

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



MEMORIES OF MY FATHER (EL OLVIDO QUE SEREMOS)

A film by FERNANDO TRUEBA

Colombia / 2022 / 136 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 Fernando Trueba at <https://pragda.com/film/memories-of-my-father/>.

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 *Memories of My Father*:

Based on the legendary book *Oblivion: A Memoir* by the Colombian writer Héctor Abad Faciolince and directed by Academy Award® winning director Fernando Trueba (*Belle Époque*), the film tells of the life of the prominent doctor and human rights activist, Héctor Abad Gómez (Javier Cámara), a father who is concerned about both his children and children from less favored classes.

After a devastating loss in the family, Héctor gives himself to the greater cause of public health programs for the poor in Medellín to the consternation of the city's authorities. The film straddles two eras: Faciolince's adolescence in Medellín in the 1970s, and his young adulthood in the '80s up until 1987 when his father was assassinated.

- 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/memories-of-my-father/>) without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- The first time that the entire family is shown interacting together comes when Dr. Saunders visits their house. Describe the various members of the family. How do they interact amongst each other? What are the different roles that each character carries within the family?
- Describe the work that Héctor and Dr. Saunders are conducting together. What are they trying to discover? What is the public reaction after Héctor voices the issues he discovers?
- While the film highlights the important role that Héctor plays for his entire family, it primarily focuses on the special relationship between him and his son. Describe this relationship. How does Quiquín show his adoration towards his father? What are some of the important lessons that Héctor teaches Quiquín?
- Analyze the trajectory of Héctor's career. How does his relationship with the public develop over the course of the film? What are the reasons for which he is either hated or loved?
- Midway through the film, Héctor leaves Colombia and his family to work in another country. Why did he leave? How did the family cope without Héctor away from home?
- As the film returns to the present day, the audience engages with a much older version of Quiquín. Describe his temperament. In what ways has he changed? What is his involvement within politics?
- What finally causes Héctor to fully dive into the world of politics? How does their family life change? What is his reaction towards the danger and controversy that his decision causes?
- What was the aftermath of Héctor's death? How did the public react? What did this signify for the legacy and future of his activism?
- *Memories of My Father* was adapted from the memoirs of Héctor Abad Faciolince and told from his own perspective. Does the film appear to be structured in the same way? What difficulties arise when attempting to adapt a book into a film?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- *Memories of My Father* begins during the present before cutting to the history leading up to that moment. Why do you think that the film is in medias res?
- Why does the director decide to start the film during a screening of *Scarface* (1983)? How does it relate to the events that follow? Do you think it is used to make a commentary on gang violence? Explain.
- When the story shifts to Quiquín's childhood, the family prepares for the arrival of Richard. How does the camera use Quiquín's point of view to quickly introduce each member of the family? How does it help to build the audience's perception of them?
- The narrative is divided into two main time periods: the early seventies when Quiquín was just a child, and the early eighties when he was a young adult. Why is his childhood shown colorized while his adulthood is shot in black and white?

CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- Describe the use of lighting and colors within the childhood period of the film. How are they used to portray a sense of warmth and intimacy?
- As Marta passes away, the film uses a short montage of grainy film that shows her during her illness. What was the purpose of this montage? How did it make you feel?
- Describe the pacing of *Memories of My Father*. Does it feel fast or slow? Is there any difference between the pacing of the two time periods?
- Analyze the use of non-diegetic music within the film. How is it used to evoke certain emotions? Consider the scene in which Héctor is murdered. How does the music augment the emotions that his family members feel? What would this scene feel like without the music?
- Following the death of Héctor, Quiquín reads his note as the film closes on a shot of his father during his retirement celebration, staring at Quiquín through a rolled-up piece of paper. Why did Trueba choose to conclude the film with this specific memory? Does it relate to any other moments within the film?

THEMES

- What do you know about Colombian politics during the seventies and eighties? Why did Héctor feel obligated to become involved? Who was he fighting against? Who was he fighting for?
- Throughout the film, Héctor uncovers a variety of problems related to public health. He consistently promotes change in their health system, however, is faced with constant backlash. Why did people fight against his suggestions? Why were people reluctant to get vaccinated? How can we strive to inform the public on the acceptance of medical advancements?
- After witnessing the many social and economic injustices within Medellín, Héctor became a strong advocate for the development of impoverished communities. Why was his compassion mistaken for communism?
- Throughout the film, Héctor and his family are faced with many hardships. This includes moments such as the career-based exile that Héctor faces, as well as the death of Marta. Speak on the importance of maintaining a strong family bond. How do the various family members support each other as they navigate arduous times?
- On many occasions, Héctor's public reputation is displayed to the audience through the press. Moments such as the radio broadcast near the start of the film and the television broadcast near the end show the varying perspectives surrounding the professor. Speak on the power that popular media has on the way we perceive certain topics and figures. How does the public perspective surrounding Héctor change throughout the film?
- Speak on the importance of public activism. How is activism portrayed in the memories of Quiquín in comparison to his present life? How do the various protests near the end of the film demonstrate change and revolution in Colombian society? How can we advocate for change in modern times?
- *Memories of My Father* frequently depicts life's transitions and how the absence of a loved one can shape one's journey through different stages of life. How does Quiquín change when he studies in Italy, away from the influence of his family? In modern times, how can we manage to maintain our relationships with loved ones as distance separates us?
- Memories and nostalgia play a significant role in the film as Quiquín reflects on his past and the cherished moments he spent with his father. Speak on how the legacy of a loved one can survive death through our memories. How can we work to preserve our heritages and family histories?

