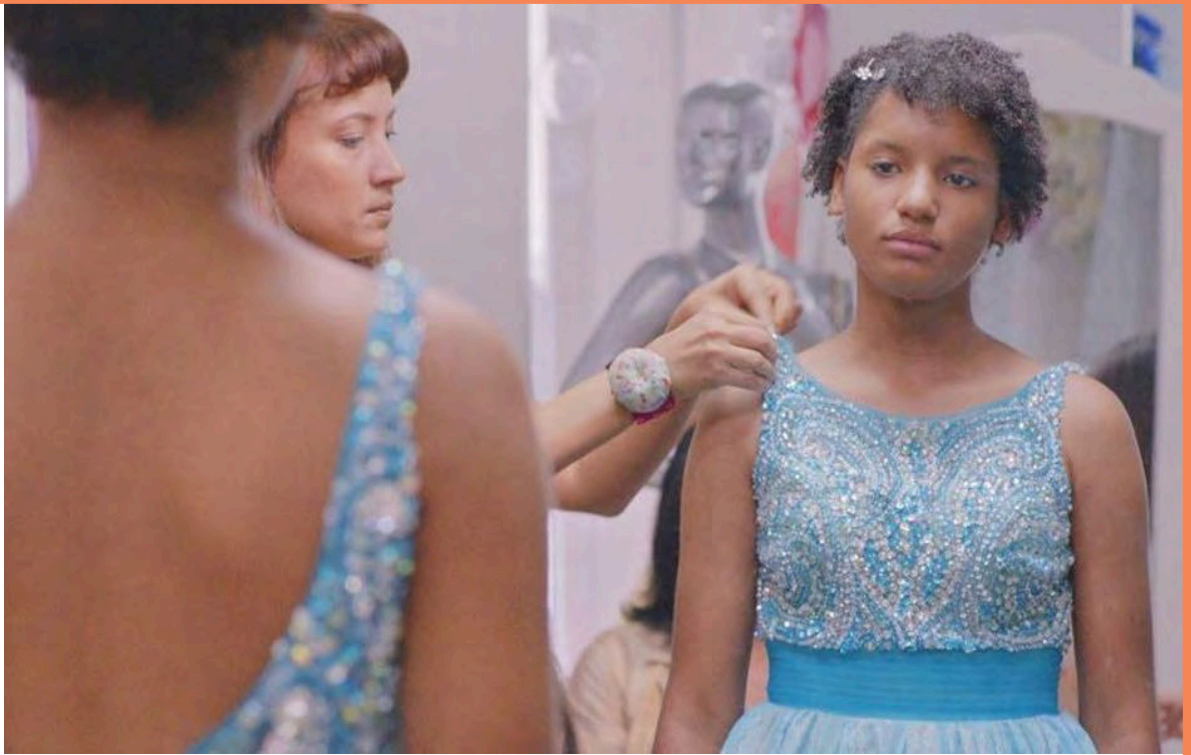


STUDY GUIDE



MIRIAM LIES

A film by NATALIA CABRAL and ORIOL ESTRADA

Spain, Dominican Republic / 2018 / 90 min
Spanish with English subtitles



www.pragda.com

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country that film comes from. Learning about the filmmaker is also a relevant way to gain insight on the context in which the film was produced. You can learn more about Natalia Cabral and Oriol Estrada at <https://pragda.com/film/miriam-lies/>.

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's marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this synopsis for *Miriam Lies*:

The first dramatic feature by documentary duo Natalia Cabral and Oriol Estrada centers on a quinceañera celebration and shows how racial prejudices affect a teenage girl's choices.

"*Miriam Lies* is the latest in an exciting and refreshing new wave of cinema from the Dominican Republic. For sensitive teen Miriam (Dulce Rodriguez), life really shouldn't be much more than sunny afternoons spent with best friend Jennifer, talking about boys and making preparations for their upcoming shared quinceañera, an event celebrated mainly by upper-middle-class society in Santo Domingo. The product of a short, troubled mixed-race marriage, the shy teen is often made to feel like an outcast within her own working-class family for being darker than the rest, leading her to find comfort in an online relationship with sympathetic suitor, and potential quinceañera date, Jean-Louis.

When Jean-Louis reveals himself to be black, Miriam feels the weight of a badly broken society bear down on her young shoulders, driving her to create a web of tall tales, excuses, and deepening cover-ups. With a cast that delivers some incredibly natural performances, this powerful debut feature from co-writer/directors Natalia Cabral and Oriol Estrada shoots sharp criticism at the heart and mind of Caribbean society with a treatment as subtle as it is demolishing."- Hebe Tabachnik, *Seattle International Film Festival*

- ❑ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main events of the film's plot and the socio-political context of the film.
- ❑ Do you think that the film will have a political message? Cite specific language from the synopsis to support your answer.
- ❑ How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- ❑ Viewing the marketing materials alone (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images available at <https://pragda.com/film/miriam-lies/>) without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- ❑ How do Miriam and her friend Jennifer navigate their class difference? Reflect on the opening sequence of the girls in the pool enjoying lollipops and towards the end of the film when we see the girls find solace in singing a song together.
- ❑ In the film, we see several women belonging to different races, socio-economic classes, and age groups. Identify three or four characters that represent diversity and contrast this representation with other films about women and their worlds.
- ❑ Identify two or three scenes in which the film touches upon Miriam's racial difference. How do societal perceptions of race impact Miriam as an adolescent girl as she comes of age?
- ❑ Towards the end of the film, Miriam tells Jennifer that Jean-Louis is black. This is a powerful moment in which Miriam tells the truth. How does this scene contribute to the film's narrative structure?
- ❑ The film revolves around Miriam's fifteenth birthday party preparations and celebrations. Despite being the center of attention, Miriam seems utterly lonely. Reflect on this conflict in the narrative.
- ❑ We see Miriam and her friend talking about boys and planning for their fifteenth birthday party. Identify a few scenes in the film that reflect adolescent sexuality.
- ❑ Miriam is a sensitive and shy girl. What are the various factors in her life that impact her confidence? Consider race, class, and divorce.
- ❑ In the film, we see Miriam caught between her mother and father. Consider the scenes in which her father gives Miriam money to give to her mother. What impact do you think this has on Miriam's relationship with both of her parents?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- ❑ Describe the film's cinematography referencing specific choices in color, lighting, camera lenses and angles, etc.
- ❑ Much of the film is shot in closeup. Analyze this filmmaking technique and consider what it contributes to the narrative.
- ❑ What is the color palette in the film? How does it affect the mood and create a particular atmosphere in the film?
- ❑ Even though the film is a narrative, it contains several documentary elements. Can you identify any scenes that exemplify the documentary style the film?
- ❑ There is very little music in the film. Why do you think the filmmakers chose this approach and how does it impact you as the viewer?

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CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

- ❑ Try to think about two or three shots that really spoke to you. What about them is significant and why specifically do they stick out in your mind?
- ❑ What is the pace of the film? Is it slow or fast? Why do you think the directors chose this pace for the film?
- ❑ Think about the sequence in which Miriam explores the aquarium where she has arranged to meet Jean-Louis. How is the lighting in this scene different from the rest of the film?
- ❑ We see Miriam watching a scuba-diver perform a strange dance as he cleans the tank of the aquarium. What impact does this have on the viewer? Reflect on the role of this dream-like sequence and its purpose in the film. Relate this to other films you may have seen that use similar cinematic techniques.

THEMES

- ❑ Think about Miriam's identity as a biracial child. Reflect on how mixed race impacts identity formation, self-esteem, social isolation, and family dynamics.
- ❑ One of the most common values we teach children is to tell the truth. Is it wrong that Miriam tells lies? How does the film complicate fixed notions society has about honesty?
- ❑ Miriam is a shy girl who meets a boy online. Reflect on adolescence, technology, and romantic relationships. What does the film tell us about these issues?
- ❑ How does Miriam's parents' divorce impact her? Is there in anything culturally specific about Miriam's experience? Reflect on the impact of divorce on children in general.
- ❑ Do Miriam and her mother have a good relationship? Reflect on mother-daughter relationships in general and how they affect the female experience of coming into womanhood.
- ❑ Miriam's mother married a black man but wants Miriam to have a white boyfriend. When her mother discovers Miriam's boyfriend is black, what does this tell you about Miriam? Reflect on how a child's values are shaped.

