumumba (Zaire 1961), Martin Luther King, Jr. (USA 1968), Salvador Allende (Chile, 1973), Maurice Bishop (Grenada, 1983). Name other political assassinations that occurred in the 20th century.
- What were the leaders' political beliefs? Why were their beliefs controversial?
- What were the circumstances of the assassinations and who were the culprits? Were they brought to justice?

Discussion Questions

- What was meant by the phrase "ideological mildew" during the seminar at the opening of the film? Where do you think the film takes place? Why? How does the director's use of flashbacks influence your feelings about

the characters in the film? What were the motivations behind the photojournalist's investigation of the murder? What happened as a consequence of the assassination?

- What is the meaning behind the letter "Z"?
- Is this a "fair and balanced" view of the events or does the director deliberately color them to reflect only his viewpoint?