

***Black Swan*** is a tight, merciless thriller that forges one, driving throughline that is supported by every character and element in the story. In order to become the Black Swan and achieve her dream of ballet perfection, Nina must prove to her director Thomas that she can transform herself on stage, fight off her mother's attempts to stifle her and defeat her rival Lily, all while suffering from the rapid deterioration of her psyche. She loses the battle for her mind but she achieves her artistic dream, dancing a perfect Black Swan, at the ultimate cost of her life.

The script is separated into very clear sections with high-stakes story engines. There isn't a single wasted moment as it shows us Nina's world through her eyes, challenging us to delineate between reality and fantasy. You may suspect there's a supernatural element or you may never doubt it's all in Nina's head; either way, it still works because the Central Dramatic Question remains the same: can Nina finish the play? Make sure to watch it twice to pick up on all of the little clues and details.

## **Black Swan (2010)**

Psychological Thriller

Screenplay by Mark Heyman and Andrés Heinz and John McLaughlin

Directed by Darren Aronofsky

102 minutes

### **BASIC STORY MAP**

**PROTAGONIST:** NINA SAYERS, young ballerina

**Skill:** Ballet dancing

**Misbehavior:** Obsession

**Achilles Heel/Flaw:** Schizophrenia

**EXTERNAL/INTERNAL GOAL:** To become the Black Swan

**MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT:** Thomas/ Lily/ her Mother/ Herself

**THEME:** Artistic obsession leads to madness.

**CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION:** Can Nina perform the Black Swan without losing her mind?

**THE ENDING:** Nina finishes the ballet, reaching perfection, and dies of her self-inflicted wound.

**ARC:** Nina goes from a shy, sheltered dancer to a schizophrenic who kills herself for perfection.

**LOGLINE:** A fragile dancer wins the coveted lead role in *Swan Lake* and must overcome her overbearing stage mother, a jealous rival, a controlling director and her own schizophrenia if she is to survive opening night.

## **FULL STORY MAP**

### **STORY ENGINES**

ACT 1: Nina fights for the role of the Swan Queen and wins it, accepting her new status as a star.

ACT 2A: Nina gets closer to Thomas and struggles to let herself go as he pushes her to her limit.

ACT 2B: Nina battles with her mother and Lily as she goes insane.

ACT 3: The show. Nina transforms completely into the Black Swan and dies right after her final leap.

### **THE BEAT SHEET**

*(note: this is not a complete scene list)*

#### **ACT ONE**

1-3 – **OPENING**: Nina’s dream sequence; she’s dancing as the white swan with Rothbart, the evil black bird.

4 – Nina’s stage MOTHER finds scratches on Nina’s back. Nina dismisses her.

5 – Nina sees a girl who could be her twin on the subway train.

5 – In the dressing room at the Metropolitan Opera House, all the ballerinas are trashing Beth, the “old” star. Nina is the only one to defend Beth.

7 – LILY arrives, late. She’s Thomas’ new discovery, fresh from San Francisco.

10 – **INCITING INCIDENT**: The director, THOMAS, announces he is looking for a new swan queen, the girl who can best dance the white swan *and* the black swan. Nina is chosen for the small group to audition for the lead.

12 – BETH, the former star, trashes her dressing room in a rage and runs out. Nina sits in Beth’s chair, looks into her mirror, steals her lipstick.

13 – Nina’s audition; she falters on her black swan dance and her audition is cut short when Lily loudly enters the room, stealing Thomas’ attention.

15 – Nina passes her doppelgänger on the sidewalk. Is she hallucinating?

21 – Nina appeals to Thomas to give her the role. She wants to be perfect, but he tells her that’s her problem. To dance the black swan, she must learn to let go of herself.

