

STUDY GUIDE



THE ROSE SELLER

A film by VICTOR GAVIRIA

Colombia / 1998 / 115 min
Spanish with English subtitles



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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 Victor Gaviria at <https://pragda.com/film/the-rose-seller/>.

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 *The Rose Seller*:

Directed by the iconic Colombian poet and filmmaker Victor Gaviria, *The Rose Seller* is a poignant portrayal of life in the streets of Medellín, Colombia. Its premiere was an event that captured the attention of the entire country, and it has since become a cult film.

The story follows the misfortunes of a group of girls in their early teens, all separated from their families and making a living for themselves. Monica is 13 years old and has already rebelled against everything. She has created her own world in the streets, where she courageously fights to defend what little she has: her young friends, her drug dealer boyfriend, and her dignity and pride that makes no concessions to anyone. On Christmas night, like every night, she sells roses to couples in trendy nightspots and sniffs glue to fill the desperate emptiness with passing visions of lost family and friends. Monica hopes to buy herself the dream of a party with fireworks, new clothes, and a date with her boyfriend.

This film's title deliberately recalls Hans Christian Andersen's tragic fairytale *The Little Match Girl*, which served as the model for the story of street children. Gaviria uses a constantly moving camera to follow the cast of very young nonprofessionals with relentless intensity as they travel between the slums where they live to upscale city streets and back again. The film bears astonishing witness to Gaviria's ability to cast and work with untrained actors, several of whom, like some of the performers in *Rodrigo D*, were dead within months of the film's production.

- ❑ 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/the-rose-seller/>) without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- ❑ After Monica sniffs glue, she sees her dead grandmother. Similarly, there are other children who hallucinate when they sniff glue. What is the significance of these hallucinations to the film's narrative?
- ❑ Describe Monica's relationship with her dead grandmother. Reflect on the film's ending.
- ❑ In the beginning of the film, we see Monica and her friends going to the nightclub to sell roses. Monica is struck by the song, "I've got a dream, a big dream..." What is her dream?
- ❑ Describe the neighborhood the film is set in and the relationship between the children and the streets in which they live.
- ❑ Does your perception of Monica change over the course of the film? If so, what makes you think about her character differently?
- ❑ Identify two or three points in the narrative that are taken from the fairytale *The Little Match Girl* the film is based on.
- ❑ The film takes place in the period of three days. How is time constructed in the film?
- ❑ Describe the children's relationships with each other and the relationships between different groups.
- ❑ Think about two or three scenes that really spoke to you and explain specifically why these scenes are significant to you.
- ❑ Compare the girls' homes in the slums to the room they rent with each other. Describe the differences between the two spaces.
- ❑ How is religion used to structure the narrative? What is the role of religion in the lives of these children?
- ❑ What do you think about the film's ending? Does it give you hope?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- ❑ Analyze the film's cinematography in terms of its long takes, intimate handheld sequences, and close-ups. Can you give examples of each?
- ❑ 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?
- ❑ Would you describe this film as a magical realism film? Why or why not?
- ❑ How would you describe the film's editing style?
- ❑ The actors in the film are non-professional. How does this approach contribute to the film? Could the same film have been made with professional actors?
- ❑ Gaviria's filmmaking gives attention to the powerless and poor. What filmmaking techniques does the filmmaker use to do this effectively? Include the choices of non-professional actors and specific locations in your reflections.

THEMES

- ❑ Are the children in the film rebels? What are they rebelling against?
- ❑ The story is primarily told from the point of view of Monica and her friends. Why do you think the director chose to emphasize female protagonists in the film?
- ❑ What do the lives of the street children in the film tell us about contemporary Colombia as a country?
- ❑ The filmmaker, Victor Manuel Gaviria, is also a poet. Do you see the influence of his poetry in the film? Explain.
- ❑ How does the film explore sexuality? Reflect on the children exploring their sexuality and their experiences of abuse. Give examples from the film. What does this tell us about child sexuality in general?
- ❑ In one scene, street boys don't show remorse after accidentally killing a homeless man while trying to protect a fellow street girl from rape. Describe the children's moral universe based on this scene.
- ❑ Buñuel's "Los Olvidados," explores similar themes. How does this film differ from Buñuel's 1950 classic film?

