

STUDY GUIDE



THE SLEEPWALKERS (LOS SONÁMBULOS)

A film by PAULA HERNÁNDEZ
ARGENTINA, URUGUAY / 2019 / 107 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.

The UNICEF publication, “A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents” reports same harrowing statistics on sexual violence. The reports highlights that “nearly 9 in 10 adolescent girls who have experienced forced sex said this happened for the first time between the ages of 10 and 19. In the handful of countries with data on adolescent boys who had been forced into sex, a majority reported that this had occurred for the first time when they were adolescents.”¹

The same report also points out that most of these assaults are performed by a person known by the victim, “There is often a perception that sexual violence is a relatively rare occurrence, and when most people think about this type of violence, they envision rape by a stranger. However, available data reveal that children in many places are at greatest risk of exposure to sexual violence within the context of close relationships such as those with family, friends, and intimate partners.”

“Regardless of the type of sexual violence experienced or the circumstances surrounding it, most victims keep their abuse secret and never seek help. The reasons for this are varied but can include fear of retaliation, guilt, shame, confusion, lack of confidence in the abilities or willingness of others to help, or lack of knowledge of available support services. Cultural and social norms can also drive a victim’s reluctance to come forward or can dictate to whom she or he is expected to look to for assistance.”

Globally, violence against women disproportionately affects low- and lower-middle-income countries and regions. 37% of women aged 15 to 49 living in countries classified by the Sustainable Development Goals as “least developed” have been subject to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their life. 22% of women living in “least developed have been subject to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their life. 22% of women living in “least developed countries” have been subjected to intimate partner violence in the past 12 months—substantially higher than the world average of 13%.²

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 *The Sleepwalkers*:

Following the path of Lucrecia Martel’s *La Cienega*, Paula Hernández places her film in that family reunion subgenre, focusing on the story between mother and daughter. Luisa, her husband Emilio, and their 14-year-old daughter Ana, are spending their New Year holiday visiting Emilio’s mother Meme at her country house, joined by Emilio’s sister, brother, and his family. Over the course of what was hoped to be a peaceful, summertime family vacation, multiple tensions – ranging from career worries to troubled adolescence, a possible selling of the house to myriad family problems – will gradually simmer into an explosion. Luisa, and Ana in particular, will face an awakening in the midst of a silent family crisis.



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¹ UNICEF (2017). A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents, p. 75-87. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/familiar-face>

² WHO (2018). Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018 <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>

INTRODUCING THE FILM *(continued)*

Featuring a skilled and brilliant Argentinian cast, including Erika Rivas (*Wild Tales*) and Luis Ziemkowski (*One Love*), who bring the requisite nuance and humanity to Hernandez' rich script, *The Sleepwalkers* is an indelible portrait of a family in crisis, where desire and expectation clash when familial pressures push women to their limits. The film builds to a violent climax, but in its aftermath, we're given the relief of knowing that, when chaos reigns, the parent-child connection at the center of this story holds.

- ❑ 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.
- ❑ The synopsis described "family reunion" as a subgenre. Would you consider it as such? Why or why not?
- ❑ 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?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ How do the color tones used in the costume and setting reflect the tone of the film?
- ❑ Describe the use of music in the film and the contrast between the pace of the music and pace of the story.
- ❑ What is the purpose of the shot from the point-of-view of Ana in the back of the car on their way to the family vacation?
- ❑ The film is filled with close-up shots of both Luisa and Ana. Why do you think the filmmakers chose this technique?
- ❑ From the sounds of nature to the arguments between family members, sound is a crucial aspect of the film. Describe the role that sound (ex. water rushing in the beginning scene) plays in the story.
- ❑ How do you think the rural setting impacts the story?



NARRATIVE

- ❑ Describe how the relationship between Luisa, Emilio, and Ana is portrayed before they arrive at the family vacation.
- ❑ What do you think is the purpose of Ana using her phone so much throughout the story?
- ❑ How do the scenes showing Emilio and Luisa fighting shape the viewer's perception of Ana?
- ❑ Who would you consider to be the protagonist? Ana or Luisa? Why?
- ❑ Describe specific moments that show the tension between Ana and Luisa. How does the tension between them fluctuate at different moments in the story?
- ❑ What do you think of the scene when Luisa looks at Ana's phone when she is not there? Why do you think she does this?
- ❑ What role does the storyline of Inés play? Do you think that her struggles with her baby add to the plot or distract from other important aspects?
- ❑ How are the men of the family portrayed?
- ❑ What kind of reaction does the final scene of the film spark in the viewer? How is the portrayal of the relationship between Luisa and Ana different in this scene from any other in the film?
- ❑ The only characters that appear throughout the entire film are members of the family. Would the story have the same power if it included anyone from outside of the family, even as background characters?
- ❑ How do the different characters react to the final events? Do their sex and age affect their reaction?



THEMES

- ❑ What do you think the meaning of the title *The Sleepwalkers* is? How does the meaning change throughout the film?
- ❑ What message does the climax of the film send about domestic violence and abuse? How does the family react to it among themselves?
- ❑ Describe the way that familial tensions and inter-family conflict are portrayed. What impact does this realistic depiction have on the viewer?
- ❑ Ana exemplifies the struggle of growing up. Contrast the scenes in which Ana is forced to act adult-like and when she can be a young teenager.
- ❑ Why do you think the filmmakers chose rap as the genre of music that Ana listens to?
- ❑ Most of the plot occurs outside, and many scenes take place near the river and in the woods. What is the importance of nature in the film? Could you consider nature to be a character in the film?

