

STUDY GUIDE



Birdboy: The Forgotten Children

(Psiconautas, los niños olvidados)

a Film by ALBERTO VÁZQUEZ AND PEDRO RIVERO

SPAIN / 2017 / 76 MIN
Spanish with English subtitles



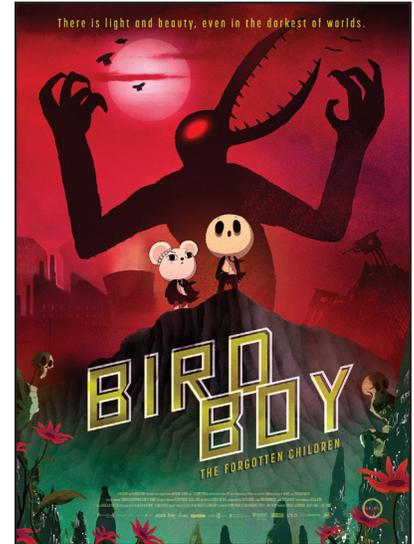
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BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key characters in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *Birdboy: The Forgotten Children*:

There is light and beauty, even in the darkest of worlds. Stranded on an island in a post-apocalyptic world, teenager Dinky and her friends hatch a dangerous plan to escape in the hope of finding a better life. Meanwhile, her old friend Birdboy has shut himself off from the world, pursued by the police and haunted by demon tormentors. But unbeknownst to anyone, he contains a secret inside him that could change the world forever. Based on a graphic novel and short film by co-director Alberto Vázquez and winner of the Goya Award for Best Animated Feature (where Vázquez won Best Animated Short Film in the same year), *Birdboy: The Forgotten Children* is a darkly comic, beautiful and haunting tale of coming of age in a world gone to ruin.



- ❑ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-economic and political background to the film.
- ❑ How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- ❑ Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images)?

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ How does the first scene (00:54-02:25) introduce the film's tone? Elaborate on any cinematic techniques (editing, the mise-en-scène¹, the use of color, the diegetic and non-diegetic sound², etc.) you can uncover that contribute to the tone.
- ❑ When Dinky is introduced to the audience in her debut scene (07:17-10:27), she is generally alone in the frame – and when she does appear in the frame with another character, they are situated far apart. What do you think this means? What feelings does this cinematic technique elicit?
- ❑ Keeping in mind wardrobe, dialogue, and any behaviors, how are the other characters (Birdboy, Zorrito, and Sandra) introduced at the start of the film?
- ❑ What do the close up and medium shots of the different characters aim to portray? What can you uncover about the characters' emotions from these shots? Do these emotion vary throughout the narrative?

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¹ "Mise-en-scène...is used in film to refer to everything that goes into the composition of a shot--framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and the visual environment, and sound." "Term Index." *The Columbia Film Language Glossary*. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

² "Diegetic music is 'produced within the implied world of the film'...The sound of a mother's voice as she is shown singing to her infant is clearly diegetic, and the faint sounds of a music box might be assumed to be coming from inside the nursery, even if the source is not shown on screen. In contrast, non-diegetic music refers to music that accompanies a scene but is external to the fictional world, such as dissonant orchestral chords sounding as a figure appears in a deserted alley or throbbing music punctuating a car chase." Tan, S.-L., Spackman, M., & Wakefield, E. (2017). The effects of diegetic and non-diegetic music on viewers' interpretations of a film scene. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 34(5), 605-623.

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

- ❑ Non-diegetic and diegetic sound continue to play a major role throughout the film. Select scene(s) that contain sound and explain its use in the narrative: the emotions it produces for the audience and the tone that it adds to the dialogue.
- ❑ Notice the *mise-en-scène* when Dinky is confronted by her parents (08:25-10:27). How is religion portrayed? Discuss the differences between Dinky and Dinky's parents experience with religion.
- ❑ Do you feel the animated nature of the film has a purpose? In other words, how would *Birdboy: The Forgotten Children* differ if it were a live action film?
- ❑ How does the intense use of color throughout the film highlight the movie's narrative themes and tone? Think of a few scenes from the movie and analyze what the colors evoke.



NARRATIVE

- ❑ “We are the forgotten children, we have neither father nor mother. In the garbage we seek our future...” (00:32-00:53). Explain why you think this quote was used to introduce the narrative. What character(s) is the quote referring to in using the word “we”? Was this phrase introduced as a metaphor for the lost generations in Spain and Latin America? Those generations that cannot find jobs, move away from their parents’ homes, or the need to emigrate outside looking for a better life? What would mother and father mean in that case? State and community maybe? Explain using specific scenes from the film.
- ❑ What assumptions can you make about the film from the opening minutes? What do you think the film is about? Do these assumptions evolve or stay the same as the film continues?
- ❑ What effect does Mr. Rellogio have on the narrative? Pay attention to the tone of the scenes that come just before and after Mr. Rellogio’s scenes. Do his scenes break up tension or continue the tone?
- ❑ At the beginning of the narrative, Dinky chooses “friends” over “school” (10:51-10:59). Can you justify her choice? Why or why not? Would you make the same choice if you were in her position? Why or why not?
- ❑ Explain why Dinky, Zorrito, and Sandra decide to leave the island. What motivated each of them? What obstacles did they face? Did they grow from these obstacles? If so, what did this growth help them achieve?
- ❑ What are the differences and similarities between Dinky, Zorrito, and Sandra’s home island and the island of the rats? Make sure to not only discuss situational/geographical differences and similarities, but also the differences and similarities between the two island’s inhabitants and cultures.
- ❑ What does Birdboy represent? What gift does his character have that can save the islands? What must he overcome and sacrifice in order to transform into the hero/savior? Do you consider Birdboy the hero? Why or why not?
- ❑ What does the audience learn about Birdboy’s past that influences his present? How does his past both negatively and positively impact his present?
- ❑ Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene (1:07:54-1:11:00)? What can you conclude from the final scene?



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NARRATIVE *(continued)*

- ❑ Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene (1:07:54-1:11:00)? What can you conclude from the final scene?
- ❑ Think about your responses to the characters. Did you like them? Is there one character in particular that you identify with? If so, explain how the character development makes him or her more relatable.
- ❑ What did you enjoy most about the film? Was there something you did not like or fully understand about the film?

THEMES

- ❑ In an interview with the co-directors, Pedro Rivero states that *Birdboy* works as “a metaphor for adolescence...every generation we are going to lose our innocence as children and we have to inhabit a completely new world even though we don’t like it and want to return back to the old one.” Select scene(s) that support this statement, describing the various difficulties associated with adolescence highlighted in the main characters’ storylines.
- ❑ Explain how the themes that emerge from the narrative are universal and touch on issues that societies around the world are dealing with today, using real world examples that connect to the various topics explored in this film.
- ❑ What message regarding environmental crisis does this film offer its audience? How does it explore material waste, natural resource depletion, and recycling? Select scene(s) that provide a moral critique on the environment to support your response.
- ❑ How is industrial production depicted in the film? Is there a critique of capitalism in the movie? Why or why not?
- ❑ What role does **time** serve in the film? Think about how the events of the past influence the present in the island, and how the characters struggle/reminisce on this past.
- ❑ In the scene where the two rats find two other rats just like them (38:21), the older rats start to fight to the death, and the two child rats watch and imitate. What is the film saying about the cyclical nature of violence?
- ❑ How does this film handle drug use? Why do you think the characters use drugs? What messages emerge from scenes that include drugs?
- ❑ How is mental health portrayed in this film? Does it continue the stigma that surrounds the topic or does it aim to breakdown this stigma and portray mental health in a different, more informative light? Select scene(s) to support your response.
- ❑ How does this film create a cinematic world of class divisions and discrimination? How does it depict law enforcement and justice? Does the narrative champion or challenge these divisions and the way the state handles these divisions?
- ❑ What message does this film offer regarding the topic of death? Is there something the living can learn from death in the narrative? Is this message positive or negative?
- ❑ How does this film explore different parent-child relationships? Does it cast a moral view on “good” versus “bad” relationships? Select scenes to explain your answer.
- ❑ Dinky’s father states, “Please, Dinky. We just want to be like everyone else: a normal family” (10:22-10:28). Does the father’s idea of family match your own idea of a normal, healthy family? What are the images and associations that come to mind when you hear the word family?
- ❑ Does the last scene (1:07:54-1:11:00) give the audience a concluding message regarding the film’s theme(s)? Why or why not?
- ❑ What tone does the film end on? How does this tone impact the theme(s) that emerge throughout the film? Is it a happy ending? Why or why not?

