

Sample Student Worksheet

SCIENTIFIC METHOD	APPLICATION TO <i>INCEPTION</i>
Asking the Research Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might one know whether Cobb is awake at the end of <i>Inception</i>?
Identifying Relevant Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every dreamer must have a totem. A totem is an object that lets one know the difference between reality and a dream. • At the beginning the audience is shown a totem, a top. In the dream world the top spins and spins. But in reality the top stops spinning.
Formulating a Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H1: If the top does not fall then Cobb is dreaming. • H2: If the top falls then Cobb is awake.
Collecting Information/Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early in the film Cobb spins the top twice and it falls. It happens once in the hotel room after he wakes up from a dream to “extract” information from Saito. It happens again in the warehouse after he wakes up from the shared dream with Ariadne. • In Mombasa when Cobb wakes up from a dream in Yusuf’s lab and tries to spin the top Saito interrupts him. The audience never sees Cobb properly spin the top and therefore, can’t be certain if he has awakened. • Later in the film Cobb reveals that the top actually belonged to his dead wife Mal. It was her totem to distinguish the dream world from reality when she was alive.
Testing the Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H1 is supported. • At the end of the movie when Cobb spins the top it does not fall. • However, because the movie fades out before the top falls, the audience cannot be certain if Cobb is dreaming. • In addition, doubt is cast because the top is not Cobb’s totem. • Whether the top falls or spins is irrelevant.
Working with the Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H3: If the totem belongs to Mal then there is <i>no way</i> to determine whether Cobb is awake or dreaming.
Reconsidering the Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the audience doesn’t know Cobb’s totem it is difficult to determine whether he is dreaming or awake. • Perhaps Cobb’s wedding ring is his totem. • Or reality for Cobb is choosing to see his children. • The movie starts with Cobb and Saito in limbo before the inception heist. In limbo Cobb wears a wedding ring but can’t see his children’s faces. • That limbo scene is also the penultimate one prior to Cobb awakening on the plane without a ring and arriving home to see his children’s faces. • The dialogue between Cobb and Saito in limbo repeats throughout the movie: “take a leap of faith...” “become an old man...” “waiting to die alone...” “filled with regret.” But each time it repeats Cobb and Saito switch verses. • This suggests that perhaps the entire movie is a recurring dream.
Asking New Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does one know that in <i>Inception</i> the entire movie is not a dream? • How does one know that in <i>Inception</i> the entire movie is a dream?