

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



BOCA CHICA

A film by GABRIELLA A. MOSES

Dominican Republic / 2023 / 97min
Spanish and English 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 Gabriella A. Moses at <https://pragda.com/film/boca-chica/>.

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 *Boca Chica*:

Beautifully juxtaposing the realities and expectations of a young girl approaching womanhood in the Dominican Republic, *Boca Chica* shines a light on the insidious child sex trade and the lives it seeks to destroy.

Director Gabriella A. Moses exposes the community's complicity by way of twelve-year-old Desi who is constantly exposed to unwanted advances and crude comments from older men, both visiting and homegrown. She works at the family restaurant alongside her mother Carmen, who encourages the behavior, in a once serene beachside town now bustling with foreign tourists.

Music is Desi's escape. She dreams of parlaying her nascent musical talents into a full-fledged singing career. When she stumbles across a group of local rappers that set themselves apart from the scene, her passions begin to boil to the surface. She seeks to avoid the common fate of growing mature before her time and falling prey to the morally bankrupt adults in her life who encourage her to forgo her innocence for profit.

Boca Chica explores themes of identity, family, codependency, and truth, and exposes how local social norms present the sexualization of very young girls as a path to survival.



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

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- When discussing Desi's cousin Elvis's upcoming wedding to an American woman, what does Desi's aunt make her promise? What are her feelings about the wedding, and how do they differ from Desi's mother's?
- What instrument does Fran play? What about Fran's great uncle? Do you think Desi's family's musical background has influenced her own passion for singing?
- The film's First Act frequently cuts back and forth between Desi and Fran despite them leading starkly different lives in different countries. Explain the reasoning behind this narrative decision and what it implies about the relationship between these two characters.
- Desi's first rap scene is the first time we see her stand up for herself. How does Desi's passion for music play a pivotal role in her personal development over the course of the film?
- Compare and contrast Fran and Elvis. How does their treatment of Desi differ? In what ways do these two men respectively personify Desi's two potential paths in life?
- Reflect on the relationship between Desi and the blue haired boy. What is their dynamic like at the beginning of the film? How does it evolve throughout the film? What were some of the ways they influenced each other in relation to music and their own character arcs?
- What causes an argument between Desi's mother and her aunt? What greater problem does this moment of conflict signify?
- What familial secrets are revealed by Fran at the wedding? How does this change our perception of Fran in terms of his identity and desires?
- The film ends with Desi moving across the country with Fran after he's offered a spot in a band. In the film, how does music directly or indirectly resolve the challenges Desi is faced with?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- In the first scene in Desi's bedroom, the lighting takes on a gold-like quality while Desi herself is shrouded within a canopy of sheets. How does this technical choice contribute to conveying an aura of innocence?
- During the birthday party scene, the sound and music are muffled as we watch the children dancing from Desi's POV. Explain how the sound editing conveys Desi's feeling of isolation from her peers.
- While serving at the restaurant, Desi spots a young girl sitting at a table with an older white man, the girl implied to be a trafficking victim. Desi's face is then superimposed over the girl's body. How is this photoshopping technique used as a storytelling device in this scene, and what does it imply about Desi's state of mind?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- Explain how the editing throughout the film immerses the viewer into Desi's POV, particularly through the use of sound effects and diegetic music.
- In the scene where Elvis is cutting Fran's hair, describe how the lighting contributes to the scene's nefarious undertones.
- There is a continuous 2-minute long take in the scene showing Desi waiting alone outside a club for Elvis. Analyze the effectiveness of this directorial decision and the senses it seeks to elicit from the audience.
- Much of the film takes place outdoors, on the streets or by the beach. How does the use of exterior shots serve the mood and theme?
- The film concludes with a final shot of Desi looking out the bus window straight at the camera just as it starts its journey, a playground and young prostitutes reflected in the glass. What meaning does this last shot have?



THEMES

- As recently as 2021, the Dominican government passed Law 1-21, which eradicates all grounds for child marriage in the country. With this in mind, what makes the Dominican Republic a worthy setting to explore themes of adolescence and sexualization?
- The film was helmed by a female director and made by a mostly female crew. How do you think director Gabrielle A. Moses injects the film with a uniquely female perspective? How do you think the film would be different if a man had made it?
- The title *Boca Chica* translates to “small mouth”, or individually as “mouth” and “girl”. Beyond being an obvious reference to the setting of the film in Boca Chica, DR, how does this title fit the scope and themes of the film?
- Desi's mother is presented as complicit in the sexual harassment that Desi is forced to endure. Explain how the theme of motherhood is turned on its head to further contextualize Desi's isolation. Do you think Desi's mother's complicity is a byproduct of the greater Dominican culture / economy? If so, how?
- The struggle of Good vs Evil is inherent in the film, especially at it relates to the socio-politics of child sex trafficking. Explain how the characters of Elvis and Fran operate as manifestations of this theme from Desi's viewpoint.
- During the birthday party scene, one of the girls tells Desi it's “better to be pregnant than fat.” Describe the implications of this remark and what it reveals about cultural expectations of women in the DR.
- The theme of family is investigated throughout the film. Describe the various effects Desi's family members had on her as it relates to her identity and perspective. How were they positive? Negative?
- Both Desi and Fran find community through their music. What does this imply about music as an interpersonal medium? How does music bring the two of them closer together?
- There are frequent references to Desi's age, and even arguments about whether she, at 13 years old, should be classified as a child or an adult. In what ways do the people around her treat Desi as a child? In what ways do they treat her as an adult? What is important about this distinction?

