

PALACE CINEMAS 

CINE LATINO:

A NEW FESTIVAL OF
LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA

GUARANI

a film by LUIS ZORRAQUIN



~ Winner of European Vision ~
Primer Corte Award Ventana Sur

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Overview

Guarani (2015) is an Argentinean-Paraguayan feature film by Luis Zorraquin.

Atilio (Emilio Barreto) lives with his granddaughter Iara (Jazmin Bogarin) in a small town in Paraguay. His great desire is to have a grandson to pass on his Guarani indigenous culture. When he discovers that Iara's mother, Helena, is pregnant, he decides to go on a long journey and cross borders to Argentina to arrive to the big lights of Buenos Aires, with the aim to convince Helena to come back to her home town and give birth in the Guarani land... The long journey will make Atilio and Iara understand the real meaning of traditions and family bonds.

Guarani is Argentinean director Luis Zorraquin's debut feature film. While working in Paraguay for many years, he became interested in how Guarani culture is transmitted through generations in the contemporary world.

Language: Spanish and Guarani (with English subtitles)

Running time: 85min

Curriculum Links

Guarani is suitable for students Years 9-12

Years 9-10: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures: English, Humanities, The Arts

By comparing and contrasting the featured culture with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures students gain a better understanding of the concepts of Identity, Country/Place, Culture and Peoples. Also applicable to Media Arts, Intercultural Capability and Spanish.

Years 11-12: VCE English, VCE Media, VCE Spanish

Relevant areas of study:

- Indigenous cultures of Latin America
- Language and identity
- Gender power relationships
- Intergenerational relationships
- Tradition and modernity in the 21st Century

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Background information about the Guarani culture



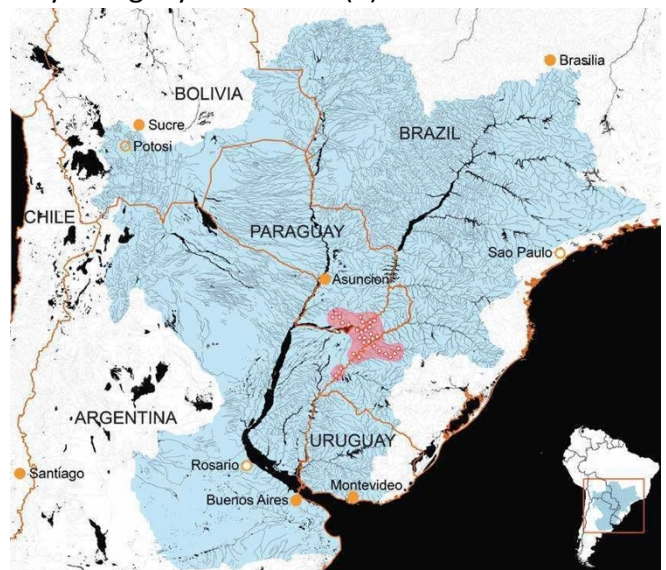
“Some say the Parana River divides the coast of the three countries (Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay). But in reality it is a liquid thread which unites them and transforms them in a fourth, legendary, country.”

Alfredo Varela, *The Dark River*

The Guarani people are a group of culturally related indigenous peoples of South America. They are distinguished from the related Tupi by their use of the Guarani language. The traditional range of the Guarani people is in present-day Paraguay between the Uruguay River and lower Paraguay River, North East Argentina, southern Brazil, and parts of Uruguay and Bolivia. See map on right (1).

Their demographic dominance of the region has been reduced by European colonisation, particularly enslaved to work in the local crops plantations during the Spanish colony and by the commensurate rise of *mestizos* (combined indigenous and Spanish descendants). Furthermore, The War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870), in which Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay fought against Paraguay, resulted in a demographic disaster for the latter, whose population was reduced by up to 85%, and as much as 90% in the case of males. This gender imbalance may explain the relevance given to males in the passing of traditional values and knowledge.

The Guarani language, still widely spoken across traditional Guarani homelands, is one of the two official languages in Paraguay, the other one being Spanish. The language was once looked down upon by the upper and middle classes, but it is now often regarded with pride and serves as a symbol of national distinctiveness. The Paraguayan population learns Guarani both informally from social interaction and formally in public schools. In modern Spanish, Guarani is also applied to refer to any Paraguayan national (2).



The Guarani region and the River Plate (in blue). The 30 Jesuit Missions which operated until early 19th C. (in red)

The Guarani language



In the health centre scene Lara acts as an interpreter for her grandfather, who has all his life refused to speak Spanish despite the fact that “he understands everything”. The nurse congratulates Lara for being “very brave”.

Guarani is one of the most-widely spoken indigenous languages of the Americas and the only one whose speakers include a large proportion of non-indigenous people. This is an interesting anomaly in the Americas where language shift towards European colonial languages (in this case, the other official language is Spanish) has otherwise been a nearly universal cultural and identity marker of mestizos (people of mixed Spanish and Amerindian ancestry), and also of culturally assimilated, upwardly mobile Amerindian people.

Jesuit priest Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, who in 1639 published the first written grammar of Guarani in a book called *Tesoro de la lengua guaraní* (Treasure of the Guarani Language), described it as a language “so copious and elegant

that it can compete with the most famous [of languages]”.

The name “Guarani” is generally used for the official language of Paraguay. However, this is part of a dialect chain, most of whose components are also often called Guarani (3).

According to Fernandez Bogado, “Identity issues are better known for being a factor for crisis in the world. However, in Paraguay, the use of Guarani emerges as a reaffirmation of the national capacity to coexist with other languages and cultures and, at the same time, of being a powerful factor for cohesion for the foreign-born communities who make up this country of seven million in the center of South America” (4).

Traditions: The *mate*



Mate is a cultural feature in *Guarani*. Iara drinks *mate* whilst steering the boat through the Parana river.

Mate is a traditional South American caffeine-rich infused drink, particularly consumed in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, the Bolivian Chaco and Southern Brazil, and in southern Chile.

The *mate* drink is prepared by steeping dried leaves of yerba mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*) in hot water and is served with a metal straw from a shared hollow calabash gourd, called a *bombilla* in Spanish, which is traditionally made of silver.

Mate was first consumed by the indigenous Guarani and also spread by the Tupi people who lived in that part of southern Brazil which was Paraguayan territory before the Paraguayan War. The consumption of yerba mate became widespread with the European colonisation in the Spanish colony of Paraguay in the late 16th century, among both Spanish settlers and indigenous Guarani, who consumed it before the Spanish arrival. *Mate* consumption spread in the 17th century to the Rio de la Plata and from there to Chile. This widespread consumption turned it into Paraguay's main commodity. Aboriginal labour was used to harvest wild stands. In the mid-

17th century, Jesuits managed to domesticate the plant and establish plantations in their Indian reductions in the Paraguayan department of Misiones, sparking severe competition with the Paraguayan harvesters of wild strands. After their expulsion in the 1770s, the Jesuit missions – along with the yerba mate plantations – fell into ruins. The industry continued to be of prime importance for the Paraguayan economy after independence, but development in benefit of the Paraguayan state halted after the Paraguayan War (1864–1870) that devastated the country both economically and demographically.

Mate has a strong cultural significance both in terms of national identity as well as socially, to the extent of being the national drink of Argentina. In Paraguay it is also consumed with ice cold water (called *tereré*).

Mate unites people and it is always offered to whoever comes your way. (5)

Narrative and narrative structure



While her cousin gives birth, Lara looks through the window as her grandfather, Atilio, waits in the garden drinking *mate*. After being congratulated for the arrival of his new baby granddaughter, Atilio sets off on his old boat down the river. *Guarani* opens with a visually powerful scene and the question of gender as a cultural value. Juxtaposed to this, the viewer sees teenage Lara riding her bicycle along the river while listening to rock music with her earphones. Next to the nearby highway, she expectantly waits for the local bus, which passes by without stopping.

Life seems to go on in this small Paraguayan coastal town, men fish, Atilio has a drink from his flask and seems to be waiting on his boat. The all-encompassing natural river surroundings appear to be dictating the mood. Lara arrives and she is reprimanded for being late. Both grandfather and granddaughter go on with their daily job of delivering goods to the locals. Atilio is offered some illegal business, which he sturdily refuses claiming he is a fisherman and won't get involved in such deeds. When faced with the reality of desperately needing the money to fix his engine, he agrees to transport people to the other shore. All interactions in this scene take place in *Guarani* language.

Until this point in the film Lara is depicted as a "normal" teenager, who spends her time going to school, listening to music and riding her bicycle.

However, the audience learns about her particular family situation: her mother lives in the Argentinean capital, Buenos Aires, and that is why she regularly checks for deliveries from the bus.

Intergenerational differences in attitudes towards gender roles start becoming more apparent in the next scene, in which Atilio is trying to teach some fishing techniques to a young boy, and Lara complains that the youngster is too small to do what he is told, the suggestion is she thinks she would do it better if allowed. Despite Atilio and Lara's differences, they appear to enjoy their time together as we witness peaceful moments of daily appreciation for the environment which not only supports their livelihood but also plays an integral part in their relationship. Lara works with her grandfather and expects to be remunerated for her efforts, claiming she will use it to buy school books. By this interaction the audience can come to conclusions that Lara values her schooling more than her elder.

That evening, in the heart of the family home, Atilio has dinner at the centre of the table, in the background two of his daughters and his granddaughters are moving around the rooms. The women talk [in Spanish] about the baby's cries and other issues such as one of the granddaughters' new boyfriend and the unwanted prospect of her becoming pregnant, the interactions escalate into an argument to which

Atilio puts a stop to by declaring [in Guarani language] “Shut up all of you. Here we speak Guarani. If you don’t like it, you can live”, making clear that, for Atilio, culture and language are interwoven.

Next day, lara receives a package from her mother. The emotional tone rises as lara reads a letter hiding in the toilet and cries inconsolably, creating an expectation point in the story. The following morning lara appears proud wearing a new fashionable top sent by her mother, but she is told off by Emilio for looking too much like a city girl. The generational tension grows when lara answers back that she is fed up, claiming she is not a boy.

Atilio goes boating by himself and searches on lara’s backpack to find the letter she has received from her mum. Unable to read it himself, he seeks help from someone who can translate from Spanish to Guarani for him and finds out that his daughter Helena, lara’s mother, is expecting a child, a male child, his first grandson. The local dispensary provides with a phone with which Atilio attempts to call his daughter, but fails. We learn there is a trust system of paying later for products and services, highlighting the close nature of the town’s inhabitants.

Later, lara finds out Atilio had read her letter and gets upset. They continue their boat trip as usual, but in a sudden change, Emilio steers the boat away from their house. Night sets, their journey to Buenos Aires is under way.

The first new encounter is with a floating national celebration composed of several boats, where families gather, women dance, and both Paraguayan and Argentinean flags proudly flutter. It is rather soon when the boat engine is finally ruined. Opposing ideas about gender roles escalate when lara suggests continuing on by bus or going back, but the elder explains that he needs to go to Buenos Aires to bring his daughter back in order to ensure his grandson is born in Guarani land. He further explains that Guarani men are made for the river, whereas women are to stay at home. lara rejects his idea and angrily goes off to the nearby town.

After spending an evening in the town, with the help of an Argentinean father (El Uruguayo) and teenage son Beto (and not without Atilio’s reservations about lara’s fondness for the boy) the pair is able to continue their journey after all. However, discovered to have no tickets or enough money to continue on their trip, lara and Atilio are dismissed from the bus they are on and must continue on by foot. With the help of some locals lara and her grandfather get work in a farm for a day in order to earn enough money until the next stop. In this scene the audience is reminded of other gender injustices such as lower pay for a girl in the same job, compared to a man.

During the following, long train ride, Atilio gets sick and requires medical attention. They are taken to the nearest health centre, where he is given some fluids and is required to keep rest. The health practitioner acts as a helper not only to the grandfather, she offers lara a hot shower and food. *Guarani* is as much about intergenerational and cultural relationships as it is a “coming of age” story. Here we see a more matured lara, deeply caring for her grandfather and at the same time able to articulate some of the differences between them.

Once Atilio had recovered, at least according to him, the pair gets back on the road. After hitchhiking and going on a bus ride they finally arrive to the big city and to Helena’s house. As Atilio and lara converse in the girl’s mother’s room, Zorraquin makes evident that the journey has been a life changing experience of growing understanding for both.



Main characters



Atilio

Atilio (Emilio Barreto) is an elderly Guarani man proud of his culture who refuses to speak Spanish. He lives in a small town in the coast of the Parana River in Paraguay with two daughters and granddaughters, including lara. His subsistence consists mainly of fishing and transporting goods across the river. Very early in the film it becomes apparent that water is a fundamental element in the lives of the Guarani people and the photography captures the environment almost as another character in the film. Emilio is desperate to pass on his knowledge to the next generation and believes that only a grandson could understand and hold the Guarani tradition.

lara

lara (Jazmin Bogarín) is a fourteen-year-old girl who lives in a small town of Paraguay with her aunties and grandfather, Atilio. Her mother has gone to live to Buenos Aires (Argentina) in search of a better life. Like for many teenagers, lara's days are taken up by school, riding her bike and listening to rock music. lara is also Emilio's greatest help and regularly accompanies him on his fishing trips. One day she receives a letter from her mother telling her she is expecting a child, a boy. lara has mixed feelings about the news, specially after her grandfather decides to travel with her to Buenos Aires to ensure the new grandson is born in Guarani land.



Director Luis Zorraquin



Luis Zorraquin studied at the Universidad del Cine (Argentina). He improved his studies in script with Jose Martinez Suarez. Luis developed his professional career in commercials and feature films where he worked as assistant director. He directed four short films. *Guarani* is his first feature film.

Director statement

“Some time ago, when I was in Paraguay, I got to know Guarani’s culture, which still beats and subsists despite the huge silence and wars. Now, many people emigrate looking for a better future. I wanted to tell a story that took place in the border, with a strong Paraguayan view, opposing culture values that seem to be lost in the youngsters.” (6)

On language and identity

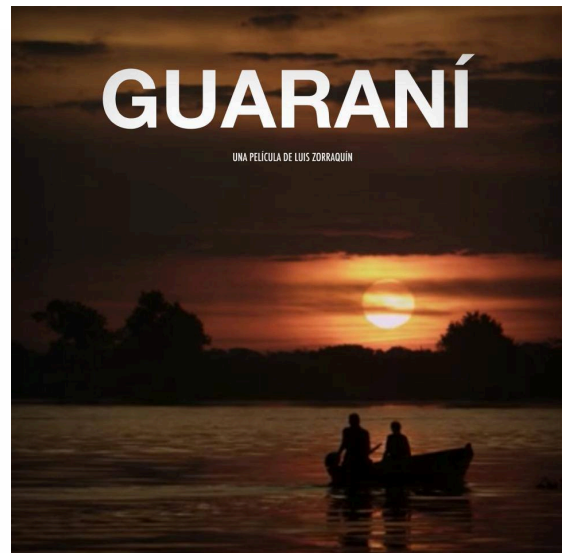
In *Guarani*, language and identity are given a central role. When asked the question of what impressed him from Guarani culture, Zorraquin replies: “The film takes language as a cultural referent. What impressed me the most is what is left, what through development remains and is advancing. Also, language shows certain identity. It is only now that it is resurfacing, because during a long time the Guarani language wasn’t legal and speaking it was badly perceived, it was something “poor” people would do. It wasn’t a symbol of development. What surprised me the most was how, despite all this, it was able to survive, because it is a rich language, with a lot of wisdom. And that culture survived through colonisation, through the War of the Triple Alliance, through 40 years of Stroessner dictatorship, when Guarani was synonym of “Indian” and “underdevelopment”. And there they are, today using the language in the Parliament and Law.” (7)

Suggested activities

Before viewing the film

1. Setting the scene.

Research information about Paraguay. Locate Paraguay, its neighbouring countries and the Parana River in the map and complete the table. *(This activity can be completed in Spanish)*



PARAGUAY	
Capital	
Official Language(s)	
Population (composition and number of inhabitants)	
Important products	
Kms to Buenos Aires	

2. Title and script.

The film we are going to watch is called *Guarani*. Now that you know a bit more about Paraguay, what do you think it can be about now?

3. Plot and topics.

Watch *Guarani*'s trailer and answer the questions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIMINph1dr4>

a. How can you describe the characters you see in the trailer?

b. They are about to set off in a long trip. What challenges do you think they will face?

Suggested Activities-General discussion points

- How are gender roles depicted in the film? What similarities and differences are there with gender roles in your own culture?
- What generational differences create tension in the story? Why?
- What similarities and differences can you recognise between these generational tensions for the Guarani people depicted in the film and any you have experienced in your culture?
- How does the director position the audience towards the cultural places of Emilio and Lara in the letter in the boat scene?
- The characters have undergone changes throughout the journey. Discuss.
- What does the end suggest to you?
- What issues represented in the movie resonate with contemporary Australian Aboriginal culture?



Suggestions for Spanish language activities

Beginners

- **Family, physical and character descriptions**
Create a family tree for Lara's family, include physical and character descriptions for each character.
- **Routine, likes**
Describe the daily routine of the characters in their hometown.
Describe what the characters do, what they like and dislike and how they feel during the journey.
- **Interview**
Work in pairs. One of you is a journalist who is asked to interview the director of the film. The other will interpret the director. Write ten questions you would ask and then conduct the interview (you can imagine their answers). Record/film the interview or write an article with your findings.

Intermediate

- **Places**
Write an article in which you describe the similarities and differences you imagine between life in Lara's hometown and in the city of Buenos Aires.
- **Routine, trips**
Imagine you are Lara. Write some diary entries during the trip.
- **Email recommendation**
You loved the movie, write an email to recommend it to a friend, remember to include the reasons why you liked it.

Intermediate+

- Write a film review for Guarani.
- Research the Guarani *mate* legend and write a summary.
- Is there a culturally relevant product similar to *mate* in your culture? Write an article about it.
- Write the script for a speech about gender inequality in your culture and give suggestions to overcome this.
- Oral debate: Is there a place for traditional values and knowledge in the modern world?

Answers to table: Asunción, Spanish and Guarani, 6,892,000 (notably creole, 20% native), Agricultural and animal products: sugar, beef, soy, wheat

Bibliography

- (1) Silveti and Silvestre (2015), *Revista: Harvard Review of Latin America*. Territorio Guaraní. Map <http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/territorio-guaran%C3%AD>
- (2) Guaraní people. Wikipedia (adapted) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guaran%C3%AD_people#cite_note-1
- (3) *Guaraní language*. Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guarani_language
- (4) Fernandez Bogado (2015), *Revista: Harvard Review of Latin America*. A bilingual country: Paraguay and the Guaraní Tongue.
- (5) Mate, *Wikipedia (adapted)* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mate_\(beverage\)#History](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mate_(beverage)#History)
- (6) *Guaraní*, Film Synopsis, Medialuna Biz <http://www.medialuna.biz/screeners/guarani.html>
- (7) Ranzani (2016), Paraguay, pasado y presente, *Página/12*, April 4, 2016, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/5-38446-2016-04-04.html>

Further reading

In English

Territory Guaraní (Spring 2015) *ReVista, Harvard Review of Latin America*
<http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/territory-guarani-spring-2015>

In Spanish

Entrevista al equipo de Guaraní: “Todos aprendimos con esta película”, *La nave de los sueños*,
<http://www.naveonline.com.ar/post/142521400716/entrevista-al-equipo-de-guaran%C3%AD-todos-aprendimos>

Further viewing

In Spanish

Entrevista a Luis Zorraquín, Directores AV, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4PsAvvA2PM>
Guaraníes. Ñanderu el creador. *Pueblos Originarios* (2013), Canal Encuentro
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiFkn6Vspmc>
Entrevista a Jazmín Bogarín, *Última Hora*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwggwP2y3Sk>
Leyenda de la Yerba Mate, Paka Paka, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ru7q1tQp25k>

Further listening

In Spanish

Reseña de la película, *La autopista del Sur*, Radio AM720, (hasta min 2:11)
<https://soundcloud.com/la-autopista-del-sur-3/estrenos-criticas-de-guarani-y-mandarina>

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