

Dreams According to Sigmund Freud

Cast of characters:

Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Mrs. Goldstein, Mr. Dassler,
Mrs. Kaplan, Narrator

Narrator: The year is 1900. Sigmund Freud, aged 44, has just published his landmark book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He considered his book to be a psychological breakthrough. In many ways, it is. For the first time in history, someone has attempted to carefully study dreams from a psychological point of view, to understand why we dream, and what they might mean.

For a number of years, sales of the book are very slow. But over time, the book becomes extremely influential. Over the coming decades, thousands of young psychoanalysts will buy the book and begin to focus on dreams as an essential part of understanding the human personality. Even over 110 years later, Freud's book can be found in the psychology section of bookstores all around the world.

When we meet him today, he is sitting in the study of his home in Vienna, Austria, when he hears on knock on his door. It's a 25-year-old psychiatrist from Switzerland named Carl Jung.

Carl Jung: Excuse, me, Dr. Freud?

Sigmund Freud: Hello, you must be Dr. Jung.

Jung: Yes. It is a pleasure to meet you Dr. Freud.

Freud: I hope the train ride from Switzerland wasn't too long.

Jung: It was fine, thank you. As I wrote in my last letter to you, I have come to talk about the book you have just published. I just finished it and it is brilliant.

Freud: Thank you, Dr. Jung. I am glad you liked it.

Jung: You have really given me and other psychiatrists the information we need to use dreams as part of psychoanalysis.

I have a question for you. How did you come to your understanding of dreams in the first place?

Freud: Well, ever since I was a small boy, I have been interested in dreams. I even kept a dream journal. Later on, when I came to study psychology, I had dreams that puzzled me and

I was determined to find out what they meant. As I analyzed my own dreams and those of my patients, I came to my discovery.

Narrator: As he reads his and his patients' dreams over and over, he begins to interpret them, finding what he believed was their true meaning. Freud is convinced that he has discovered the secret shared by all dreams.

Freud: I guess the most important thing I have discovered about dreams is that dreams are wishes that want to be fulfilled.

I believe that dreams are wishes that have been kept away from your conscious mind. The mind tries to hide away certain embarrassing, disgusting, cruel, unpleasant, self-centered things...things that are in all of our minds and which we hold back. They are forced into the unconscious.

Jung: But why are they forced into the unconscious?

Freud: Because if we were aware of these unpleasant things, they would give us all sorts of emotional problems. Like anxiety and depression. Maybe even psychosis.

Interpreting dreams is a way of uncovering some of this, if you know how to do it. When a patient learns the true meaning of his dreams—from the unconscious mind—his psychological life will be much healthier. And his symptoms may be relieved.

Jung: So let me see if I understand. You say that the reason for every dream is some kind of unacceptable wish. In sleep, all those forbidden wishes, fantasies, and desires often become part of our dreams. But in dreams, these wishes aren't always obvious. The mind disguises them the true meaning and that's why the dreams have to be interpreted.

Freud: Yes, that's exactly what I hoped people would get from the book.

Jung: You also say that dreams take place in two layers. That was interesting.

Freud: Yes, you are talking about the manifest content and the latent content of a dream. The *manifest content* is the part of the dream that you can remember when you wake up. It's the "story" of the dream.

But, we can only get so much information from just hearing a patient describe what

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- went on in their dream. What I am really interested in is the *latent content*. “Latent” means “hidden,” and the latent content is the dream’s hidden meaning. And we use the methods of psychoanalysis to find this meaning.
- Jung: Yes, and you said in the book that dreams are symbolic—many of the things we remember from a dream, the manifest content, really stand for something else, the latent content. Can you give me an example of a dream that you have interpreted?
- Freud: Sure. I recently had a young man as a patient who had recently become engaged. He described a dream he had where he was walking down the church aisle with his fiancée. Suddenly, she became a two-headed monster that swallowed him.
- We discovered that the two-headed monster was actually a symbol for her parents, who he believes is interfering with their wedding plans. As you could probably guess, this patient doesn’t get along with her parents and he is afraid of being “swallowed up” by them, or at least really bothered by their interference.
- Jung: Well, that was a good example, but where does the information in a dream come from? How does it work?
- Freud: I have learned that recent events can have a big effect on what a person dreams about. Especially events from that same day. You know, like being made angry at work. Often, a person will gain “revenge” that night in a dream.
- Jung: A wish fulfillment, in other words!
- Freud: Yes, you’ve got it. And your mind plays all kinds of tricks to hide the real meaning of a dream. I call this process *dreamwork*.
- Jung: Could you explain dreamwork to me?
- Freud: There are many forms of dreamwork that I have seen in my patients. A very common type is something that I call *condensation*. To “condense” something means to make it smaller. Well, in dreams, many different ideas from your waking life can be *blended* together in a dream. Often, a person or place in a dream can represent several people or places. Like when you have a dream about your brother, but in the dream he has someone else’s face. That’s condensation.
- I also have found that some important person or event in a person’s life can be represented by some recent but unimportant memory. I call this kind of dream work *displacement*. Psychoanalysis can figure out the links between the important and the unimportant details.
- Jung: But why does everything have to be symbolic? Why can’t the dream be about what is *really* bothering you? Why does it have to be so indirect and mysterious?
- Freud: Actually, sometimes our dreams aren’t completely symbolic. For example, say you have a dream about getting a new car. Now, sometimes that car might actually represent your unconscious desire for independence. But sometimes a car is just a car.
- When dreamwork hides the true meaning, I believe this is because if you were aware of the true meaning in the dream, the anxiety would wake you up. Our minds have a “censor” that protects us from this anxiety by disguising the meaning, and this helps us get the sleep we need. Does that explanation help?
- Jung: Yes, it’s becoming clearer to me now. But I wish I could see you in action and see how you interpret dreams in real life.
- Freud: Well, it’s your lucky day Dr. Jung. I am seeing some patients very shortly. Maybe you could stay and listen in on the sessions. I am sure my patients wouldn’t mind.
- Narrator: And so Carl Jung goes into the next room and listens to Freud with his first patient, Mrs. Goldstein.
- [Mrs. Goldstein enters.]
- Freud: Hello, Mrs. Goldstein.
- Mrs. Goldstein: Dr. Freud, you’re always telling me that a dream is a fulfilled wish. Well, I’ll tell you about a dream I had where the subject was the exact opposite. It was a dream where one of my wishes was not fulfilled!
- Freud: Well, what was the dream?
- Mrs. Goldstein: OK, I wanted to have a dinner party, but I had no food in the house. I thought I would go

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buy some, but I remembered that it was Sunday, and all the stores were closed. Then I tried to call some caterers, but my telephone wasn't working so I had to give up on the dinner party.

Doesn't my dream look like the reverse of wish fulfillment? I think we need to analyze this dream Dr. Freud.

Freud: As you know, recent events in life are what give rise to our dreams.

Mrs. Goldstein: Hmm. The day before, I had visited a lady friend whom I think my husband kind of admires. She is very, very thin, and fortunately, my husband doesn't like women like that, he prefers normal-sized women like me.

Then I think she said she wanted to gain weight—she said, "When are you going to invite us over for dinner again? You always make such great food."

I said, "Yeah, right! I am supposed to invite you over for a good meal so you can put on weight and be more appealing to my husband? I would rather stop having dinner parties!"

Freud: Hmm. Very interesting. So you see, this dream is a disguised fulfillment of a wish after all.

Mrs. Goldstein: What do you mean Dr. Freud?

Freud: Just think about it for a moment.

[Mr. Doyle enters.]

Narrator: Next, we turn to Mr. Dassler, a patient who may have some secrets even he doesn't know about.

Mr. Dassler: I keep having these dreams where I am playing cards. What does that mean Dr. Freud?

Freud: Well, by now you should know that a tiny piece of information like that doesn't give me much to work with. Continue...

Mr. Dassler: OK. Usually I am playing with a few friends. Now, whenever I play any sort of game in real life, I am a real stickler for the rules. I would rather lose fairly than win by cheating.

Freud: Well, well...go on.

Mr. Dassler: But in these dreams, I am always hiding cards under the table. And all the while, I am terribly frightened. And I am always wearing a mask of some sort.

Freud: You say you are frightened in these dreams. Why are you afraid?

Mr. Dassler: I am frightened that someone will see what I am doing and tell everyone at the table that I am a fraud.

Freud: In one of our recent sessions, you mentioned that you have been paying special attention to your friend's wife.

Mr. Dassler: Yes, of course. My friend Fritz. He has been working overseas for some months. He asked me to look after his wife and to see if she has everything she needs while he is away. So I have been doing some gardening for her and helping her by taking her into town when she needs to shop.

Freud: You are very fond of her.

Mr. Dassler: She is a wonderful person.

Freud: And perhaps...

Mr. Dassler: What are you hinting at Dr. Freud?

Freud: Well, it's more what *you* have been hinting at. Actually, you haven't just hinted at it, you've spelled it out in big letters.

You love your wife, right?

Mr. Dassler: Yes, of course I do.

Freud: And you would do nothing to hurt her?

Mr. Dassler: Never.

Freud: And you believe she would be devastated if she discovered that you were...

Mr. Dassler: [Angrily] That I was what?

Freud: Seeing another woman!

Mr. Dassler: Oh no! Is that what my dreams are about? Now it makes sense. In my dreams, I cheat in the card games because I have an unconscious desire to cheat on my wife! And if I were caught...I would never be able to face her. And *that's* why I am wearing a mask in these dreams!

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Freud: Yes, I think you've hit the nail on the head. As usual, with a little help from me, of course. OK, our time is up.

Narrator: We now move to Freud's final patient, Mrs. Kaplan.

Mrs. Kaplan: ...I had this strange dream where I was strangling a little white dog.

Freud: Don't you like dogs?

Mrs. Kaplan: Yes, I do, I don't know why I had this dream.

Freud: Is there anyone you've been angry or fighting with, except for small dogs?

Mrs. Kaplan: Not really. Well...my horrible sister-in-law, maybe.

Freud: Ah ha!

Mrs. Kaplan: In fact, now that I think about it, we had an awful argument a while back. I shouted, "I don't want a dog in my house!"

Freud: I wonder if she is short and pale by any chance?

Mrs. Kaplan: Yes, I guess you're right.

[Mrs. Kaplan leaves.]

Freud: Did you hear that Dr. Jung?

Jung: Yes I did. I think I get it now.

[Freud escorts Jung to the door leading to the street.]

Freud: Good. Have a nice trip back to Switzerland.

Jung: But...

[The door closes in his face. Muffled sounds of Dr. Jung mumbling angrily are heard through the door. Freud sits in his study, waiting for his next patient.]