

The Orphanage



Suitable for:

GCSE, AS/A2 Media/Film Studies, Spanish

Produced by Guillermo del Toro, this Spanish gothic-horror tale tells the story of a long-abandoned orphanage with a particularly troubled past.

Production and Value

Guillermo Del Toro worked as one of the producers on this film, and his name appears prominently on the marketing materials for the film. What do you think is the purpose of this? Consider this Del Toro's previous films, as well as the concept of him 'presenting' The Orphanage as opposed to directing it.

Establishing the Plot

- What is the situation at the beginning of the film?
- What different characters are presented, and how are we intended to respond to them?
- How is the direction of the narrative established in the early stages of the film?

Fantasy and reality become confused at times – for the main character – and subsequently for the viewer. These lead to a degree of ambiguity in the events that we see onscreen.

- How effective do you find the narrative ambiguity of the film as you watch, and again after you have finished viewing?

Conventions of the Horror Genre

The horror genre has a large number of conventions associated with it. Make a list of all the conventions that you might associate with a horror film, think about characters, setting, iconography, sound (diegetic and non-diegetic) etc.

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The list is useful for giving us an overview, but it's more accurate and helpful to think about the conventions associated with particular cycles of horror films. From the list you can see a large number of conventions, however you would not expect to find them all in any single horror film.

- How does *The Orphanage* fit into the horror cycle? Which other films does it share conventions with? Think about specific scenes and particular conventions employed.
- How heavily does this film rely on superstition for its narrative drive and the resolution of plot elements?
- How effectively is sound, and silence, employed to build suspense in the film? Make a note of any key moments where these elements are used to particular effect.



Child Protagonists

Children are catalysts for plot elements in the film; however, they are not often onscreen. In *The Orphanage* child characters disappear or are hidden, for example, behind masks.

- To what extent does this conform to or move away from other genre pieces in which children feature prominently?

The trailer places emphasis on ‘the games that children play’.

- Can you think of any other horror films where games and rules feature prominently in the plot? Does *The Orphanage* represent a departure from these in any way?

Female Leads

The lead character in *The Orphanage* is a woman. What other horror films can you think of that feature female leads? Make a list of all those that you can think of, then find the release dates of the films.

- Would you say there is an established tradition of female leads (as opposed to female victims, say) within the horror genre?
- Are these characters of a certain type or do they represent a diverse range of representations?
- Do all of these films rely on a woman playing the part or could they be remade and re-cast with male leads?
- Which do you think is the case with *The Orphanage* – does the narrative necessarily require a female lead?

The Ending

- How effective do you find the ending in terms of the rest of the plot?
- Do you feel this was the only resolution, or could other endings have been possible within the confines of this plot?