



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GHOSTBUSTERS

FEAR OF DEATH AND HUMOR AS MASTERY OF DREAD

Why we see ghosts. Why they scare us. **Why we laugh.**



“We came, we saw,
we kicked its ass!”
— Dr. Peter Venkman

ABOUT THE FILM



In this 1984 comedy classic, three parapsychologists become Ghostbusters—turning their fascination with the supernatural into a business and ultimately facing an apocalyptic threat in New York City. Beneath the laughs is a story about fear, meaning, and the power of humor to help us face what frightens us most.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What do you love most about Ghostbusters and why?
- 2 Why do you think belief in ghosts is so common across cultures and throughout history?
- 3 How does our tendency to detect “agents” or “minds” help us survive? How might it also lead us to see ghosts where none exist?
- 4 In what ways are the ghosts in the movie linked to fear of death or the unknown?
- 5 What is the biggest fear the film is aiming at—not just for the characters, but for us as viewers?
- 6 How do the Ghostbusters transform fear into something useful or even fun?
- 7 What role does friendship and teamwork play in facing what scares them?
- 8 How does humor change the experience of fear? Why can it be so powerful?
- 9 What does the movie suggest about feeling in control when life feels chaotic?
- 10 What did you take away from this film about fear, death, and laughter?

THINK MORE DEEPLY

- Why is the ghost specifically a dead person?
- How does the movie show the difference between healthy and unhealthy fear of the unknown?
- What do the characters each bring to the team, and how do their differences make them stronger?
- If the “scoleri brothers” were real, what might they represent psychologically?
- Can you think of a time when humor helped you face something scary or overwhelming?
- What would life look like if we let fear run our world? What changes when we face it with courage (and maybe a joke)?

HUMOR SPOTLIGHT

The film shows several ways humor masters dread:

- 😊 Naming the fear.
- 📖 Turning it into a story.
- 🗣️ Making it shareable.
- 🧠 Keeping perspective.
- 👊 Taking action anyway.

What are some ways humor helps you in hard times?

TRY THIS

THE FEAR → FUN REFRAME
Pick a fear that shows up for you.

- 1 Name it. What exactly are you worried about?
- 2 Face it with facts. What’s real, what’s a story your mind tells?
- 3 Find the funny. What’s one silly or absurd way to look at it?
- 4 Get support. Who are your “Ghostbusters”?



Fear shrinks
when we shine
light on it—
together.

EPISODE IDEAS

- 📺 “What slimed me?” — When the unknown feels overwhelming.
- 📺 “The big one” — Facing worst-case fears.
- 📺 “Venkman’s comeback” — Using wit to stay in control.
- 📺 “Crossing the streams” — When teamwork changes everything.
- 📺 “We’re ready to believe you” — The balance of skepticism and openness.



REFLECTION PROMPTS

- ♥ What helps you feel brave when fear shows up?
- ♥ When do you notice your mind creating stories that scare you?
- ♥ How do you use humor—or how could you use it—to get through hard moments?
- ♥ Who do you go to for support when the unknown feels big?
- ♥ What would it look like to live with a little more courage and a little more laughter?



Ghosts may be fragments or something more, but the fear they stir is real—and so is our ability to face it with courage, connection, and humor.



FAQ

Is this movie too scary for teens? Ghostbusters is rated PG. It has some frightening images and adult humor, but the tone is comedic and ultimately empowering.



DR. MICHAEL ZAKALIK, PSY.D.
Psychologist for Parenting | Z Psychology



Understanding
minds.



Strengthening
connections.

www.psychologistforparenting.com