

# STUDY GUIDE



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## Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN (Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN)

A film by ALFONSO CUARÓN  
MEXICO / 2001 / 106 MIN  
Spanish with English Subtitles

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[www.pragda.com](http://www.pragda.com)

## 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. Think about Mexico's early fight for independence and establish a relationship between the three main characters in *Y Tu Mamá También*. Who do they represent?

On September 16, 1810, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Catholic priest, launched the Mexican War of Independence calling for the end of Spanish rule in Mexico, redistribution of land, and racial equality. After some initial successes, Hidalgo was defeated, captured, and executed... Ironically, it was the Royalists—made up of Mexicans of Spanish descent and other conservatives—who ultimately brought about independence. In 1820, liberals took power in Spain, and the new government promised reforms to appease the Mexican revolutionaries. In response, Mexican conservatives called for independence as a means of maintaining their privileged position in Mexican society. In early 1821, Agustín de Iturbide, the leader of the Royalist forces, negotiated the Plan of Iguala with Vicente Guerrero. Under the plan, Mexico would be established as an independent constitutional monarchy, the privileged position of the Catholic Church would be maintained, and Mexicans of Spanish descent would be regarded as equals to pure Spaniards. Mexicans of mixed or pure Indian blood would have lesser rights.<sup>1</sup>

### 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 *Y Tu Mamá También*:

This smash road comedy is that rare movie that combines raunchy subject matter and emotional warmth. The film reimagines the typical road-trip movie and shows the lives of three unlikely traveling companions against the backdrop of political and social turmoil of Mexico.

With their respective girlfriends away in Europe, Julio (Gaél García Bernal) and his upper-class friend Tenoch (Diego Luna) are planning a summer full of drink, drugs and meaningless sex. During a wedding, the two friends find themselves bewitched by a gorgeous, troubled, older Spanish woman (Maribel Verdú). When she agrees to accompany them on a trip to Heaven's Mouth, a made-up beach paradise that the two men claim is on the Oaxacan coast, the three new travel companions form an increasingly intense and sensual alliance. Soon, simmering jealousies boil over to calamitous and severe arguments that ultimately strip the two friends physically and emotionally bare.



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<sup>1</sup> History.com Editors. Spain accepts Mexican Independence. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/spain-accepts-mexican-independence>

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

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## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

### CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ A voiceover from an unknown narrator appears throughout the film. What is the purpose of this voiceover? Give some specific examples. Why does the sound stop when he is narrating? Have you encountered this technique in any other films?
- ❑ According to Bruce Isaacs in his article "Reality Effects: The Ideology of the Long Take in the Cinema of Alfonso Cuarón" <sup>2</sup>, the director's films demonstrate "a fixation on the capacity of the image to display greater and more complex indices of time and space, holding shots across what would be deemed uncomfortable durations in a more conventional mode of cinema". For example, during the wedding scene, the camera pans away from the primary characters to follow a waitress as she takes food to bodyguards waiting outside the venue. What is the effect of using a "straying camera"?
- ❑ How does the film's set design set you in the time and place of Mexico in the 1990s? Think specifically about the backdrop and the costumes etc.
- ❑ How would you describe the color palette of the film? Are the colors dull, bright, or vibrant? How might the colors reflect the film's themes?
- ❑ What stylistic characteristics does this film borrow from the road movie genre?
- ❑ How does this film subvert the narrative closure of the typical teen film?
- ❑ In what sense does the camera focus on the Mexican "subaltern" <sup>3</sup>?



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<sup>2</sup> Isaacs, Bruce "Reality Effects: The Ideology of the Long Take in the Cinema of Alfonso Cuarón"  
<https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/4-3-isaacs/>

<sup>3</sup> Subaltern: the lower or colonized classes who have little access to their own means of expression and are thus dependent upon the language and methods of the ruling class to express themselves.

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## NARRATIVE

- ❑ What is the meaning of the film's title? How does it relate to the concept of Mexican *machismo*?
- ❑ Describe the two main protagonists – Tenoch and Julio. Give a few examples about the way they dress, the houses they live in and their upbringing.
- ❑ What do you make of the relationship between the two friends? Analyze its trajectory from beginning to end, using specific scenes throughout the film.
- ❑ Tenoch and Julio are finishing up high school and getting ready to go off to college. What sorts of ambivalence do they feel about the future? How admirable are the models set by their four parents? Give specific examples.
- ❑ To what extent is this a 'coming of age' movie?
- ❑ How does the narrator comment on Julio and Tenoch's awareness of class differences between one another?
- ❑ What does each of the characters learn about themselves and about their societies during the course of the narrative?
- ❑ How is cousin Jano portrayed and how is he contrasted with Julio and Tenoch?
- ❑ Describe Luisa, the third main protagonist. What are Luisa's various motivations for going on the trip? Can she be considered a feminist? Why is she married to Jano?
- ❑ Does this portrayal in the film offer an implicit commentary on intellectuals?
- ❑ What do the characters, and the audience, learn from their encounters with the police checkpoints, the poor towns, the drug busts, the queen's roadblock, and the fisherman and his family?
- ❑ In what sense is Luisa's relationship with the fisherman and his family significant? What happens to this family after the film ends?
- ❑ What becomes of each of the three main characters at the end of the film?



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## THEMES

- ❑ What is the film's perspective on sexuality? Give examples to support your answer.
- ❑ What is the fundamental difference between Luisa's attitude toward sex and that of the two teenagers?
- ❑ What figures in Mexican history do the three main characters' names allude to and what do they represent?
- ❑ What is the significance of Luisa's nationality (Spanish) in relation to Julio and Tenoch's nationality (Mexican)?
- ❑ Could Luisa be considered a mother figure? Why or why not? How is this related to her nationality?
- ❑ What can you say about the different socio economical classes represented in the film? What story elements manifest these differences? Give a few specific examples.
- ❑ Briefly analyze the intertwining of sex and death in *Y Tu Mamá También*. Focus on a few key scenes that illustrate this theme.
- ❑ What political critiques does Cuarón make about Mexico in this film, and how does he reveal these perspectives?
- ❑ What references are there in the film to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation or Zapatistas of the 1990s? How does the film treat this theme?
- ❑ What does the film suggest about the future of class relations in Mexico?

