

# STUDY GUIDE



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## THE INFILTRATORS

A film by ALEX RIVERA and CRISTINA IBARRA

UNITED STATES / 2019 / 95 MIN  
English and 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 that film comes from.

The word *Dreamers* is used to refer to those undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children without documentation, and The Dream Act, which was first introduced in 2001, aims to create a pathway to citizenship for these young people <sup>1</sup>. After Congress failed to pass the Dream Act in 2010, the Obama Administration announced a new program in 2012 called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) which allows Dreamers to come forward, pass a background check, and apply for work permits. However, President Trump's administration announced the end of DACA in 2017.

- Find out more about the status of Dreamers now, and the challenges they face in terms of securing citizenship and facing deportation. Research immigration detention centers in the USA and the treatment of immigrants within them. Also, explore the immigration policies of both President Obama and President Trump: how do they differ and how are they similar?

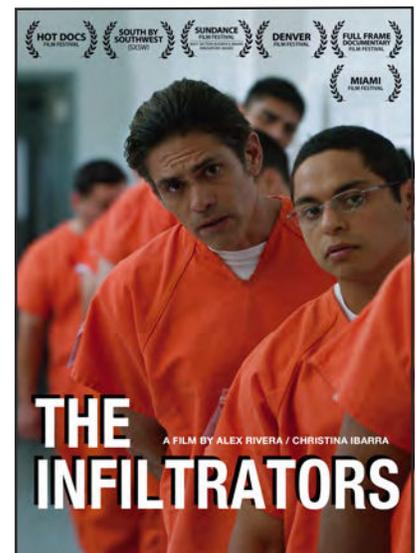
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### INTRODUCING THE FILM

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 synopsis for *The Infiltrators*.

A group of undocumented activists, or Dreamers, from the National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA) work together to infiltrate the Broward Detention Centre in Florida. In their attempt to assist those undocumented immigrants inside the center who are on the verge of being deported, the activists take the bold step of getting themselves arrested so they can work from inside the facility and push for the release of those inside. Because they can't film much of what goes on inside Broward, the film is a recreated docudrama which uses actors as well as the real people involved in the story.

- 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-political background to the film.
- Do you think that the film will be politically charged? If so, why?
- 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)? In what ways does the marketing material differ from larger commercial productions?



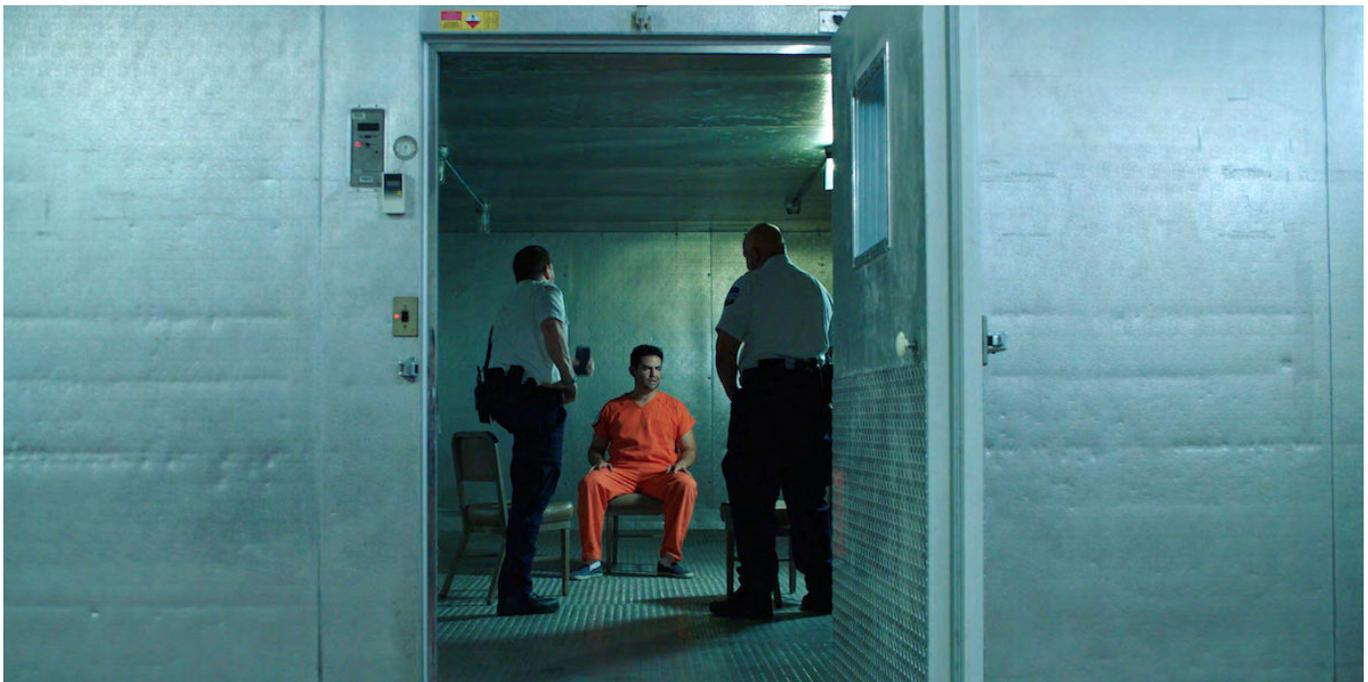
<sup>1</sup> <https://americasvoice.org/blog/what-is-a-dreamer/>

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## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

### CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ *The Infiltrators* uses a mix of genres, with part of the film in documentary-style and part as a dramatization of the real events. How effective is this hybrid approach? What are the pros and cons of this technique?
- ❑ The film was shot by two filmmakers that blend their individual expertise; Alex Rivera (experimental and narrative) and Cristina Ibarra (documentary). Were you able to tell that the film wasn't shot by one filmmaker? How do you think their personal backgrounds affected their cinematographic and narrative choices?
- ❑ How might this film be different if it were completely narrative-focused and had a traditional script? How might it be different if it were just a documentary?
- ❑ How is the film more documentary-like than narrative and vice-versa?
- ❑ Thinking about the dramatized sections of *The Infiltrators*, how did the directors, Alex Rivera and Cristina Ibarra, use aspects like music, lighting, location, casting, and costume to add to the film's realism and urgency.
- ❑ Consider the use of real audio files that are mixed with the dialogue in the dramatized action of the film. What effect does this have? Other than the real audio files, how is non-diegetic sound used in the film<sup>2</sup>?
- ❑ Reflect on the use of actors playing inmates, and the subtext that this may imply.
- ❑ What do you think the series of overhead shots of the detention center mean? Why do you think the directors chose to show Broward from that point of view?
- ❑ The directors selected narration for parts of the film. Do you think this is a smart narrative device for this kind of story?



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<sup>2</sup> Non-diegetic sound is sound whose origin is from outside the story world. Diegetic sound is any sound that emanates from the story (or narrative) world of a film.

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## NARRATIVE

- ❑ The film first introduces its characters as themselves (with interviews and news footage of earlier protests), then switches to actors in scenes where individuals come into contact with the detention system. How is the narrative affected by this transition? Where you able to empathize with the characters and the actors in the same way? Why or why not?
- ❑ Captions are used to introduce us to the actors playing key roles in the story ahead: “Maynor Alvarado as Marco,” “Manuel Uriza as Claudio,” and so on. Was this helpful to understand the story? Did it add to the narrative? Why do you think the directors chose to include them?
- ❑ As Marco and Viridiana enter further into the system, what do we learn about ICE’s function? Consider Claudio’s role here.
- ❑ What can we learn from Claudio’s case about the way sentencing with ICE works?
- ❑ Think about the detainees’ relationships with one another. How do they develop throughout the film, and what do they represent?
- ❑ Find examples of elements of comedy in the film. What function do these moments have?
- ❑ How are the security guards in the facility portrayed? What do you think of them?
- ❑ Note the scene in which Viridiana tries to get herself arrested, but fails, seemingly because she is too smart and well-dressed. What does she have to do to get herself thrown into Broward? What does this tell you about the ICE system?
- ❑ Consider Nima’s case: what does this tell you about sexism in the immigration system?
- ❑ Look again at the film’s climax, when the plan to release inmates’ gains momentum... How do you feel when watching this part of the film?
- ❑ Research the current status of the film’s main characters’ cases. Where are they now?



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## THEMES

- ❑ Directors Ibarra and Rivera use imagery of open doors in several occasions throughout the film. What do you think they symbolize? Choose and analyze a few scenes in which this motif appears.
- ❑ Find examples of unjust treatment of the detainees at the hands of the ICE enforcement agents, or by the government, in the film.
- ❑ Explore the morality of imprisonment without trial. How is this theme portrayed in the film?
- ❑ What are the pros and cons of for-profit detention centers, and of privatization in general?
- ❑ Remember that Broward is an Obama-era immigration detention system. Compare it with the Trump administration's treatment of immigrants and refugees in detention centers. What does this tell you about ongoing sentiment towards immigrants and refugees?
- ❑ Consider the bravery it took for these young people to go up against a system as powerful as ICE. Now explore why it has befallen these people to fight for others in a precarious position. Whose responsibility do you think it is to oversee advocacy for these people?
- ❑ Research the pros and cons of grassroots organizing as a method of challenging systems of oppression. What other methods of disruption do we see used in the film? Which are the most effective?
- ❑ Explore the risks and dangers some of these refugees and immigrants will face if they are to be deported.
- ❑ How does the film challenge your perception of immigrants and refugees? Find examples of moments that surprise you in this way.
- ❑ Consider the media's image of immigrants in the USA being homogeneously Latino. Now think about the way this film challenges that perception.
- ❑ Have the immigration policies of successive US governments caused unnecessary human suffering? Is there a humane way to control immigration?
- ❑ Marcos and Viridiana transform the perceived liability of being an undocumented detainee into a source of power and strength. How do they manage to do this?

