

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



MONEY EXCHANGE

A film by LAUTARO GARCÍA CANDELA

Argentina / 2022 / 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 Lautaro García Candela at <https://pragda.com/film/money-exchange/>.

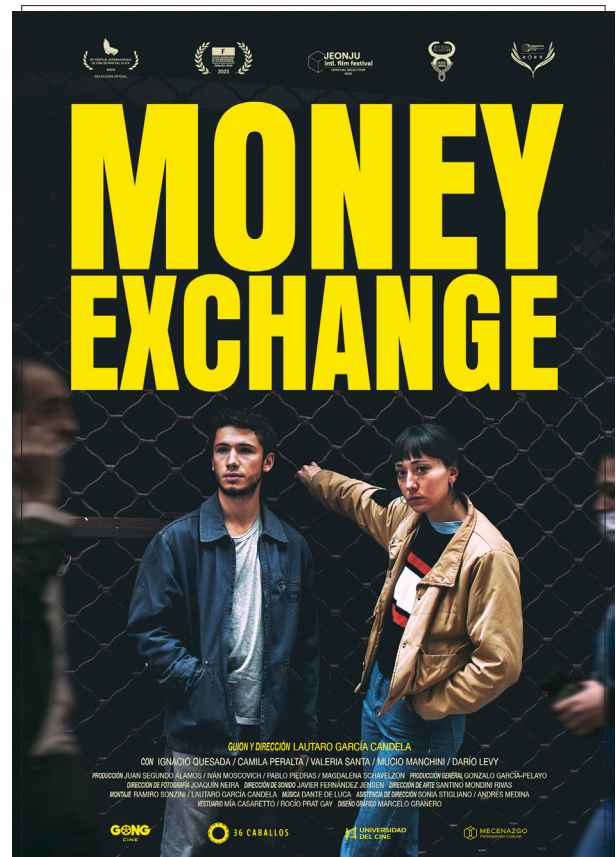
INTRODUCING THE FILM

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 *Money Exchange*:

An extended sequence of newsreel footage about Argentina's spiraling inflation since 2019 sets the stage for Pablo, who works on Peatonal Florida, Buenos Aires' economic and tourist epicenter, trying to survive in a precarious and exhausting working world.

When he falls in love with Florencia, an architecture student who shows him the city in a different way, he gets involved in the illegal exchange business selling dollars on the black market to improve his standard of living. As an impending currency crisis looms, Pablo seizes the opportunity to strike a blow using the volatility of the dollar value to his advantage. Despite the risks of getting caught by his money-laundering boss, he comes up with an elaborate scheme that could earn them enough money to change his 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/money-exchange/>) without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- What form of currency spikes in value at the beginning of the film? How does this economic event catalyze the ensuing string of events?
- Pablo is shown at the beginning of the film handing out coupons to uninterested pedestrians. How does this initial image of Pablo compare to when he becomes an *arbolito*?
- *Money Exchange* can be split into two parts: the first half a romance, the second half a thriller. Why do you think the plot is constructed in this way, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of this narrative strategy?
- How is the story of the Tucumana girl key to the main story? Putting the movie in its entirety into perspective, what narrative device could this seemingly random anecdote from a side character be characterized as?
- What's the final straw that convinces Pablo to want to be an *arbolito*? Do you think he is rash in his decision, or do you believe he should have considered alternative options?
- Think about how the movie portrays the romance between its two protagonists and think about Pablo and Florencia individually. In what ways are they different? In what ways do they represent two sides of the same coin – the coin being low-income youth – and what divergent paths do they appear to be taking?
- According to Pablo's boss, what version of the American Dollar is more valuable? If all versions of the American Dollar have the same monetary value, why do you think there is this discrepancy in Argentina?
- How does Pablo's and Florencia's relationship change over the course of the film? How does Pablo's new career as an *arbolito* affect their relationship? Do you think they come from similar financial backgrounds? If so, how does this class difference affect their relationship?
- How do Pablo's choices become increasingly money-driven? In what ways do those around him also become more money-driven? Why do you think this is the case?
- The last scene shows Pablo serving a customer at a café, having just sent a voice message to Florencia. The customer asks Pablo if he has "large face" bills, and the movie ends on a cliffhanger. What can we infer about Pablo's fate based on this scene?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- The opening shots of the film are overlaid with audio snippets of newscasts. Describe how this editing choice helps to establish the setting and set the tone for the story.
- The first instance of nondiegetic music comes in the scene when Pablo sees Florencia for the first time. How is the music used to present Pablo's internal emotions to the audience?
- In the first date scene at the bus stop, the camera is stationed and angled so that a bus – orchestrated in such a way that we don't know whether it's the one Florencia is waiting for – obscures our view of the two protagonists. How does the cinematography in this scene build anticipation and uncertainty?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- In their scenes together, Pablo and Florencia frequently inhabit the same static frame rather than being shown in alternating shots. Explain how this directorial decision shapes our perception of their relationship.
- Right after Pablo discovers his moneymaking scheme, the film cuts to a montage of various shots. Describe how the montage in this scene is used to portray changes in time and mood.
- Most of the film is shot using dark, natural lighting. How does this add depth to the movie's gritty narrative?
- Describe how the nondiegetic music in the thrilling second half of the film increases tension.
- Pablo's voice message to Daniela while she's in Paris narrates over handheld shots of Argentina. What's effective about the narration in this scene and how does it uniquely provide context for the string of events that have happened since we last saw them?
- In what "style" would you say the movie, particularly the scenes on the street among the arbolitos, is mostly shot in? Does the cinematography seem stylized or more grounded in realism?

THEMES

- Filmmaker Lautaro García Candela used real-life arbolitos when shooting scenes on Florida Street. What does this imply about the director's motivation for making the film? How would it be different if the director used background actors instead?
- In the film, the American Dollar not only fluctuates in tangible value, but it seems to grow into a symbol for prosperity itself. How does the Dollar's significance relate to the international sensationalism of the "American Dream"?
- Art imitates life and life imitates art. How does Money Exchange utilize current events as the foundation for its plot? How is the film's setting vital to its story and message?
- Equal parts thriller and romance, the movie in its most basic sense can be described as a coming-of-age tale. How does Pablo evolve over the course of the film? In what ways does his romance with Florencia and the ordeal with money laundering influence this change?
- Economic unrest not only propels the story forward but also is inherent in Money Exchange's cast of characters. Explain how economic unrest is presented in the film and how it influences characters in major decisions.
- Although his livelihood is modest, Pablo is not presented as being desperately poor, and his reasons for joining the arbolitos is more about fueling his passions than making ends meet. There's an apparent push and pull between desperation and greed, and the gray area between the two. Do you think Pablo's decisions reflect greed or desperation?

