



## Bear Story

A sad and beautiful tale of a former circus bear who builds an elaborate mechanical diorama to remember the life he used to have with his wife and son before he was taken against his will. The film is an allegory of the director's own experience of being separated from his grandfather during Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile during the 1970s.

**Recommended for ages 10+**

**Themes:** Family; grief/loss; creative expression; discrimination; resilience; violence

**Director(s):** Gabriel Osorio Vargas | **10 min** | **Animated Short** | **2015** | **Country:** Chile | **Language:** No spoken dialogue

**Official film website:** [www.bearstory.cl](http://www.bearstory.cl)



## SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On September 11, 1973, Augusto Pinochet [pee-no-SHAY], the Chilean commander in chief of the army, led a military coup against the democratically elected president, Salvador Allende, and his socialist government. For the next 17 years, Pinochet ruled over Chile with an iron fist, instituting sweeping economic, political, and social policies. Dissidents were brutally silenced through torture, exile, and even death. Pinochet's secret police executed or "disappeared" over 3,200 people, and thousands more were tortured, imprisoned, or sent into exile. Even after Pinochet stepped down as president, he continued to function as Chile's commander in chief, a position that gave him considerable influence over his successors. Though Pinochet's corruption and human rights abuses were well-documented, he never stood trial. Director Gabriel Osorio Vargas's grandfather was detained during Pinochet's dictatorship and ultimately exiled to England, where he was forced to live apart from his family.

### WORDS TO KNOW

- **Allegory:** A story in which the characters and events are symbols that stand for ideas about human life or for a political or historical situation.
- **Animation:** A way of making a movie by using a series of drawings, computer graphics, or photographs of objects (such as puppets or models) that are slightly different from one another and that when viewed quickly one after another create the appearance of movement.
- **Diorama:** A scene, often in miniature, reproduced in three dimensions by placing objects and figures in front of a painted background.
- **Oppression:** The exercise of authority or power in a cruel or unjust manner.

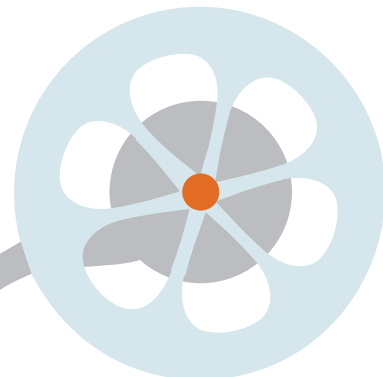
For more film terms, refer to the PCFF Film Glossary ([pcfri.org/FilmHub](http://pcfri.org/FilmHub)).



Clues  
and  
Cues

Pay attention while watching

- Notice the bear's pocket watch/locket, which shows up a number of times throughout the film.
- Listen to the music. How does it convey emotion?



## TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

- Why does the film open with the image of bears? What do the bears symbolize?
- There are a number of films within this film. Describe what happens in the story when you see the smaller film within the larger frame.
- Who are the villains in this film? What do they stand for?
- Who is the hero of this story? What does this hero stand for?
- Who do you think the circus catchers are a symbol for in our society? Who are the bears and circus animals like?
- What does the pocket watch/locket represent?
- What is the relationship between the real bear and the mechanical bear?
- Why do you think he tells this story over and over again?
- This film is an allegory, which means the characters are symbols which represent a larger political and social story. What do you think is the moral of this story?
- How does the story of the mechanical bear end differently than the real bear's story? How does the animation convey emotion even without the use of dialogue or facial expressions?
- Why do you think the bear chose to write a happy ending for his mechanical bears?
- Does this story have a happy ending? Why or why not?

## GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



For Activity Reel details, downloadable storyboard template and more, visit the the Film Hub website: [www.pcffri.org/FilmHub](http://www.pcffri.org/FilmHub)

### • Writing Prompts

Have you ever been separated from people you love, even if only for a short time? Write a journal entry describing that experience. This film is really about Gabriel Osorio Vargas' personal experience as a child. After a dictator seized power in his native homeland, Chile, Vargas' grandfather was taken by the police, jailed, and eventually sent out of the country. Have political events ever affected your family personally, either in your lifetime or in your parents', grandparents' or great grandparents' lifetimes? Write a journal entry describing how political events have affected you and your family.

### • Design Your Happy Place

**Materials:** Shoebox, scissors, glue, tape, other art supplies as available  
Create a diorama like the one in the film. In Bear Story, the bear's happy place was his home where he lived with his family. What's your happy place? You can recreate a place that already exists, like your bedroom, or design a place you want to exist!

### • Storyboard Your Own Allegory

**Materials:** Paper or storyboard template available at [pcffri.com/Film Hub](http://pcffri.com/FilmHub), pens, pencils, and crayons  
Bear Story is an allegory (see "Words to Know"). The story isn't really about bears and zookeepers, it's about the political situation in Chile and life under a dictator. Sometimes it's easier to tell a difficult personal story with symbolic characters. Think about something difficult that has happened in your life. For example, maybe your family had to move, or your parents got a divorce, or you immigrated to a new country. Pick an animal or a creature that represents you and your family and illustrate the challenge you experienced. Use the storyboard template to combine words and pictures.

## MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources complement the film and inspire further discussion or programming.

### BOOKS

- **Animal Farm**  
by George Orwell  
This famous allegorical novella details the revolution of barnyard animals against their human master, and the tyrannical animal rule that follows.
- **Aesop's Fables**  
by Aesop  
A vast collection of allegories for children, each imaginative tale features animals learning simple truths and important lessons about life.
- **Yertle the Turtle**  
by Dr. Seuss  
This allegorical story follows the rise and fall of King Yertle the Turtle.
- **Charlotte's Web**  
by E.B. White  
A classic tale about a friendship between a pig and a spider in the hard world of the barnyard.

### FILMS

- **Soul Boy (2010)**  
Fourteen-year-old Abila must confront the sorceress, who has won his foolish father's soul in a gambling bet.
- **Yertle the Turtle (1992)**  
The animated film version of the picture book by Dr. Seuss, this allegorical story follows the rise and fall of King Yertle the Turtle.
- **Charlotte's Web (1973)**  
An animated film based on the book by E. B. White. There is also a live-action Charlotte's Web film (2006).

 Indicates PCFF festival selection

## BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- **"The Serious History Behind Oscar-Winning Animated Short Bear Story":**  
[www.time.com/4241151/pinochet-history-oscars-bear-story/](http://www.time.com/4241151/pinochet-history-oscars-bear-story/)
- **"A Chilean Dictator's Dark Legacy":**  
[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/10/AR2006121000302.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/10/AR2006121000302.html)
- **"Oscar-Nominee 'Bear Story' Dir. Gabriel Osorio on His Grandfather's Exile & Latin American Animation":**  
[blogs.indiewire.com/sydneylevine/oscar-nominee-bear-story-dir-gabriel-osorio-on-his-grandfathers-exile-latin-american-animation-20160222](http://blogs.indiewire.com/sydneylevine/oscar-nominee-bear-story-dir-gabriel-osorio-on-his-grandfathers-exile-latin-american-animation-20160222)
- **"Augusto Pinochet, Dictator Who Ruled by Terror in Chile, Dies at 91":**  
[www.nytimes.com/2006/12/11/world/americas/11pinochet.html?pagewanted=1&r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/11/world/americas/11pinochet.html?pagewanted=1&r=0)
- **Another summary of the film, this website includes a "Making Of" video:**  
<http://theinspirationroom.com/daily/2016/bear-story/>

