

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



HOME IS SOMEWHERE ELSE

A film by CARLOS HAGERMAN

Mexico, United States / 2023 / 87 min
English and 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 Carlos Hagerman at <https://pragda.com/film/home-is-somewhere-else/>

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 *Home is Somewhere Else*:

An estimated 11 million undocumented migrants are living in the United States under the constant threat of sudden deportation. What is it like to grow up in such a situation?

Home Is Somewhere Else shares the rich complexity of the emotional experiences of immigrant children and families to better understand and empathize with them. It invites discussion about the need for a new US migratory model based on respect for human rights for all.

In this documentary animation, three young immigrants tell their stories. Eleven-year-old Jasmine fears being separated from her undocumented parents and sets off to become an activist to protect families like her own. Sisters Evelyn and Elizabeth. Evelyn was born in the USA but has chosen to return to Mexico, while her sister Elizabeth, an illegal immigrant in Los Angeles, is struggling to realize her ambitions. Finally, Lalo shares the story of his childhood, deportation experience, finding a way back, and transforming his challenges through his work as an artist and activist.

Voiced by the actual children and their families, the stories are woven together by spoken word poet José Eduardo Aguilar, also known as Lalo "El Deportee," the film's host and MC whose vibrant "Spanglish" breaks codes, switches standards, and pushes the viewer to decipher his poems. Their painful experiences and vibrant hopes and dreams lend themselves well to animation. A powerful reminder of how the color of your passport determines your life.



- 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/home-is-somewhere-else/>) 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 a narrator breaking the fourth wall by standing on a stage and talking to us (the audience). How does this opening scene set the tone for the rest of the documentary?
- > What's the conflict currently facing Jasmine and her mother? Do you think this is a widespread issue among US immigrants?
- > How and why was Jasmine's father detained for six months? What lasting effects did this traumatic experience have on Jasmine and her parents?
- > What were the results of the congressional vote on the Dream Act? On what emotional note do the filmmakers wrap up Jasmine's story? What does this imply about Jasmine and her family's resolve since the decision?
- > Why does Eli have difficulty crossing the US-Mexico border whereas her sister does not?
- > How does Eli's immigration status impact her life and career prospects? How is her situation different from her sister Evelyn's?
- > In "Between Dos Mundos", the narrative cuts back and forth between José's encounter with the police and a memory of him fishing with his dad. What are some connections you can draw between these two seemingly dissimilar stories?
- > What aspect of his stay at the ICE detention center does José equate to his grade school experience?
- > Why do you think the filmmakers chose to organize the film into sectionalized chapters? How do you think the narrative would be different if presented in interweaving storylines?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- > Why do you think the filmmakers opted for an animated format to tell these stories? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this technical decision?
- > How would you describe the use of animation in the film? Do you think it's meant to project realism or something more abstract? How does the animation style of each of the stories affect the tone of the doc?
- > What do you think the animation style in Jasmine's chapter is meant to represent? How does the animation style fit the theme of its narrator and her story?
- > What effect do the various sound effects – anything ranging from tire screeches to birds chirping – have on the viewer's perception as they watch? How would the film be different without them?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- The documentary uses real interviews from the subjects and reframes them as dialogue for scenes in the film. What's effective about this editing choice, and how does it tie into the themes? How would it be different if voice actors had been used?
- Eli's and Evelyn's scenes talking on the phone are often presented through a split-screen. What does this editing choice imply about their relationship? What if these scenes had been shown through alternating shots?
- What do you think the animation style in José's chapter is meant to represent? How does the animation style fit the theme of its narrator and his story?

THEMES

- What do you think was the filmmaker's goal in making this documentary? How do you think the film would resonate if it had been reenacted in a traditional live-action narrative?
- Why do you think the documentary is titled *Home is Somewhere Else*? How is this title fitting for the film's themes?
- The documentary focuses on Mexican stories of immigrating to the United States. Do you think the stories are Mexican-specific, or do you think they can be applied on a more universal scale? Conversely, what do you think is unique about the Mexican immigration experience?
- While there are countless similar immigrant stories ripe for telling, the filmmakers chose to amplify these three tales. What's particularly compelling about each chapter, and how is each of them unique in the themes they raise? What was something you learned about the immigrant experience from each story?
- The animation for Jasmine's story incorporates Jasmine's own personal drawings of her family, pets, house, etc. How does this minor decision align thematically with the documentary? Why do you think they used her drawings instead of hiring a professional artist?
- The documentary uses real interviews from the subjects and reframes them as dialogue for scenes in the film. What's effective about this, and how does it tie into the themes? How would it be different if voice actors had been used?
- Think about the chapter titled "Between Dos Mundos". How does the title's incorporation of the English and Spanish languages tie in with the narrator's identity and experience?

