

STUDY GUIDE



EVERYBODY KNOWS (TODOS LO SABEN)

a Film by ASGHAR FARHADI
FRANCE, SPAIN, ITALY / 2018 / 132 MIN
Spanish with English subtitles



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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. If you have time, try to find more information about the film's writer and director, Asghar Farhadi -- why might an Iranian director have interest in a Spanish narrative?

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key participants 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 *Everybody Knows*:

Laura and her two children travel from Argentina to Spain to attend her sister's wedding. The joyful reunion soon turns tragic when her older daughter gets kidnapped -- revealing a dark web of hidden secrets.

- 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 social 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

- Take a close look at the opening shot of the film -- an anonymous hand cutting up articles on a recent kidnapping in Spain. How does this shot set up the viewer for what's to come next? Did you keep this shot in mind as the film developed? Consider a quote said by the director during the Toronto International Film Festival: "Everything you see within the frame helps you envision what exists outside of it."
- Why do you think the filmmakers decide to use the church to place their credits? What role does the church play in the film? What does the minister's behavior tell you about the town's social and economic circumstances and how can this relate to Laura's family history?
- Keeping in mind dialogue, clothing, and an behaviors, how are the characters introduced to us at the start of their story lines? What are the differences in how they are introduced?
- The relationship between Paco and Laura seems to be packed with meaning from the very beginning. How does the film demonstrate the tension in their relationship? Think about their body language, their positions in the frame, how they talk to each other, how they look at each other, etc.
- Think about the sun-kissed color palette of the film. How do the film's colors reflect the mood and themes of the film? In what way do the beautiful colors juxtapose the dark and dramatic narrative? Does the film's cinematography help create dramatic tension?



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CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

- Take a careful look at the close-ups and medium shots of the characters. What does the framing tell you about each individual character, and their relationship to each other? In what way does the film show, rather than explain, their relationships?
- Re-watch the wedding scene in the church (19:00 - 23:00). How do you know something wrong will happen soon? Analyze all aspects of the **mise-en-scené**¹, including music, framing, cutting, etc. What cinematographic tools did the director use to create dramatic tension?
- Analyze the scene where Laura and her family realize that Irene is missing (31:00). How do the filmmakers build suspense in this moment? How does the handheld camera and drone create the effect of danger?
- How does the film show Laura's character deteriorate as a result of her daughter's disappearance? Pay close attention to costuming, make-up, hair, and Penelope Cruz's acting.
- Analyze the moment where Paco tells his wife that Irene is his own daughter -- what happens cinematically? What is the purpose of the shaky handheld camera?
- How does the director use sound to create a sense of unease in the audience?
- Do you recognize the different accents, the Spanish from the Argentine?

NARRATIVE

- Judging from the first few minutes of the film, what do you think this movie is about? What assumptions can you make? Asghar Farhadi
- Laura and her nuclear family are now assimilated as Argentine, but her extended family is clearly Spanish. How does nationality play a role in the movie's narrative? Do you think Laura is ostracized for becoming an Argentine? How is her Argentine husband treated by the Spanish family? Can you name three ways in which Alejandro and Laura's family clash from a cultural standpoint?
- How does the tone of the film change entirely after the wedding? Did you find this change of tone to be forced or well executed?
- Think about the relationships between the women in the film. How does Laura get along with Paco's wife? How does Laura get along with Rocio, the teenage mother?
- What role does motherhood play in the film? Are women stigmatized because of their relationship (or lack thereof) to their children? Consider Laura's emotional distress, Rocio's single motherhood, and Bea's decision to not have children.
- What differences did you notice in Laura's and Rocio's parenting style?
- Who did you first expect to be the kidnapper? Did you think it was someone from within the family or an outsider? Why? Use specific scenes to help justify your first assumptions.
- The film's title would make you believe that everybody knows who kidnapped Irene.. Did you know? Were you surprised in the third act when the identity of the kidnapper was revealed or did you guess beforehand?
- How do family problems, unresolved conflicts, and past histories resurface as a result of Irene's disappearance? How is Irene's disappearance used as a narrative device to explore the histories and relationships between characters?



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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."

NARRATIVE *(continued)*

- Do you think the family responded well to Irene's kidnapping? Do you think they should have called the police instead of dealing with the matter themselves? Use specific scenes and evidence to support your argument.
- Do you think Paco's decision to sell part of his land to save Irene was the right one? Consider the argument that many workers and fruit-pickers would lose their jobs and pay.
- Do you think Laura should have told Paco that Irene was his daughter?
- Do you sympathize with Alejandro? Why or why not? Does his unwavering faith in God makes sense to you from his cultural background, even if it is extremely passive?
- Were you satisfied with the film's ending? Were you upset? Did you find it to be a happy ending? Elaborate on your reaction to how the film concludes.
- What do you think is the point of the narrative? What overall message is being relayed?

THEMES

- Spain is a very Catholic country, with a strong foundation in the church. What role does religion play in the film? What purpose does the church serve? Why do you think the filmmakers decided to make Laura's husband a devout Christian? How are Christianity and wealth related?
- Do you think the film reflects differences between how people relate in rural Spain, in contrast to the city? How is that materialized?
- What do the people's customs tell you about the town? Consider, for example, the importance of land and how it is talked about.
- What role does technology play in the film's narrative? Think about the shots that include drones, laptops, iPhones and television sets. How is technology important to the movie's narrative? What does this juxtaposition tell you? In your answer, consider the antiquity of the Spanish village.
- How are class tensions central to the film's drama? Think about the relationship between the wealthy family and the townies, as well as the relationship between the fruit pickers and the wealthy family. Does the party's exclusivity tell you anything about the family's relationship to the townies?
- Paco is labeled as "the son of the servant," and the family blames him for not buying the farm-land for a high enough price. How is Paco's socioeconomic status used as a scapegoat for the wealthy family? What does this say about the relationship between crisis, class and scapegoating? What role does pride play in the film, especially in the context of a family that has fallen from grace?
- The film is titled after a phrase the characters repeatedly say throughout the film -- *todos lo saben*. Often, it is used to refer to gossip that has spread but remains suppressed. What role does gossip play in the film? What is common knowledge in the drama and what is not? Is gossip used as a means to an aim? Why do you think the film is titled *Everybody Knows*?
- Analyze the themes of family, betrayal and lies within the film. In what way does the film explore these universal themes?
- The filmmaker, Asghar Farhadi, is Iranian -- why do you think he was interested in a Spanish-Argentine story? Do you think he might have been challenged with the language barrier? ²



² "An Iranian Oscar Winner Made a Film that Feels so Thoroughly Spanish.", *The Washington Post*
https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2019/02/15/how-an-iranian-oscar-winner-made-film-that-feels-so-thoroughly-spanish/?utm_term=.ef2c5f71b0e9