

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “AN OVERWHELMING FILM” (JORGE LUIS BORGES, 1941)
ENGLISH 125.068

Name:

Jorge Luis Borges is a celebrated poet and novelist, but he is most famous for his essays, which are readily recognizable by their wit, erudition, and brevity. His 1941 review of Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* is an extremely short piece which nonetheless operates within the synthetic mode, offering in Borges’s typically measured way, both censure and praise.

Citizen Kane itself is an immensely influential film, both in terms of filmic virtuosity and narrative structure. Told in a nonchronological series of flashbacks, the film sketches the rise, fall, and famous last words of newspaper magnate Charles Foster Kane. You will not need to know the film to answer the following questions, but *Citizen Kane*, like other classic films such as *Casablanca* and *The African Queen*, genuinely deserves its reputation. I heartily recommend a viewing.

Should you need more space, please attach an additional piece of paper.

1. Is Borges’s review of the film wholly positive? If not, what parts of the film does he condemn and why?
2. What parts of the film does Borges praise? Why?
3. What does Borges mean by the word *genius*? What about *overwhelming*? Does he use these words in a positive sense or a negative one?
4. What is Borges’s final verdict on *Citizen Kane*? In light of your answers to the questions above, how does he arrive at this verdict?