

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



CARAJITA

A film by SILVINA SCHNICER & ULISES PORRA

Argentina / 2021 / 89 min
Spanish with English subtitles

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 Silvina Schnicer and Ulises Porra at <https://pragda.com/film/carajita/>.

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 *Carajita*:

Featuring striking cinematography and outstanding performances, *Carajita* (which means annoying child) explores the tenuous relationship that exists between race, class, and family.

Sarah, the pampered daughter of a corrupt oligarch whose family recently relocated to Las Terrenas, thinks of her Black Dominican nanny, Yarisa, as “part of the family.” The two have a “mother-daughter-like” relationship that transcends their social standing. That illusion is put to the test when Yarisa’s spirited daughter Mallory goes missing, challenging Sarah’s naïve beliefs.

Boasting intuitive storytelling and confident direction, *Carajita* plays like a psychological thriller, deriving oppressive tension from unspoken inequalities and the impunity of privilege.

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



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- > The film begins with an extreme long shot that displays a person crying on the seashore. Seconds later, a police car arrives as their headlights illuminate the darkened beach. Who is this person? How does this shot relate to the events that follow? What can the audience infer from this moment?
- > As soon as Mallory is introduced in the film, Yarisa's complicated familial life is made apparent. What forces keep Yarisa stuck between her real family and the family she works for? How does she attempt to balance the two lives?
- > Although Yarisa is practically part of the family, there are many ways in which her employers establish boundaries between them. In what ways do they treat Yarisa separately and in what ways do they treat her as part of the family? Provide specific examples of both.
- > Reflect on the relationship between Yarisa and Sarah. What is their dynamic like at the beginning of the film? How does it evolve throughout the film? How does the appearance of Mallory affect this relationship?
- > During the funeral for Mallory, tensions between the two families rise as Yarisa's sister and Alvaro begin to argue. What causes this sense of tension? How did this argument start?
- > After Mallory's death, both families participate in the processes and ceremonies that follow. However, it is made clear that Yarisa is left alone to grieve. What are the reasons for this and why does she appear so distant from the families?
- > After finally leaving her room, Yarisa gradually breaks down. She runs to the beach where she cries out to Sarah, begging her to come. Why does she do this? What does she want from Sarah?
- > As the film concludes, a sense of ambiguity lingers. It is not clear what happens to any of the characters, nor is it clear if anyone will face repercussions for the death of Mallory. What do you believe happened? What can be inferred from the closing sequence?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- > Following the opening shot, Sarah narrates a message intended for Yarisa while being submerged under water. This is the first time that the audience is exposed to the relationship between the two characters. How does this style of storytelling interact with the audience? Why did Schnicer and Porra choose to begin the film this way?
- > *Carajita* boasts a relatively simple sound design that depends on diegetic sound, rather than non-diegetic music. Nonetheless, the film has a recurring theme that consists of an ominous flute used sparingly during key moments. When is this theme used and why is it used in these moments?
- > Describe the pacing of *Carajita*? Is it fast or slow? What techniques are implemented to achieve the pacing? How are these techniques used to complement the bleak tone of the film?
- > Following the death of Mallory, the film cuts to a closeup of Alvaro. He stares directly into the camera before he takes off his mask and begins to joyously sing as the ceiling lights illuminate his face. At the same time, the film's recurring ominous tune drowns him out. Why do you think the filmmakers choose to include such a stylistically detached sequence to follow the previous scene? In what ways does this sequence contrast the previous one?
- > After discovering the death of Mallory, Yarisa's onscreen presence seems to diminish. From then on, the focus seems to shift away from her and primarily center around the two families. Yarisa does not return until the end of the film. What do you think is the filmmakers' reasoning behind this decision?

CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- Throughout many scenes within *Carajita*, diegetic sources of light such as smartphone screens, candles, and car headlights are used to contrast the dark Dominican nights. How does this technique compliment both the mood and narrative of *Carajita*? What other forms of lighting are used?
- *Carajita* can be described as a psychological thriller that often employs elements of horror and mystery. What editing techniques help to establish the tone of this film?
- Following Yarisá's breakdown, the final sequence of the film does not contain any dialogue, nor any non-diegetic music. What effects come with this minimalist soundscape that differentiates from the rest of the film?
- The film ends on a rather abstract note. After the camera follows Sarah as she leaves the house, it quickly pans back to where she left. The room is now filled with goats. What meaning does this final shot have? Do you think this last shot is based on reality and the goats are real or do you interpret the goats as a magical/surreal element? Explain your answer.

THEMES

- The colloquial term "carajita" is often translated as "brat" or "annoying child". How does this title relate to the film? What significance does it carry?
- *Carajita* is a film that serves as a commentary on class struggle in the Dominican Republic. Examine the relationship between Yarisá and her employers. What are the various facets to this relationship? What statements do Schnicer and Porra make?
- One of the most prevalent motifs in this film is submersion underwater and many of the film's most important moments occur while Sarah is under the sea. This includes her opening monologue, her message to Yarisá following the death of Mallory, and the final climatic beach scene when Yarisá breaks down. What does this motif symbolize? What is the meaning behind Sarah's relation to water?
- The film continuously places goats at the center of many scenes. What do these goats symbolize?
- Explore the portrayal of mother-daughter relationships in *Carajita*, particularly between Yarisá and Sarah. How does their support and connection influence their individual journeys? How does this dynamic change after the death of Mallory? Describe other forms of this relationship, such as that between Yarisá and Mallory and Sarah and her mother.
- Yarisá is a character that has a very complicated family life. While she is distant from her blood-family, she is very much ingrained into the family she serves. What commentary on family life does *Carajita* make? How do the two distinct families differentiate?
- Guilt exists as a recurring theme throughout the film. Yarisá feels guilty for being an absent mother, Sarah feels guilty for killing Mallory, and Alvaro feels guilty for allowing Mallory to walk home at night. How do the various characters cope with their guilt? How do they react?
- *Carajita* clearly portrays two vastly different families; one is rich and powerful while the other lives in relative poverty. What social disparities exist between the two families? How are their lives different?
- As the film concludes, viewers are permitted to believe that Sarah manages to avoid repercussions for her actions. What social injustices arise from the wealth and power that her family possesses? How do those same social injustices affect Yarisá's family?

