

# **Rain Man Film Summary**

## **Rain Man by Barry Levinson**

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## Context

*Rain Man* is the story of two brothers who meet after the death of their father. The younger brother, Charlie, is a money-minded machine who is angry that he didn't get all of his father's inheritance for himself. His older brother, Raymond, is an autistic savant who is brilliant but cannot live on his own. In order to get Raymond's portion of the inheritance, Charlie decides to kidnap Raymond from the institution where he has been living for many years.

Charlie and Raymond travel across the United States from Cincinnati to Los Angeles in their father's old Buick Roadmaster. As the two get to know one another, they finally become true brothers. For Charlie, this moment comes when he realizes that he remembers Raymond as the "Rain Man" of his childhood. Charlie's transformation begins from that moment, and he cares less about money and more about his brother.

Barry Levinson was already a writer and director in Hollywood by the time he directed *Rain Man*. His major debut as a director was the previous year, in 1987, when he directed *Good Morning, Vietnam*, a Vietnam War story starring Robin Williams. Levinson had actually been offered *Rain Man* earlier but had decided to work on *Good Morning, Vietnam* first. After other directors such as Steven Spielberg left the production, Levinson agreed to come back to work on it.

According to reports, the screenplay for *Rain Man* was first written for Dennis and Randy Quaid. However, those actors either chose not to take the parts or were not offered them in the end. Dustin Hoffman was also originally offered the part of Charlie Babbitt, but after visiting with a savant, he insisted on taking the role of Raymond. He thought Bill Murray would make a great Charlie, but this never panned out either.

By the time Hoffman starred in *Rain Man*, he had already made a name for himself in dozens of movies such as *Alfredo, Alfredo* (1972), *Papillon* (1973), *All the President's Men* (1976), and *Tootsie* (1982). After playing such diverse characters in both drama and comedy, Hoffman took on one of the best roles of his career by playing Raymond Babbitt.

Tom Cruise was also a big name star by this time as well. He had made his major debut in *Legend* (1985) before becoming the shining star in movies such as *Top Gun* (1986), *The Color of Money* (1986), and *Cocktail* (1988). Cruise was known for his powerful performances as a hot, young businessman, and the role of Charlie Babbitt seemed made just for him.

*Rain Man* racked up awards in 1988. The picture won two Golden Globes for Best Motion Picture - Drama and Best Actor for Dustin Hoffman. Additionally, the film won Oscars for the Best Actor in a Leading Role for Dustin Hoffman, Best Director for Barry Levinson, Best Picture for Mark Johnson, and Best Writing for Ronald Bass and Barry Morrow.



# Summary and Analysis

*Rain Man* opens with Charlie Babbitt looking over a nice, brand-new Lamborghini. Charlie owns a collectible car company that is in financial trouble because of governmental rules. His secretary/girlfriend, Susanna, is stressed out, but Charlie keeps trying to keep the collectible buyers interested. Charlie and Susanna leave to go to Palm Springs to make a deal.

On the road, Susanna asks Charlie to talk to her since they're going away together for a few days. Charlie's phone rings, and his assistant tells Charlie that his father just died. The funeral is the next day in Cincinnati, and Charlie decides to go to the funeral. Although he hadn't talked to his father in years, Charlie feels compelled to attend. Susanna insists on going with him on the trip. The next day at the funeral, Charlie stands apart from the group, watching, while Susanna waits in the car. He has to meet with his father's lawyer that night to go over the details of the will.

Charlie and Susanna go to his father's house and look at his father's 1949 Buick Roadmaster that Charlie was only allowed to drive once. Susanna accuses Charlie of being overly dramatic about his father. Charlie is convinced that his father had something against him. Even when Charlie did well, his father never seemed to be proud of him. When Charlie was young and stole his father's car, his father left him in jail for two days to suffer. Charlie never talked to his father again. He also tells Susanna that the Rain Man, his imaginary friend, came to sing to him that night.

That night, Charlie receives a letter from his father forgiving him for losing contact with him. As his inheritance, Charlie receives the Buick and the title to his father's prize-winning rosebushes. The rest of his father's estate is going into a trust fund for a beneficiary named in the document. The lawyer cannot tell Charlie who the beneficiary is. Although Charlie is terribly upset that he receives no money, he is not surprised that he has been done yet another wrong by his father.

The next day, Charlie takes the Buick and visits the bank to find out about the trust fund. They learn the unnamed beneficiary is at an institution named Walbrook. Charlie and Susanna pull up to Walbrook to meet with the head person there. As they wait, Charlie and Susanna see many children and adults watching television silently and eating dinner together. Charlie meets with the head of the hospital, but he refuses to give Charlie any information.

Down at the car, Raymond Babbitt gets into the car with Susanna. He tells her that his father owns the car and lets him drive it once a week on Saturdays. Charlie realizes that only someone who knew the car well would know that the leather had been changed over the years. Raymond tells Charlie that his father was Mr. Babbitt and that his address is the same as Charlie's. Mr. Bruner, the head of the hospital, comes outside and reveals to Charlie that Raymond is his brother - a brother Charlie never even knew about.



Bruner explains to Charlie that Raymond is an autistic savant. Raymond processes sensory input differently than other people, but he is an extremely brilliant man. Raymond uses rituals and routines to keep himself safe. Charlie realizes that Raymond is three years older than him. Charlie is terribly upset that he has not known his brother all these years, but he is also upset that Raymond just got \$3 million and can't understand money. Raymond watches television and does Abbot and Costello's "Who's on First?" to help him deal with his nervousness about Charlie and Susanna being in the room. Vern, Raymond's caretaker, explains that Raymond can read and remember anything he reads. Vern helps to calm Raymond, calling him his "main man."

Vern explains to Charlie and Susanna that people are not Raymond's first priority. Charlie asks Raymond to go on a walk with him so he can see the hospital. Charlie convinces Susanna to wait for Charlie in the car at the gate. He tries to tell her that the car bothers Raymond, but Charlie has actually decided to sneak Raymond into the car so they can go on a little trip. Charlie tells Raymond that their father died, and he asks him if he wants to see him at the cemetery. He also invites Raymond to come to Los Angeles with him sometime soon. They decide to go to Los Angeles for the Dodgers game on Wednesday, but Raymond reminds Charlie that he can't be off the property for more than two hours. Vern watches from the front of the hospital as the two make their way down the road and drive off in the car with Susanna.

Charlie, Raymond, and Susanna find a hotel to stay at, but Raymond is very out of sorts at being in a new place. Raymond does not know how to function without his general routines. They give Raymond a phone book to read, and then Susanna begins to question whether the head of the hospital actually suggested this idea, as Charlie keeps claiming. Charlie tries to call the lawyer, but he's not in. Raymond and Susanna watch *Wheel of Fortune*, and Raymond begins to quote the opening lines. While Charlie orders dinner, Raymond and Susanna settle in to watch some television. In the middle of the night, we see Raymond reading the phone book by the flashlight. He hears a strange noise in the other room and goes to investigate. When he walks in on Charlie and Susanna having sex, Raymond begins to mimic their noises while sitting on the edge of the bed watching television. Charlie kicks Raymond out of the room and becomes very angry with him.

Susanna tells Charlie that he should be kinder to Raymond, because Raymond does not understand where he is. She realizes that Bruner did not tell Charlie to take Raymond, but Charlie says he is going to keep Raymond until he gets the half of the money he thinks he deserves. Susanna leaves in the middle of the night, because she is tired of Charlie using people, including her and Raymond, all the time.

At a restaurant the next day, Raymond makes a list of the serious injuries that are made against him by Charlie. Charlie calls Dr. Bruner, who warns him that Raymond must come back. Bruner explains that he cannot give Charlie the money, but Raymond needs to be there to get the best care. Charlie is totally focused on getting his share of the money, not caring who he hurts in the process. Charlie discovers the depths of Raymond's brilliance when Raymond looks at a pile of spilled toothpicks and immediately knows exactly how many were in the box and how many were on the floor.



Charlie and Raymond get back on the road. Charlie calls his office and finds that his business is in trouble. He tries to get Raymond on a plane, but Raymond is afraid of flying because he knows about all the dangers of the different airlines. Raymond references crashes incurred by every major airline available. Charlie becomes angry at Raymond, but he finally realizes that they will simply have to drive to Los Angeles.

While stuck in traffic because of a wreck later that evening, Raymond becomes very upset when he sees cop lights everywhere. Charlie has to get Raymond back into the car, but Raymond keeps trying to wander off. Finally, Charlie gets the car off the road and stops to talk to Raymond. Raymond does not want to be on the highway anymore, so he agrees to walk in front of the car until they can get off at the exit onto a less dangerous highway. As he walks, Raymond quotes "Who's on First?" Charlie decides that they have to drive all night so he can get back to his business, but Raymond insists that they stop somewhere for the night.

The next day it rains, and Raymond explains that he doesn't go out when it rains. Charlie tries to work from the hotel, but he has trouble getting anything done while stuck in the middle of nowhere. Charlie tries to get legal advice so he can get custody of Raymond and the money that he inherited. He also calls the office to find out about Susanna, who has still not returned. Raymond's routines and rituals are gone, so he continues have trouble functioning, causing Charlie additional frustration.

In a small town, Charlie stops to look for a psychologist to talk about Raymond. However, as he is on the phone, he discovers that Raymond has wandered off from the car. Raymond almost gets run over when he stops at a "Don't Walk" sign, and we see his complete inability to get along in the real world. As cars honk at him, a man tries to help him. Charlie comes to his rescue, and they visit a psychologist. The psychologist explains to Charlie that Raymond is actually brilliant but cannot understand the way other people deal with life.

One day on the road, Raymond is desperate to see *Judge Wapner*, and Charlie finally stops at a lone house in the country and begs a woman to let them watch the show. That evening, Raymond says that Charlie said, "Funny, Rain Man." Charlie finally realizes that Raymond is the Rain Man of his childhood memories. Raymond also shows Charlie a picture of them as children. Raymond still distinctly remembers the day he left home after their mother died. He even remembers Charlie waving goodbye to him as he left. Charlie tries to remember the song of his Rain Man, and Raymond begins singing it for him. The two finally connect as brothers.

As Raymond and Charlie talk, Charlie runs the water in the tub and Raymond begins to scream. Raymond remembers hot water accidentally burning Charlie as a child, and he totally loses it. Raymond pats Charlie's head as he realizes that he is now safe. Charlie finally realizes that his father put Raymond in the institution because they were afraid that Raymond would accidentally hurt him. At this moment, Charlie finally begins to care for his brother. Charlie calls Susanna that night because he is afraid that it's over between them and he wants to make things right.



Charlie finds out the next day that if he does not quickly come up with \$80,000, his company will be out of business. As they drive, Charlie begins to put sunscreen on Raymond so they can keep the top down like Raymond wants. The brothers finally arrive in Las Vegas on the last leg of their trip home. After arriving at Caesar's Palace, Raymond and Charlie get all dressed up and hit the casino. Raymond's ability to remember numbers allows them to make a fortune at the tables, and Charlie is able to win enough money to keep his company. Additionally, they get a high roller's suite. Charlie tells Raymond to stay where he is while Charlie goes to the bar, but a woman comes over to try to seduce him. Raymond is totally clueless, but Charlie stays close by. The woman finally leaves, and Charlie and Raymond go up to their room.

Charlie apologizes to Raymond for the way he treated him about the money. Raymond has a date with Iris for dancing later, and Charlie tells him that he needs to learn to dance. Charlie ends up teaching Raymond how to dance that very night, and they begin to become friends. Later in the evening, Susanna shows up at the hotel, and she and Charlie reunite.

Charlie, Susanna, and Raymond finally make it to Los Angeles. Because of their winnings at the casino, Charlie is able to keep his business open. Dr. Bruner offers Charlie \$250,000 to return Raymond so that he can be in a safe, comfortable environment. However, Charlie and Raymond have made a connection along the road, and Charlie does not care about the money anymore. Raymond returns to Walbrook, where he will be well cared for and safe while Charlie can visit his long-lost brother any time he wants.



# Characters

## Raymond Babbitt, played by Dustin Hoffman

### Description

Raymond Babbitt is the older brother of Charlie Babbitt. Raymond remembers Charlie even though Charlie was too young to remember when Raymond left their home. For years, Raymond has been living at Walbrook Hospital after he accidentally burned Charlie with hot water after their mother's death. He is an idiot savant - a type of autistic person. Raymond is very talented with counting and numbers, but he has no way to cope with the normal things of life. He recites Abbott and Costello's "Who's on First?" every time he gets nervous. He cannot stand to have his routines changed or his stuff touched.

Raymond lives a cloistered life at Walbrook, seeing his father only on the weekends until Charlie appears. After the death of their father, Raymond inherits \$3 million, and Charlie finds out about his existence. Charlie steals Raymond, and the two brothers begin to get to know one another. Raymond sees a different side of life during this time, but he cannot cope in that reality permanently due to his condition. Eventually, he must return to Walbrook so that he can function safely in his world.

### Analysis

Raymond is an amazing man with many talents. His penchant for reading and remembering things is unbelievable. He can literally read any book and remember everything he read; however, he may not be able to tell whether or not he read the book. Raymond's whole life was changed after he accidentally burned the baby Charlie with hot water. Until then, Raymond had enjoyed Charlie's presence, and Charlie had lovingly called him the "Rain Man."

Raymond's way of living is completely incompatible with the way the rest of the world lives. He is not very concerned about people, but we do find it sad that he has had to sacrifice a relationship with his brother because of his condition. Raymond is a happy man, still on the level of a child in many ways because of his need to be cared for in the most basic ways. Even Raymond's brilliance cannot help him to function like others.

## Charlie Babbitt, played by Tom Cruise

### Description

Charlie Babbitt is a selfish, hard-working young man. Charlie owns his own business buying and selling antique cars. He first learned to love cars from his father, but after a major falling out years before the two quit speaking. Charlie never forgave his father for





having him arrested for stealing his father's favorite car, the Buick Roadmaster. His father left him in jail for two days to teach him a lesson, and Charlie then left and never returned home.

Charlie is shocked to learn that his only inheritance from his father is the Buick Roadmaster and his father's prize rose bushes. He becomes angry when he discovers that \$3 million was left to an unnamed beneficiary and he seeks to set things straight. Charlie does not remember Raymond and is shocked to discover that he has a brother. As they make their trip across country, Charlie begins to see what he has been missing.

## Analysis

Charlie is the most dynamic character in *Rain Man*. Charlie's fiery temper gets him into trouble in business just as it got him into trouble at home as a young man. Charlie's hatred for his father snowballs when he discovers that he did not get the inheritance that he expected. He decides to get what he deserves no matter what - even when that means kidnapping his older brother, Raymond.

Charlie changes as he and Raymond journey along the road to California. Charlie at first resents Raymond and his ways, but eventually he begins to realize that he remembers Raymond but only as an imaginary friend he called "Rain Man." As they travel, Charlie begins to appreciate Raymond's brilliance as well as his innocence. When Bruner finally offers Charlie \$250,000 to return Raymond to Walbrook where he will be safe, Charlie no longer cares about the money. Although he knows Raymond needs to be at Walbrook, Charlie will miss him greatly. However, he now has a relationship with his brother, and we suspect that they will see each other soon.

## Dr. Bruner, played by Jerry Molen

### Description

Dr. Bruner is the head of Walbrook Hospital. He has been there for many years, and he knows Raymond and his situation well. After Charlie discovers that the beneficiary of his father's will lives at Walbrook, he visits Dr. Bruner. Bruner refuses to give Charlie information at first, because he is committed to his patients and his promise to Charlie's father.

Bruner finally tells Charlie about Raymond and introduces the brothers. Charlie is shocked to find out that he has a brother, and Bruner tries to explain Raymond's situation to Charlie. Bruner took on the care of Raymond as a personal favor to Charlie's father, and he is committed to protecting Raymond. Throughout the film, Bruner tries to convince Charlie to return Raymond to Walbrook where he will be safe.



## **Analysis**

Dr. Bruner is a good and noble man. He has headed Walbrook Hospital successfully for many years, and he made a commitment to Charlie's father that he would watch over Raymond if anything ever happened. Bruner tries to stay true to his promise by protecting Raymond from Charlie. However, Bruner fails to stop Charlie from taking Raymond. Bruner spends the rest of the film on the phone with Charlie trying to get him to return Raymond.

Dr. Bruner shows his interest in and care for Raymond by offering Charlie \$250,000 to bring Raymond home to Walbrook. Bruner does this so that he can keep his promise to Charlie's father. He realizes that Raymond cannot function for long outside the walls of the hospital and seeks to make things right.

## **Susanna, played by Valeria Golina**

### **Description**

Susanna is Charlie's coworker and girlfriend. They are on their way to Palm Springs one weekend when Charlie gets the call about his father's death. Susanna goes with him to the funeral; however, she cannot stay along as he uses Raymond and everyone else to get what he wants. She finally returns only after Charlie has changed to a better person.

### **Analysis**

Susanna is a strong, intelligent woman. Although she has let Charlie use her in the past, she finally stands up for herself and refuses to be treated badly. She cannot protect Raymond, but Susanna does leave Charlie as a way of making her feelings about the matter clear. Finally, she returns to him when he is a better man, thanks mostly to the influence of his brother.

## **Vern, played by Michael D. Roberts**

### **Description**

Vern has been Raymond's primary caretaker for about nine years when Charlie's father dies. Vern tries to explain the situation to Charlie and Susanna while also trying to protect Raymond.

### **Analysis**

Vern is the closest person to Raymond, but he admits that Raymond probably wouldn't even notice if he were gone. Raymond's whole life is in things and routines, and people do not play a major role.



## **Lenny, played by Ralph Seymour**

### **Description**

Lenny is Charlie's faithful helper at his work. Lenny is the one who calls and tells Charlie that his father has died, and Lenny keeps Charlie's business open and running while Charlie is traveling across country with Raymond.

### **Analysis**

Lenny functions as Charlie's right-hand man at his work. Although Lenny seems to think Charlie is cocky, he has a good job and enjoys working with his boss.

## **Iris, played by Lucinda Jenney**

### **Description**

Iris is a woman whom Charlie and Raymond meet while in Las Vegas. She begins talking to Raymond, and they decide to go out dancing later that night.

### **Analysis**

Because of Iris, Raymond decides to learn how to dance and begs Charlie to teach him. The two brothers have fun and form a connection through this activity.

# Themes

## Importance of Family

As *Rain Man* begins, Charlie Babbitt is a selfish man without any real family. For years, he has avoided even speaking to his father because of one event when he was young. Charlie had stolen his father's favorite car, a Buick Roadmaster, and his father called in the car as stolen. He left Charlie in jail for two days. After this incident, Charlie left home and never looked back.

On a trip to Palm Springs with Susanna, Charlie finds out that his father has died and he is officially alone in the world. Charlie feels no regret for his father's death since they hadn't talked in years. Instead, he focuses on the substantial amount of money he lost to another beneficiary. When the lawyer reads the will, Charlie is shocked, but he has no idea of the important gift he will be getting in finding a brother.

After finding Raymond, Charlie begins to understand what he has been missing by not knowing his family. Charlie never felt a lack until he found that he was able to enjoy spending time with his brother. Charlie learns to love Raymond, and he is saddened by the years they were forced to spend apart. We see how important the relationship between the brothers becomes as Charlie decides that he no longer cares about the money but only about his brother Raymond, whom he has come to love. We learn that nothing - not money, not power - can take the place of the love of a family.

## Money Isn't Everything

Living in the materialistic American society, viewers often become caught up in all the things that money can buy. Movies show bigger and better cars and explosions, while film lovers pay more money to see more of these types of shows. The American Dream is all about materialism and wealth; however, movies such as *Rain Man* remind their viewers that money isn't everything. Money does not have the power to make people happy, just as their possessions cannot give them fulfillment.

At the beginning of the film, Charlie is convinced that selling cars and making a fortune is the most important thing in his life. He only cares about his business. He has a girlfriend named Susanna, but he seems to use even her for his own benefit. When he does not receive an inheritance he feels is deserved from his father, Charlie becomes angry and cynical, stooping to kidnapping to get his way. Eventually, Charlie learns that money can't buy him happiness and that it is not worth risking everything, especially his newfound brother. Charlie refuses money from Dr. Bruner to return Raymond to Walbrook, but he eventually realizes that the only safe place for Raymond is in the hospital. Through the journey, Charlie has learned that money isn't everything and that family is most important in his life.

## Love Breaks Through to Everyone

The barriers between people can be extremely thick sometimes. People surround themselves with walls so they do not have to let anyone in, nor do they risk being hurt. In Charlie's case, the barriers he put between himself and everyone around him were almost insurmountable. He didn't talk to his father, didn't know about his brother, and used everyone else. Susanna even leaves him because she is tired of being used by him. Charlie refuses to open up to others as well as to himself. However, during the course of the film, the barriers begin to break down in the face of love.

Charlie's barriers come crashing down in front of Raymond's innocent, charming personality. Although Raymond is frustrating and functions oddly, Charlie cannot seem to hold up against the love growing inside him for his brother. Charlie's life turns around when he realizes that Raymond is actually his imaginary childhood friend, the "Rain Man." Although Charlie can barely remember Raymond, he does remember a song they used to sing together and his heart is opened by these fond memories. Charlie and Raymond begin to bond in their own special way, and Charlie's barriers are broken down by love.

## Style and Cinematography

*Rain Man* is a film that was destined to win an Oscar. The themes of the film are so simple and so close to home that they meet the needs of all viewers. Using themes of family and love and the story of a selfish young man who discovers that he has a brilliant but troubled brother helped guarantee that *Rain Man* would be loved by audiences and critics alike.

Levinson presents his story in a simplistic style in which the viewer relates to the characters on an intimate level. Rather than have a narrator or tell parts of the story at the beginning, Levinson simply pulls the viewer along for the ride. When we meet Charlie, we know only that he is focused on money; when we leave Charlie, we see that he has grown to love his only family. When we meet Raymond, he is a subdued, reclusive autistic savant; when we leave him, he is a much-loved brother who has taught his sibling some important lessons.

The most important key to *Rain Man* is the strength of the actors. Both Cruise and Hoffman give unparalleled performances. Cruise easily takes to the role of the career-minded wise guy, but Hoffman's performance is even more telling. Hoffman, who had made a variety of movies, is able to pull off the role of Raymond, the autistic savant, with style and class. Although Raymond is different, he never seems scary or worrisome. Raymond is loving while standing at a distance. Hoffman's portrayal of Raymond's personality is really what makes the movie the classic it has become.



# Motifs

## Journey

Films tend to use the journey motif to represent the emotional progress of the characters. The physical journey symbolizes a greater emotional or mental journey that the characters make during the course of the film. *Rain Man* follows in a long line of these films that seek to show a mental and emotional journey through a physical journey. Charlie's journey begins and ends in Los Angeles; however, he is a totally different man by the time he returns. Charlie's change can be seen as the characters travel across the country in the Buick Roadmaster his father left to him in the estate. As Charlie and Raymond travel, Charlie begins to change for the better.

Charlie is shallow when we first meet him, caring only about the money he makes selling cars. Charlie has no real goals involving friends or family: he seems to just be obsessed with running his business and being successful. He meets his brother Raymond and kidnaps him to try to get his share of their father's inheritance. As he travels with Raymond across the country, however, Charlie learns important lessons about himself and about life in general. Charlie learns that his family, which now consists only of Raymond, is a priceless possession. He learns to love Raymond in spite of their different behaviors and experiences, and he treasures the experience. When Charlie finally reaches Los Angeles, the only person he really cares about is Raymond; money is no longer the primary issue in his life.

## Unknown Sibling

Surprises come in many different forms in stories and films, but they always end up changing the lives of the characters. These changes can be both positive and negative, but there is always some kind of change. Sometimes the surprise is family that the character never even knew existed. An unexpected sibling can totally change the way a character sees the world and his or her life. Charlie Babbitt finds himself in this situation after the death of his father, when he learns about a brother he never knew he had. Charlie's brother, Raymond, is an autistic savant who has lived in an institution since their mother's death when Charlie was young. Charlie initially has no memory of Raymond, but eventually he realizes that Raymond, or the "Rain Man" as he called him, was the imaginary friend that he recalled from his past.

Charlie's whole world is thrown upside down when he discovers that not only is he not his father's only beneficiary, but he's not even his only son as he thought for so long. He always felt that his father had something against him, but he never knew the burdens his father was under. His father had lost his wife, and then he sent away his oldest son so that he could raise Charlie safely and well. Charlie must come to terms with Raymond's very existence as well as his feelings toward his father for not giving him all the money and for keeping his brother a secret. Charlie's worldview must make a major



adjustment for him to take in all this information. Charlie goes through a major transformation as he gets to know his unknown sibling.

## Surprising Legacy

Everyone knows what to expect when the will is read - your parents die, and you get their money. However, sometimes in both life and film, things don't work out quite as we might have imagined. This was the case for Charlie Babbitt when the lawyer read his father's letter telling him that he received nothing but the rose bushes and the Buick Roadmaster. Charlie's father left him a letter that stated his love and sadness for their situation, but he left \$3 million to another beneficiary. Charlie is shocked by the legacy he is left by his father.

Charlie's father left him the car to try to make up for their falling out years before, and he left the rose bushes to remind Charlie to aspire to excellence. Charlie learned two things from these gifts. First, he learned to forgive his father, and second, he learned to become an excellent person with a little help from his big brother. Charlie's legacy from his father helps him to become a better man. But the most important lessons Charlie learns from his trusting and lovable brother Raymond. Charlie finally has a family to belong to even though Raymond must return to Walbrook in the end.





# Symbols

## Buick Roadmaster

The Buick Roadmaster is the symbol of everything that Charlie believes has gone wrong in his life. He and his father had a huge fight over the car when he was young, and Charlie never spoke to his father again. After his father left him in jail for several days for stealing the car, Charlie decided that their relationship was over. Charlie believes that his father gave him the car just to spite him, since that's pretty much all he ends up getting. He is amazed that his father gave \$3 million to another beneficiary and that all he received is a lousy car. He wants the money to help his business, but the car is one of the most important gifts his father could have given him.

The Buick also symbolizes forgiveness. Charlie's father gave Charlie the car as a gift of atonement for past mistakes. He knew how Charlie loved the car, and he was willing to give it to him even if that meant Raymond could no longer enjoy it each week. Charlie's father realized that they had both made mistakes in the past, and he wanted Charlie to put these mistakes behind him after his father's death. He hoped that Charlie could accept the gift and give his forgiveness for wrongs done in the past. Charlie finally finds it in his heart to forgive his father as he and Raymond take their long road trip across country in the Buick. Forgiveness and love find Charlie in his father's final gift of the Buick Roadmaster he loved as a boy.

## Rose Bushes

Charlie's father leaves him his prize rose bushes as part of his inheritance. In the letter his father tells him that he hopes they will remind Charlie to seek excellence in everything. Charlie cannot believe that the man he had not heard from in years would have the gall to leave him only a car and some bushes. Although Charlie's father loved the rose bushes and took great pride in them, Charlie cannot see them as a fitting gift when he is losing \$3 million to another person. Although Charlie does not immediately understand his father's reasoning, he eventually learns the lessons his father wanted to teach him.

Throughout the course of the film, Charlie learns more about achieving excellence and his father's intentions. As roses have to be pruned and cared for, so does Charlie. He has remained a selfish boy all his life, but as he experiences life with Raymond, Charlie learns to make the best of life and live for more than money. Charlie really begins to grow to become an excellent person in Raymond's presence. Since he finally has to take care of someone else, Charlie learns the important lesson of love. When Charlie finally gets beyond the money and comes to care for Raymond (as shown by him not being interested in Bruner's money at the end), we know that Charlie has finally sought excellence and become an excellent person.



## Toothpicks

At one point in the film, Raymond and Charlie stop to eat at a cafe. When the waitress drops a box of toothpicks, Raymond is immediately able to tell them how many fell on the floor. Here, the toothpicks symbolize Raymond's different way of seeing the world. We realize that he is brilliant even though he does not act like everyone else. Raymond's talents in counting and remembering make him an extraordinary person, but we also realize that his kind, unassuming personality makes him even more special.

Raymond's ability to live only in one part of his personality and world is seen throughout the film. He cannot function in the more emotional sides of life, but he uses routines and numbers to keep his life in order. Because of his situation, Raymond's life is full of tangible, logical things, and even his caretaker, Vern, at one point admits that Raymond would probably not notice if Vern left. Raymond's inability to deal with people and situations is obvious, but the toothpicks help us to see a part of him that is brilliant beyond all measure.



# Essay Questions

Why has Charlie not talked to his father in so many years?

What is the relationship between Charlie and his secretary, Susanna?

How does Charlie find out who the beneficiary of his father's will is?

Why does Charlie decide to take Raymond with him?

Susanna leaves because of the way Charlie treats her and Raymond. Why does she return?

Who does Charlie discover that the Rain Man really was?

Why was Raymond sent away in the first place, and how does this make Charlie feel?

What is the symbolism of the Buick Roadmaster and its impact on both Charlie's and Raymond's lives?

Does Charlie come to understand the meaning of the roses his father left him?

How does Charlie and Raymond's relationship change from the beginning to the end of the film?

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