

STUDY GUIDE



ON THIS SIDE OF THE WORLD

(A ESTE LADO DEL MUNDO)

A film by DAVID TRUEBA
SPAIN / 2020 / 96 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. *On This Side of The World* takes place in the Spanish city of Melilla on the Northern edge of Africa. The city provides migrants an entry point to Europe without crossing water.

Laura Jimenez, a journalist covering the region, explains the current situation in Melilla to NPR's Ari Shapiro. "Melilla is technically an autonomous city of Spain. The land is legally part of Europe, but it is surrounded by Morocco, across the sea from the Spanish mainland. So, Melilla is one of the few ways migrants can cross from Africa into Europe without risking a dangerous voyage on the water.

...Most of the people who jump the fence are people coming from sub-Saharan countries...also, people coming from Syria or other countries in the Maghreb like Morocco or Tunisia. As for the reasons why, they come either as asylum seekers because they face conflict and persecution as dissidents, women or LGBT people in their countries, or as economic migrants searching for new means of living.

...These large groups organizing to get across the border together, it's not a new phenomenon. These jumps involving, like, large groups of people are something that has been going on since at least 2005. That year, for the first time, 700 people tried to jump at once. Then, 2013 and 2014 marked a milestone with more than 1,000 people storming the fence in 2013 and almost 4,000 people in 2014. Since then, jumps haven't stopped.

...What has changed is the geopolitical role that Melilla plays in the broader Spanish and European political scene...So as the European Union is trying to push its borders. Melilla, like other exclaves and islands in the European Union close to Africa or Asia, is now quickly becoming a camp, a place to keep migrants and asylum-seekers away from the European continent.”¹

INTRODUCING THE FILM

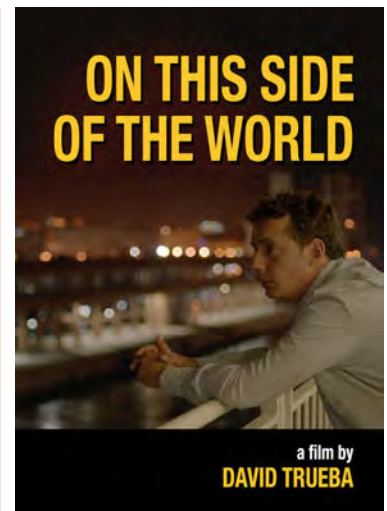
A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *On This Side of The World*:

On This Side of the World is a deep and global look at migrations, borders, and the most insurmountable walls erected by mankind.

Alberto, a dull and indolent engineer, is fired from his company just as he plans to buy a house with his girlfriend and become parents. To cover it up, he decides to accept an assignment from his former boss to travel to the city of Melilla, a Spanish enclave in North Africa and gate to Europe.

Alberto must renovate, underhand, the system of fences that not only separates one piece of land from another, a city from a country, but two universes in eternal collision: those who want to enter and those who prevent them from doing so. There, he will meet Nagore, a police officer in charge of guiding him through the unknown space, and he will come face to face with the complexity of one of the great issues that shake the world: immigration. Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys?

Trueba proves once again that he is a man concerned with the great conflicts of contemporary humanity, and that his approach to these conflictive issues is far from frivolous and distant. The filmmaker observes the world with curiosity, compassion, and a multifaceted gaze, which allows him to delve deeper into the subject without losing his narrative pulse.



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¹ Why Migrants Organize Perilous Mass Crossings into Melilla, Spain. July 26, 2021. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/26/1020866484/why-migrants-organize-perilous-mass-crossings-into-melilla-spain>

INTRODUCING THE FILM *(continued)*

- ❑ 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)?



CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ Throughout the movie, we get close-up shots of the characters, various objects, and locations. How often do these close-ups appear? What purpose do these shots have?
- ❑ How does proximity to certain elements of the movie shed light to the message that is trying to be conveyed? What does this choice by the director convey to the audience?
- ❑ The camera is always on constant motion, it appears to be scanning the room of various scenes. How does this choice by the director influence the way you see the movie? What purpose do you think it has?
- ❑ Can you think about two shots of the film that really spoke to you -- what about them is significant? Why did they leave such an impression?
- ❑ Think about the sound and imagery throughout the film. How does it work to introduce the narrative's plot and theme(s) like immigration? What is the effect on the viewer?



THEMES

- ❑ Think about the title of the film, how does the kind of life you have depends on the side of the world you were born? How does social location play a role in how you see others and vice versa?
- ❑ What message or symbol do you think the piled-up chairs have throughout the entirety of the film?
- ❑ Why do you think that Trueba decide to focus on the citizen instead of the immigrant? Who is his intended audience?
- ❑ How does the director approach themes surrounding racism and class in the film? What is Alberto and Nagore positions compared to that of the immigrants trying to jump the wall?
- ❑ What role does religion play in the film? Think about the scene with The Pope. What message does it convey to the audience?
- ❑ Can you compare or contrast the situation at the border in Melilla with the border separating other two countries? Think about the U.S and Mexico, or Palestine and Israel? Are they the same or different? Explain.
- ❑ What do you think is the responsibility of countries to nations suffering from economic distress or violence?
- ❑ What do you think about the depiction of corruption and/or favors in the film? Who do they serve?
- ❑ What do you think are the additional challenges that undocumented immigrants have to face when they reach their destinations in search of a better quality of life?

