

# STUDY GUIDE



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## LOS LOBOS

A film by SAMUEL KISHI LEOPO  
MEXICO / 2019 / 95 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.

Take some time to explore the news for immigration stories, explore statistics to understand the changes in immigration patterns, and read current legislation on the matter.

### 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 *Los Lobos*:

Following his success with *We are Mari Pepa*, director Samuel Kishi Leopo approaches a more personal topic in the moving autobiographical film.

With touches of *The Florida Project*, *Los Lobos* follows brothers Max and Leo who, together with their mother Lucía, have just crossed the border from Mexico into the United States in search of a better life. But it is not easy for them to gain a foothold in their new home country. While waiting for Lucía to return from work, the kids build an imaginary universe with their drawings and think about mom's promise of "Disneyland", their land of dreams.

Told with unmatched authenticity, including powerful documentary footage mixed with fiction and playful animation (reminiscent of the Puerto-Rican coming of age masterpiece *We the Animals*), Kishi Leopo's film is unique and breathtaking. The film blossoms into a wondrous adventure story as the two brothers gather the courage to venture outside and explore the strange new world just outside their tiny apartment door.

*Los Lobos* is an absorbing coming-of-age story about migrant life through the prism of its most innocent figures.

- ❑ 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.
- ❑ 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)?
- ❑ What does the promotional material's color palette tell you?



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## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

### CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ Why do you think the filmmaker decided to tell this story in the form of a fiction narrative? How do you think the film would have looked and felt like if it were a documentary?
- ❑ Even though the film is a narrative, it contains several documentary elements. Can you identify them? What do they add to the film?
- ❑ The film's opening sequence captures the landscape images of Lucía, Max, and Leo's migration from Mexico to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Why do you think the director choose to include beautiful images of the landscape although the journey they had to make was tough?
- ❑ What effect does the film's color scheme cause on you? How does the soft voice of the mother, Lucía, bring melancholic warmth?
- ❑ Silence is relevant throughout the film. What effect do you think sound has on the audience when considering the experiences of the boys and the mother? Does it add to the narrative/plot of the movie?
- ❑ Try to think about two or three shots that really spoke to you -- what about them is significant? Why do they stick out in your mind?
- ❑ In the opening and closing scenes, the camera shows a montage in documentary style of the various people living in the apartment complex. What do you think the director's purpose was in adding these scenes? Why do you think he added them both at the beginning and at the end of the film? Do similar images appear at other times during the films?
- ❑ Think about close-up shots throughout the film. How often do they appear, what is their main subject? What purpose do you think these shots have?
- ❑ Is the editing slow or fast paced? Why do you think the director chose this pace for the film?





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## NARRATIVE

- ❑ Think about the film's opening scene: the initial title sequence imagery and the dream sequence. Why do you think the film opens with this? How does this gain importance and meaning as the film progresses?
- ❑ When Lucía and her two boys arrive to their new apartment, it is very dirty. Lucía makes sure to clean and pick up all the trash that was left from the previous tenants. Would you agree that their apartment is like a blank canvas? How does their home change as the film progresses? Provide examples.
- ❑ How does the family struggle with adapting to their new life in the United States? What are the different barriers they face? Analyze two scenes that illustrate this.
- ❑ Max and Leo are very imaginative boys and create various games to distract and entertain themselves throughout the film. These games are often represented with animation. What do you think this method adds to the narrative of the film?
- ❑ How does the film successfully evoke empathy in the viewer and make you empathize with Lucía, Max, and Leo? Pick two scenes where you felt profound empathy for the family.
- ❑ What do you make of the relationship between Lucía and Max? Think about the juxtaposition between the first scenes and the last ones: how does their relationship change?
- ❑ Max is the oldest brother therefore he must grow up and become very independent at a young age because of his mother's absence during the day. How does the fact that he has to take on the role of a guardian affect the relationship he has with his brother?
- ❑ The Chang family is very welcoming, especially Mrs. Chang. What similarities do both families share?
- ❑ The space that the boys live in includes their imaginative innocence. They aren't exposed to the real world. Do you think that Lucía makes the right decision in denying Max and Leo the ability to be outside?
- ❑ We get snippets of the boys' childhood back at home from songs and the record tape machine. Based on what you saw in the movie, how do you think their life back in Mexico and their childhood was like? Provide examples from scenes in the movie.
- ❑ The audience never finds out what happened to the boys' father. Why do you think that the director decided to leave that information out of the film?
- ❑ What do you think the director expected the audience to feel or sense in the last couple scenes of the film? Lucía takes her two sons to the fair and although it isn't Disneyland, they make the most out of it. What message does it bring upon those viewing the movie?
- ❑ What is the significance of the last few scenes? Why do you think the director chose to end the film like this? Do you think it was a suitable ending to the film?



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## THEMES

- ❑ What do you think is the meaning of the film's title, *Los Lobos*? What themes or messages does it communicate to the audience?
- ❑ *Los Lobos* is based on the real story of the director's immigration to the United States. He has stated that the film "emerges from the hazy images of my memories". In what way do you think memory is represented in the film? Considering that the director was just a young child when the events took place, do you believe it matters that the film may not be 100% accurate?
- ❑ The director has mentioned that "the meaning of home" is an important aspect of the film. What do you think makes a "home"? Do you think the family finds a home by the end of the film? What are the things that transformed the empty room and community into a home?
- ❑ What is the symbolism behind the light bulb?
- ❑ How does religion play a role in the film and in the family's life? Is it manifested throughout the film?
- ❑ Thinking about the socio-political context between Mexico and the United States regarding immigration, how does Lucía and the boys' journey to the U.S. differ from others?
- ❑ How would you compare *Los Lobos* to other films portraying immigration stories?
- ❑ The director chose to tell an immigration story from the point of view of two young kids. How does this affect the narrative? What aspects of an immigration story were you expecting to see in the film, but you didn't?
- ❑ How do the animated sequences help the audience better understand the kids' culture shock and adaptation process from their home country to the United States?
- ❑ What does the promise of Disneyland mean to the family? How does it connect to the American Dream?

