Raising Arizona
20th Century Fox, 1987

Cast
H.I. “Hi” McDonough* ______________ Nicholas Cage
Edwina “Ed” McDonough* ______________ Holly Hunter
Nathan Arizona (Sr.) ___________________ Trey Wilson
Gale Snoats (escaped convict) ____________ John Goodman
Evelle Snoats (escaped convict) ____________ William Forsythe
Glen (Hi’s foreman) ______________________ Sam McMurray
Dot (Glen’s wife) _________________________ Frances McDormand
Leonard Smalls, a.k.a. “The Lone Biker of the Apocalypse”
(bounty hunter on motorcycle) ____________ Randall “Tex” Cobb
Nathan Jr. (infant) ________________________ T.J. Kuhn, Jr.

* = pronounced “mick-DUH-nuh”

Screenplay Ethan Coen and Joel Coen
Director Joel Coen
Cinematography Barry Sonnenfeld
Editor Michael R. Miller
Sound Skip Lievsay
Music Carter Burwell
Special Effects Peter Chesney
Art Direction Harold Thrasher
Costumes Richard Hornung
Makeup Katherine James-Cosburn

The Coen brothers are known for their off-beat filmmaking style; their other films include O Brother, Where Art Thou?, The Man Who Wasn’t There, Barton Fink, The Big Lebowski, and Fargo. Their films are frequently humorous despite (or because of) characters that take themselves very seriously.

They also often feature “lower-class” characters who speak eloquently, with highly intellectual and cultural vocabularies. For example –
--When Hi and Ed are told that Ed is infertile, Hi describes it this way: “The doctor told us that Ed’s insides were a rocky place where my seed could find no purchase.”
--When Hi is asking to hold the baby, Ed warns him, “Watch his little fontanel.”
--When Gale is trying to show Hi to a way out of his problems, he says, “I’d rather light a candle than curse your darkness.”

The questions concern everything we’ve studied so far, including The Ten Areas, with a specific focus on the literary elements of film. Overall, consider how the film and the screenplay establish the plot, setting and characterizations.
The Assignment

Answer the following questions on your own paper in complete sentences, blue or black ink.

1. Several shots and scenes are repeated in the opening sequence of Hi in prison. Why have they been edited together to be so repetitious?

2. How are the set design, costumes and lighting different in prison than they are in the free world? Give specific examples of each.

3. At the parole hearings, what’s the effect of placing Hi alone on one side of the screen and the parole officers on the other, all in profile? How does the table help establish this?

4. How do the costumes, hair and makeup of Ed and Hi show their characters, and how do they contrast each other? (Especially during the mug shot scenes)

5. During Hi’s dream about the “The Lone Biker Of The Apocalypse,” what does this montage establish about Leonard Small’s character (consider actions, mise en scène, costume, makeup and music)? Why do we keep cutting back to Hi having the dream?

6. When Hi is being chased after robbing the convenience store, all the subplots are covered in the parallel editing. I can’t think of a good question for this, so just write, “Yes, Mr. Shanley, I noticed and appreciate the parallel editing of this particular sequence.”

7. During Hi’s fight with Gale, what do we learn about Hi, Gale and Evelle?

8. What is the overall effect of the primary music, the banjo-yodeling theme? Why do we occasionally hear Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” melody in it?

9. Explain the irony of two of the following:
   • After kidnapping Nathan, Jr., Ed says she is scared of raising a child
   • Authority-defying Gale and Evelle often quote Dr. Schwartz (their psychologist)
   • “Or my name ain’t Nathan Arizona,” said Nathan Arizona, Sr.
   • Ed says to Gale and Evelle “We’re havin’ some decent friends over.” She’s referring to Glen, Dot and their kids
   • Glen’s Polack jokes, calling them stupid (especially the one he tells wrong)

10. What does the Dr. Spock’s Guide to Parenting book symbolize? (Consider who takes it, when, and why – and who doesn’t take it)


12. Explain the irony of how the characters talk, using examples from the “Screenplay Excerpts” handout. What effect does the ironic dialogue have on the characters and the story?

13. Raising Arizona uses both mimesis and diegesis to tell the story. Give one example for each.
Excerpts from the *Raising Arizona* screenplay, by Joel and Ethan Coen

**PAROLE BOARD ROOM**
CHAIRMAN: Got a name for people like you, Hi. That name is called recidivism.
SECOND MAN: Ree-peat O-fender.
CHAIRMAN: Not a pretty name, is it, Hi?
HI: No Sir, it sure ain't. That's one bonehead name. But that ain't me anymore.
CHAIRMAN: You're not just tellin' us what we wanna hear?
HI: No Sir, no way.
SECOND MAN: 'Cause we just wanna hear the truth.
HI: Well then I guess I am tellin' you what you wanna hear.
CHAIRMAN: Boy, didn't we just tell you not to do that?
HI: Yes Sir.
CHAIRMAN: Okay then.

HI: He explained that Ed’s insides were a rocky place where my seed could find no purchase.

HI: But biology and the prejudices of others conspired to keep us childless.

NATHAN SR.: Hell, that's your forte, trackin' down them microbes left by criminals'n commies'n s***! That's yer whole damn *raison d'être!* (French for “reason for being”)

ED: You mean you busted out of jail!!
GALE: Well ...
EVELLE: We released ourselves on our own recognizance.
GALE: What Evelle means to say is, we felt the institution no longer had anything to offer us.

*(He is looking at the baby)*. ... My Lord he's cute.

HI: That night I had a dream .... I'd drifted off thinkin' about happiness, birth, and new life ... but now I was haunted by a vision of -- He was horrible ... a lone biker of the apocalypse ... a man with all the powers of hell at his command. ... He could turn the day into night . . . and laid to waste everything in his path. He was especially hard on the little things . . . the helpless and the gentle creatures. He left a scorched earth in his wake, befouling even the sweet desert breeze that whipped across his brow. I didn't know where he came from or why . . . I didn't know if he was dream or vision . . . But I feared that I myself had unleashed him ... for he was The Fury That Would Be ... as soon as Florence Arizona found her little Nathan gone.

ED (to GALE AND EVELLE): You two are leaving. Tomorrow morning. Now I got nothing against you personally, but you're wanted by the authorities and you're a bad influence in this household, in my opinion.
GALE: Well ma'am ... we sure didn't mean to influence anyone.
EVELLE: And if we did, we apologize.
ED: I'm goin' in to town tomorrow to see about some shots for the baby. When I come back you better be gone or I'll kick you out myself.

*She storms into the bedroom and slams the door. There is an awkward silence as GALE studies his thumb and EVELLE stares at the ceiling. Finally EVELLE turns to Hi.*

EVELLE: ... What's he need, his dip-tet?

GALE: And as per usual, I wouldn't be surprised if the source of the marital friction weren't financial.
HI: Well, matter of fact, I did lose my job today --
EVELLE: Come on Hi. You're young, you got your health -- what do you want with a job?
GALE: But look, I'd rather light a candle than curse your darkness. As you know, Evelle'n I never go anywhere without there's a purpose ... and here we are in your little domicile. We come to invite you in on a score.
HI: My dearest Edwinna. Tonight as you and Nathan slumber, my heart is filled with anguish ... I hope that you will both understand, and forgive me for what I have decided I must do. By the time you read this, I will be gone.

I will never be the man that you want me to be, the husband and father that you and Nathan deserve. Maybe it's my upbringing; maybe it's just that my genes got screwed up -- I don't know ... But the events of the last day have showed, amply, that I don't have the strength of character to raise up a family in the manner befitting a responsible adult, and not like the wild man from Borneo . . . I say all this to my shame.

I will love you always, truly and deeply. But I fear that if I stay I would only bring bad trouble ... on the heads of you and Nathan Jr.

I feel the thunder gathering even now; if I leave, hopefully, it will leave with me. I cannot tarry ... Better I should go, send you money, and let you curse my name. Your loving ... Herbert.

GALE: All right you hayseeds, it's a stick-up! Everbody freeze! Everbody down on the ground!

Everyone freezes, staring at GALE and EVELLE. An OLD HAYSEED with his hands in the air speaks up:

HAYSEED: Well which is it young fella? You want I should freeze or get down on the ground? Mean to say, iffen I freeze, I can't rightly drop. And iffen I drop, I'm a gonna be in motion. Ya see--

GALE: SHUTUP!

HAYSEED: (Promptly) Yessir.

GALE: Everone down on the ground!

EVELLE: Y'all can just forget that part about freezin'.

GALE: That is until they get down there.

EVELLE: Y'all hear that?

GALE: Wanna fill that sack, pardner? We got – s***! (He, is looking in shock at the tellers' counter.)... Where'd all the tellers go?

VOICES: (muffled voices from offscreen) We're down here, sir.

EVELLE: They're down on the ground like you commanded, Gale.

GALE: I told you not to use m'damn name! Can't you even try to keep from forget' that?!

EVELLE: (momentarily abashed, but then brightens) Not even yer code name?

GALE: (GALE registers understanding) Oh yeah ... m'code name.

EVELLE: Y'all hear that? We usin' code names.

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HI: That night I had a dream ... I dreamt I was as light as the ether, a floating spirit visiting things to come... The shades and shadows of the people in my life wrestled their way into my slumber.

I dreamt that Gale and Evelle had decided to return to prison... Probably that's just as well. I don't mean to sound superior, and they're a swell couple guys, but ... maybe they weren't ready yet to come out into the world. And then I dreamed on, into the future, to a Christmas morn in the Arizona home ...where Nathan Jr. was opening a present from a kindly couple who preferred to remain unknown.

I saw Glen, a few years later, still havin' no luck gettin' the cops to listen to his wild tales about me'n Ed . . . Maybe he threw in one Pollack joke too many ... I don't know.

And still I dreamed on ... further into the future than I'd ever dreamed before ... Watching Nathan Jr.'s progress from afar ... Taking pride in his accomplishments as if he were our own ... Wondering if he ever thought of us ... and hoping that maybe we'd broadened his horizons a little, even if he couldn't remember just how they'd got broadened. But still I hadn't dreamt nothin' about me'n Ed. Until the end ... And this was cloudier 'cause it was years, years away ... But I saw an old couple bein' visited by their children -- and all their grandchildren too. And the old couple wasn't screwed up, and neither were their kids or their grandkids. And I don't know, you tell me. This whole dream, was it wishful thinking? Was I just fleein' reality, like I know I'm liable to do? But me'n Ed, we can be good too ... And it seemed real. It seemed like us. And it seemed like well ... our home . . . If not Arizona, then a land, not too far away, where all parents are strong and wise and capable, and all children are happy and beloved... I dunno, maybe it was Utah.