



Blanka

Abandoned on the streets of Manila, 11-year-old Blanka pickpockets and steals from tourists to survive. All she desires is to have a family, and most importantly, a mother to care for her. Drawn by the sounds of his guitar strings, Blanka develops a relationship with a blind street musician named Peter. Through Peter, Blanka discovers a way to make money instead of stealing. The two develop a bond and try to protect each other from the everyday struggles of being homeless in Manila.

Recommended for ages 10+

Themes: social change; resilience; woman's rights; inequality; self determination; international; poverty

Director(s): Kohki Hasei | **75 min** | **Drama** | **2015** | **Country:** Italy, Japan, Philippines | **Language:** Filipino w/ English subtitles



SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Childhood homelessness is a big problem throughout the Philippines, particularly in the downtown areas of the capital city, Manila. About 1.8 million children live on the streets—nearly one percent of the country's entire population. Blanka's search for a mother is similar to the struggles facing many homeless children; the country's Department of Social Welfare and Development system is strict on documentation requirements that allow parents to adopt homeless children.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **Pickpocketing:** The act of stealing money or other valuables from someone without them noticing the theft at the time.
- **Slum:** A squalid and overcrowded urban street or district inhabited by low income people.
- **Archetype:** A character, place, or thing, that is repeatedly presented in films with a particular style or characterization; an archetype usually applies to a specific genre or type classification.
- **Climax:** The highest point of anxiety or tension in a story or film in which the central character faces, confronts, and deals with the consequences of his or her actions.
- **Diegetic Sound:** Sound whose source is visible on the screen or whose source is implied to be present by the action of the film.
- **Plot:** The main events of a play, novel, movie, or similar work, devised and presented by the writer as an interrelated sequence.

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

TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

- One of the archetypes seen in the film is the character of the wise old blind man—Peter. Generally, this character uses his wisdom and knowledge in order to provide assistance or insight to the protagonist. Do you think Peter fully fits this archetype? Why or why not? Who do you think is the wisest character in the film?
- The filmmaker chose to cast the film with homeless Filipino children, such as the actor who plays Sebastian. He wanted to provide a sense of realism to their roles and the film as a whole. Does knowing this change your perception of the film? Why or why not?
- Do you think Blanka is morally good? What are some of her actions that support your position? What about the other characters in the film?
- Despite Blanka's immediate surroundings, the film includes many vibrantly colored and beautifully scenic images of the city. Why do you think these shots were included in the film? How does this help portray a sense of place?
- Peter's guitar playing soundtracks most of the film—this is called a diegetic use of sound. Why do you think the filmmaker chose to use music in this way instead of a traditional soundtrack?
- Throughout the film, Blanka is portrayed as being fiercely independent, yet the one thing she desires in the world is to be taken care of by a mother. How does this tension play out over the course of the movie? Does Blanka change from the beginning to the end? If so, how?
- Blanka's main desire is to become part of a family. Do you think Blanka does or will ever find her ideal home with a family? Think about the types of places she made into her home and what elements of a traditional family life she tried to capture.
- What questions about homelessness does the film leave unanswered for you?



Clues and Cues

Pay attention while watching

- Think about how Blanka is portrayed in relation to the other characters in the film. How do her interactions with others seem to help her develop her own sense of identity?
- Notice how the homeless and orphaned characters are treated by other members of society throughout the film. Do you think it's fair how they are treated?



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

• Writing Prompt

Materials Needed: Paper, pencils, pens

Throughout the film, Blanka's goal is to become part of a loving family, which she identifies as having a mother to take care of her. Think about the creation of families throughout the film. Do any of the characters have a familial-like relationship to each other?

• Right or Wrong?

The film chooses to blur the lines between what is and is not seen as morally right. While stealing is generally thought of as a crime, it is portrayed in Blanka as a method of basic survival. Break up into small groups; half of the group take the side of Blanka and half the group will take the side of the law. For those in the "Blanka" group, justify your actions. For those in the other group, explain why you think Blanka's stealing is wrong. After you have finished your debates, as a group, think about what would drive you to break the law. See if you have any similar scenarios.

• Altering Perspectives

Filmmakers choose how they want their protagonist and subjects to be seen by the audience through cinematography and character development (narrative elements). In groups, write a script where the main character could be viewed as either good or bad. See how you can use these film elements to try and persuade viewers to side with one of the characters. Think about how this perception could be changed if different techniques were used.

BEYOND THE FILM | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

BOOKS

- **Oliver Twist**
by Charles Dickens
Charles Dickens' second novel exposes the cruel treatment of many orphans in mid-19th century London.
- **Hold Fit**
by Blue Balliett
A girl named Early falls into Chicago's shelter system and from there must solve the mystery of her father's strange disappearance.

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

- **Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless**
www.rihomeless.org
- **Amos House**
A nonprofit service agency that provides direct support for men, women, and children in Rhode Island who are hungry, homeless, or in crisis.
www.amoshouse.com
- **Crossroads Rhode Island**
Housing and homeless shelter with a mission to help homeless or at risk individuals and families secure stable homes.
www.crossroadsri.org
- **Rhode island Kids Count**
www.rikidscount.org

FILMS

- **Gattu (2014)**
Gattu is an orphan being raised by a strict uncle, who is frustrated by his nephew's inability to focus on work. Gattu is interested in kite flying and will stop at nothing to defeat the high-flying black kite that rules the skies. The only problem—Gattu is illiterate.
- **Boy and the World (O Menino e o Mundo) (2015)**
This wordless, evocative animated film follows Cuca, a young Brazilian boy who ventures from his simple countryside home into a neon-infused, carnivalesque metropolis in search of his father.
- **I Am Kalam (2012)**
Chhotu, a bright yet impoverished Rajasthani boy, dreams of gaining an education while he works at a roadside cafe. When he hears an inspirational message from President Kalam, he sets off on a mission to meet the president.

• Indicates PCFF festival selection

RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- **Interview with the director, Kohki Hasei:**
www.eyeforfilm.co.uk/feature/2015-09-08-kohki-hasei-on-making-blanka-and-hope-in-the-slums-feature-story-by-amber-wilkinson
- **Unicef article about homeless children in the Philippines:**
www.unicef.org/philippines/reallives_11786.html
- **Los Angeles Times article about orphaned children in the Philippines:**
www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-philippines-orphans-adv-snap-story.html
- **RI Kids Count Factbook:**
<http://www.rikidscount.org/DataPublications/RIKidsCountFactbook.aspx>

