

STUDY GUIDE



SPIDER THIEVES (NIÑAS ARAÑA)

a Film by GUILLERMO HELO

CHILE/2017/94 MIN

Spanish with English subtitles



www.pragda.com

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country where that film comes from. Find two or three articles on Chile's politics and write a brief summary on what is happening and what has happened in the country. Please use reliable sources.

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 *Spider Thieves*:

Three teenage girls from a Santiago shantytown set in motion a plan to climb buildings and plunder expensive apartments. All they want is to have the cool and trendy stuff they see advertised in TV commercials and department stores. Word spreads and soon enough they became the notorious "spider thieves." Inspired by actual events, this teenage thriller is a unique social commentary on dreams, class, and expectations not fulfilled in contemporary Chile.

- ☐ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the plot's main elements and the socio-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

- ☐ What do the close up and medium shots of the different characters aim to portray? What can you uncover from the characters' emotions from these shots? Do these emotions vary throughout the narrative? Cite specific scenes in your answer and connect them to the plot.
- ☐ The camera focuses a lot on homes, buildings, and skylines. What is important about these landscapes? What do these structures represent? Are there differences regarding the portrayal of different structures? How do they touch on the major themes that emerge in this narrative?
- ☐ Think about the scene where the three girls first sneak into an apartment and play with the owners' stuff – feeling the clean water, the fine cloth of the bed sheets, the fancy make-up – and take note of the lack of dialogue, which invites the audience to pay closer attention to the mise-en-scène¹. What can you uncover from the mise-en-scène? Compare and contrast the two dichotomous mise-en-scènes in your answer. Explain what this dramatic transition between the two scenes symbolizes in your response.

(continued on next page)



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/>

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

- Diegetic and non-diegetic² sound play a major role throughout the film. Select scene(s) that contain sound without dialogue and explain its use in the narrative: the emotions it produces for the audience and the tone that it creates.
- Think about the contrast in lighting – how does the filmmaker use light to depict the wealthy neighborhoods, and how does he use it to depict the shantytown? How does lighting help create mood?



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.

NARRATIVE

- How are Avi, Estefany, and Cindy first introduced to the audience (01:01-05:50)? Think about their behavior and dialogue. Do they seem mature? Do their problems and aspirations relate to yours?
- 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 are the differences and similarities among Avi, Estefany, and Cindy’s personalities, values, motivations, and actions?
- How does the friendship among Avi, Estefany, and Cindy advance the plot? Does this relationship create any problems? If so, do these problems get resolved by the end of the film?
- Explain why you think Avi, Estefany, and Cindy decide to steal on a larger scale. What motivated each of them? What does stealing and entering homes mean for their present and future?
- What obstacles do Avi, Estefany, and Cindy face? How do they grow from these obstacles? What does this growth help them achieve?
- Can you justify Avi, Estefany, and Cindy’s actions? Use key scenes throughout the narrative to explain why or why not.
- The film mostly centers on Avi and her story. Why do you think the filmmaker decides to focus on her? Think about what her character represents – her race, her personality, etc.
- How does the fame of their crimes impact these teenage girls? Does this reality match their aspirations for fame and fortune that is mentioned throughout the film? Do their dreams change once they acquire what they wanted, and if so, what new aspirations take their place, if any?
- Is there one character in particular that you identify with? If not, is there one person in particular whose character has impacted you? What about this character makes them more relatable or impactful?
- Does your perception of Avi’s mother change as the narrative develops? Why or why not?
- What happens to Avi when she sees the photos of the victims of her crimes (1:16:22-1:25:09)? What emotions arise and what behavioral change does it produce? Why do you think this change occurs?

(continued on next page)



NARRATIVE *(continued)*

- ❑ What is your opinion of the shantytown community? Do you agree with the culture and actions of the community? Do you think the community is right in fighting for the ownership of property and legitimacy from the state? Why or why not?
- ❑ Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene (1:27:16-1:30:11)? What solutions, if any, does this film provide its audience?
- ❑ What did you enjoy most about the film? Was there something you did not like or fully understand about the film?



THEMES

- ❑ Explain how the opening minutes (00:20-09:07) introduce the narrative's major themes.
- ❑ What message do you believe the director wants the audience to understand about poverty, and more specifically, the cycle of poverty? What did you learn from this film regarding the subject of poverty?
- ❑ How is alcoholism portrayed in the film? Do you agree with this portrayal?
- ❑ What message regarding inequality does this film offer its audience? How does it explore class divisions and discrimination? Select scene(s) that provide a moral critique on material inequality to support your response.
- ❑ How does this film explore race relations in Chile? Are you in agreement with this portrayal? Compare and contrast the race relations in Chile to the United States.
- ❑ In what ways do the three girls reflect society's beauty standards? In what ways do they NOT reflect beauty standards?
- ❑ Can you assess the filmmaker's political view on the Chilean political system? Analyze his intentions using key scenes throughout the film.
- ❑ Notice the portrayal of the treatment of women in this film. What role do men play in this film? How is *machismo* and sexism explored? Select scene(s) that support your response.
- ❑ The focus on Avi's family life raises important questions. What are the images and associations that connect to the idea of family? Do you see your idea of family represented in this film?
- ❑ Does the last scene (1:27:16-1:30:11) 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?
- ❑ Do you believe the themes that emerge from the narrative are universal or do they only apply to Chilean society?

