

SCHOOL OF BABEL

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GRADES 6-12
CLASSROOM GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILM:

School of Babel is a documentary film about a program for immigrant students in a French public school. A class screening of the film may complement a social studies or immigration curriculum. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will challenge students to think critically about the experiences of foreign students in their own communities. Discussion questions and supplemental materials facilitate further research into related topics such as peer-to-peer interactions, the school system, and cultural exchange.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

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USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **School of Babel**. Support

materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

ABOUT THE FILM

A remarkable and powerful film, Julie Bertuccelli's documentary details a year in the life of a Parisian class of immigrant youth from countries around the globe—boys and girls ages 11 to 15—who have come to France to seek asylum, escape hardship or simply better their lives. They are placed in a “reception class,” and given intensified training in learning and speaking French, and are brought up to par in various other subjects so that they can eventually assimilate and join their peers in regular classes. Their teacher, Brigitte Cervoni, demonstrates extraordinary patience, skill, tenderness and insight in counseling and teaching the students, and in interactions with their parents or guardians. Filmed without narration, the story takes place largely within the classroom and is told primarily through the images, emotions and responses of the kids themselves. The vivid backgrounds of the students' lives—some of them heartbreaking—poignantly emerge as they bond with their teacher and each other. The honesty, innocence, intelligence, heart and pure communicativeness of these young people, as well as their frustrations and hopes for the future, offer a unique perspective on the immigrant experience in this extraordinarily touching film. -Tim Sika

{ Julie Bertuccelli (France, 2014)
89 minutes, In French with English Subtitles,
Grades 6-12 }

Recommended Subject Areas:

- Art/Media
- Social Studies
- Immigration
- Ethnic Studies

Key concepts / buzzwords:

- Culture
- Education
- Family
- France
- Immigration
- Language
- Media Studies
- Middle School
- National Identity
- Race and Ethnicity
- Religion
- Self-Expression

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

You may choose to frame **School of Babel** as a counterpoint to discussions about the immigrant experience in the United States. Students, especially those with international families, will likely identify with the young people shown in the film. They may wish to compare the reception class with their own school environment. To prepare students for the screening, engage them in a discussion about the experience of immigration. Make sure that students from both international and local backgrounds feel comfortable participating in the conversation and that no one is singled out.

Keep these questions in mind while watching the film:

- Have you ever been in an environment where you and your family were a linguistic or cultural minority? What do you think it feels like to be in a school where the language the students speak is not your first language?
- What unique perspectives do international students bring to a student body and a classroom? What programs does your school have in place to support international students?

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Character and Story

- 1) Who are the students in the reception class?
 - How are they like and unlike students that you know?
 - Which students did you relate to the most?

- What challenges are the students facing in addition to the regular challenges of adolescence?
- Do you think you would like to be in the reception class if you were a recent arrival in France?

2) What do you notice about the families of the students in the reception class?

- Are there any family situations that you particularly relate to?
- What additional roles are these kids playing in their families, beyond the responsibilities of a normal kid?
- What are the priorities of the families in this film?

Do you think they differ from the priorities of non-immigrant families in France?

- What cultural differences exist between the reception students' families and mainstream French society?

3) How do the students in the reception class treat one another?

- Are they supportive of each other?
- How are their interactions similar or different to the way that students treat one another in your school?

- Do you think these students will experience different treatment when they leave the reception class?

4) Describe the teacher of the reception class.

- Do you think she is a good teacher?
- What does she expect from her students?
- What kind of a tone does she set in her classroom?
- Would you like to be a student in this teacher's class?

4) How do students feel about being in reception class?

- What do the non-reception students say about the reception class?

WHICH
STUDENTS
DID YOU
RELATE TO
THE MOST?



- How do these students feel about being different?
- Do the students want to join the larger student body, or do they like being in reception class?
- Do you think it's the right decision to isolate international students from local students with special programs like reception class, or should all students be mixed from the start?

5) Were there particular students whose stories had a strong impact on you?

- Which of these students could you relate to most?
- Which students had the most trouble adapting to their environment?
- Did you empathize with those students even when they acted out or underperformed?
- What role do you think storytelling plays in cultivating empathy among students in a classroom environment?

Context

1) What is the concept of a reception class?

- Why does the French school system place international students into a special class?
- How does the American school system differ in its treatment of ESL and international students?
- What can the larger student body learn from international students in a mixed environment?
- What additional support do international students receive through reception class?
- What do you think is the proper balance between immersion and linguistic and cultural support?

2) What religious and cultural views did you encounter while watching **School of Babel**?

- Were you surprised by any of the students' perspectives?
- Did any conflicts or moments of tension arise in their discussions?
- How did students respond to cultural differences and

conflicting perspectives?

- Do you think these students were accepting of one another?
- What can you learn about conflict resolution in cross-cultural situations from the students in the reception class?

3) How did students describe the experience of immigration?

- What were the students' families' reasons for immigrating to France?
- What sacrifices did these families make by moving to a new culture?
- What social and economic factors make immigration challenging?
- Do you think that the experiences of the students in this film are comparable to the experiences of young people who move to the United States with their families?
- Which elements of the immigrant experience are universal and which are culturally specific?

4) How does Rama react when the reception teacher recommends that she repeat the year?

- Why do you think Rama feels that she is being discriminated against?
- How does the teacher react to Rama's accusation of racism?
- How do Rama and her teacher resolve the conflict?
- Do you think the teacher does a good job of listening to Rama's concerns and advising her about her educational path?
- What can teachers do to assure students that they are being heard and understood, and that their opinions matter?

5) Describe the reception students' film project.

- Why do you think the teacher chose to assign a film project to these students?



- What do you think the experience of recording each others' stories is like for the students?
- Have you ever done an activity where you interviewed your classmates?
- Do you think it would be challenging to speak about your personal history in front of the camera?
- Why do you think the reception class film won a prize at the festival?

Style and Message/Reading the Film for Media Literacy

- 1) How did you respond to **School of Babel**?
 - Did you enjoy this film?
 - Do you think that the story it tells is important?
 - Why do you think that the filmmaker chose to tell this story about the reception class?
- 2) How did the film show the passage of time?
 - What imagery did the filmmaker use to show the changing seasons?
 - Did you feel like you spent a whole year in the classroom?
 - What other tricks could the filmmaker have employed to show time passing?
- 3) What impact do you think the presence of the camera had on the students' learning and on their own film project?
 - How do you think the reception class would have been different if there was not a camera in the classroom?
 - How would you feel if a filmmaker wanted to make a documentary in your classroom?
 - Would you welcome a film project?
- 4) What role do the parent-teacher conferences play in this film?
 - How would the film and its story have changed if the filmmaker had brought the camera into the

- students' homes and lives outside of school?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to limit the film to the inside of the school?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

- 1) Filmmaking Exercise: Make a short documentary about your own class.
 - Students can break into groups and interview one another, either on-camera, with microphones, or simply with pen and paper. Smart phones with internal microphones can be used along with video cameras to enhance the quality of the audio.
 - Student filmmakers may choose to focus on the class, the school, or personal stories.
 - Collect these short videos as a graded assignment, or watch them together as a class.
 - For more information about filmmaking exercises in the classroom, and a useful worksheet outlining different shot types and camera angles, visit FilmEd.sffs.org.
- 2) Journaling Activity: Reflect on the film.
 - What were your impressions of **School of Babel**?
 - What do you think was the purpose of this film? Why did the filmmakers choose to tell this story?
 - What do you think happened to these students after the film ended? How do you think their experiences in reception impacted their future learning?
- 3) Research Project: How is immigration different in different countries?
 - What are the situations in certain home countries that cause large flows of immigrants?
 - Why do people move to certain countries?
 - Are immigrant groups similar in the US and in France?

California Media Literacy Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

- **Grade 6:** Standard 1.9 Identify persuasive and propaganda techniques used in television and identify false and misleading information.
- **Grade 7:** Standard 1.8 Analyze the effect on the viewer of images, text, and sound in electronic journalism; identify the techniques used to achieve the effects in each instance studied.
- **Grade 8:** Standard 1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (e.g., compare Shakespeare's Henry V with Kenneth Branagh's 1990 film version).
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.2 Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines, documentaries, online information) cover the same event.
- **Grades 11 & 12:** Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language); Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker's guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Common Core Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

This lesson addresses the English and Language Arts standards for Reading Informational Texts grades 5-12. Additional specific standard applications are listed below:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive.

Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) **Medium:** the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) **Author:** the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) **Content:** the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) **Audience:** the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) **Purpose:** the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM	<p>All Media Is Constructed.</p> <p>How is the message delivered and in what format? What technologies are used to present the message? What visual and auditory elements are used? What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?</p>
AUTHOR	<p>All Media Is Constructed by Someone.</p> <p>Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
CONTENT	<p>All Media Is A Language.</p> <p>What is the subject of the media message? What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content? What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response? To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?</p>
AUDIENCE	<p>All Media Messages Reach an Audience.</p> <p>Who receives the message? For whom is the message intended? What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message? What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message? How might others perceive this message differently? Why?</p>
PURPOSE	<p>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.</p> <p>Why was the message constructed? Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How? To what extent does the message achieve its purpose? What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?</p>

THE NON-FICTION FILM WHAT IS A DOCUMENTARY?

A documentary is a film whose goal is to capture truth, fact or reality as seen through the lens of the camera. But there are many kinds of documentaries, and not everyone's idea of truth is the same. The Scottish filmmaker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 to describe American filmmaker Robert Flaherty's romanticized culture studies, but nonfiction filmmaking dates back to the earliest motion picture reels.

The definition of documentary expanded as filmmakers experimented with technology and the goals of nonfiction. Avant-garde documentarians, like Dziga Vertov in the 1920s, believed that the mechanical eye of the camera gave a truer image of reality than the human eye and pointed his lens at newly industrialized cities. Leni Reifenstahl's propaganda films from Nazi Germany used the nonfiction form to convey a political message, a slanted truth. The international cinema vérité or observational movements of the 1960s attempted to remove authorship from the documentary. The observational filmmaker hovered like a "fly on the wall" watching the world without commentary. Modern documentaries often seek to raise awareness about a social, environmental or political issue, guiding their audiences toward civic participation and activism.

While watching a documentary, it is important to remember the core concepts of media analysis: who made the film, for what audience and why? The nonfiction format can be deceptively subjective, as all filmmaking involves an inherent selection process: in the images that are shot, the music and narration that accompanies them and, most significantly, the way in which they are all edited together. Media literacy means always analyzing a documentary for its message and authorial intent.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

1895 The Lumiere brothers developed the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief, unedited clips of life around them called "actualities" (e.g., *Train Arriving at the Station*)

1900-1920 Travelogue or "Scenic" films became popular, showcasing exoticised images from around the globe.

1926 John Grierson coined the term "documentary" to describe Robert Flaherty's romantic nonfiction film, *Moana*.

1929 Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino-Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With a Movie Camera*.

1935 Leni Reifenstahl released *Triumph of the Will*, the infamous propaganda film that chronicled the 1934 Nazi Party Congress.

1939 John Grierson collaborated with the Canadian government to form the National Film Board of Canada, with the initial goal of creating Allied propaganda in support of the war.

1960s The cinema vérité movement began in Europe, shortly followed by "direct cinema" in the U.S. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968 The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces)* opened the door to the activist cinema of the 1970s, which used film as a tool to counter capitalist and neo-colonial politics in Latin America.

1988 The US Congress mandated that the US government support the creation of independent non-commercial media, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium vastly more affordable to independent and amateur filmmakers. Video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo allowed amateur filmmakers to broadcast their work.

PRESENT DAY The term "documentary" has come to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema. Contemporary filmmakers continue to push the boundaries of truth in film and to explore new avenues and applications for the medium.



I came to France to be a free woman.

THE MAKING OF A DOCUMENTARY

Idea, Issue, Story.

Even though they are nonfiction films, most modern documentaries structure their content around a traditional story arc, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters, and a conclusion, theme or thesis to impart to the audience. Documentary filmmakers begin their projects with an idea or an issue that they wish to explore more deeply. Through research and planning, they develop a comprehensive plan before they begin shooting.

The Production Process.

To capture candid moments on film, modern documentary makers often leave the camera running, collecting far more footage than the final film requires. They may do this during interviews or in observational-style encounters with their subjects. To get increased access and an observational aesthetic, documentary makers often use handheld cameras and natural light, rather than staging a more formal filming environment.

Post-Production and the Documentary.

Because a documentary film relies upon candid footage, a large part of the film's construction occurs in the editing room, where you work with what you've captured. A documentary editor will sift through long interviews just to find a few phrases that will summarize the film's message. To emphasize important points and build the story, some documentaries use a voiceover,

an interview or a scripted narrative that brings candid footage together into a coherent statement. An original score can work alongside the voiceover to unify the footage and shape the mood of the film. Audiences often underestimate the power of sound to generate an emotional response. Many documentaries also use charts, graphs and historical footage to add context and emphasize key points.

Distribution.

Once a film is completed, the filmmaker needs to help it find its audience. Many documentaries are made independently on small budgets, but what's the point of all your work if no one hears your message? Some documentaries will be released in theaters around the country or get programmed on public or cable TV channels, but most documentary filmmakers will start by submitting their work to film festivals, in hopes of attracting distributors for the theater and television markets. Filmmakers may also make their films available online and use social media to reach their target audience.



I was very, very happy to work with you.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Immigration in France:

New York Times opinion piece about public opinion of French immigration: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/05/does-immigration-mean-france-is-over/>

Protests in France after students are deported: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/18/world/europe/protests-follow-frances-expulsion-of-two-minority-students.html>

Social Tensions between immigrants and French nationals: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/16/france-racism-immigration-sarkozy>

Muslim experience in France: <http://www.euro-islam.info/country-profiles/france/>

Immigration in the United States:

Background to current debate on US immigration: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5391395>

Argument in favor of increased immigration to US: <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-10-28/why-more-immigration-not-less-is-key-to-u-dot-s-dot-economic-growth>

Analysis: Do illegal immigrants actually hurt the US economy? : <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/17/magazine/do-illegal-immigrants-actually-hurt-the-us-economy.html?pagewanted=all>

Lesson plans for teaching about immigration: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/>

PBS lessons about immigration: <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/thismonth/immigration/index1.html>

Childhood Experiences of Immigration:

The Children of Immigrants at School: <http://nyupress.org/books/book-details.aspx?bookId=11382#.U1bSHeZdXJ4>

The experiences of immigrant children: <http://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/A98/00/02K60/index.xml>

The Internationals Network of Public Schools: <http://internationalsnps.org/>

The US school system and Latin American immigration: <http://cuslar.org/2014/03/25/schools-and-immigration-an-education/>



REVIEWS

Variety

By

Jay Weissberg

Within the unwarranted glut of classroom documentaries in recent years, “School of Babel” will rise to the front ranks, avoiding gratuitous cuteness in favor of a more substantive focus on the struggles of international adolescents coping with the immigrant experience. Helmer Julie Bertuccelli (“Since Otter Left”) captures the uniqueness of a Parisian class whose students struggle with integration on top of French and other subjects, and while some may be wary of yet another schoolhouse treatment, this blackboard jungle focuses more on identity than on book smarts. An upcoming mid-March Francophone release could spin out to other territories.

The school of La Grange aux Belles in northern Paris has a program for immigrant children (many of whom have a hesitant grasp of French) that provides intense language lessons alongside the core curriculum so the kids can ultimately matriculate into regular classes. Teacher Brigitte Cervoni, demonstrating the perfect balance of encouraging warmth and unwavering academic expectations, guides her charges through the year, cognizant of the need to be not only a teacher, but also a symbol of a France ideally welcoming to all newcomers.

Students in the class range in age from 11 to 15 and come from all corners of the globe and all walks of life. Many are political refugees or have fled lives of hardship, while others were from relatively solid backgrounds and are coping with reduced circumstances in the expensive French capital. As is common among immigrants, many must be their parents’ mouthpieces, since often the kids’ language skills surpass their family’s rudimentary

French.

Troubled Rama from Senegal was mistreated by her father’s family and now disguises her insecurity under a thin blanket of antagonism; negotiating schoolwork, the pressures of classroom socializing and whatever pitfalls the outside world throws at her can be a raw experience. Withdrawn Xin, from China, barely knows her mother, who moved to France when her daughter was very young, yet works all hours at a restaurant now that they’re united; one of the docu’s greatest pleasures is watching Xin’s transformation from a sad, lonely girl to a laughing participant with her classmates.

Peers, some given equal attention, come from Serbia, Venezuela, Ireland, Guinea, Ukraine, Libya and a host of other nations. Apart from a scene at the end when the class enters a short film they’ve made in the Cine-Clap Festival, Bertuccelli keeps her camera in the schoolroom, including parent-teacher/guardian-teacher conferences, which provide just enough extracurricular information to paint a more complex picture. Issues of racism are largely passed over, and the implication that France (or any country) throws its arms open to all is never questioned. Visuals are clean and bright, with editing nicely juggling the ups and downs of the academic year.



The Hollywood Reporter

by Boyd van Hoeij

French director Julie Bertuccelli's non-fiction film looks at a class of immigrant kids in Paris's 10th arrondissement.

A special class for young immigrant children in France is the subject of French director Julie Bertuccelli's non-fiction feature, *School of Babel* (La Cour de Babel).

The footage, shot over the course of a year at the Granges-aux-Belles secondary school in Paris's mixed 10th arrondissement, focuses on a special "reception class," where students who speak little to no French are welcomed and taught the language as well as regular school subjects, with special attention paid to trying to get everyone up to the level of their French peers so they can then eventually join the school's regular classes. Straightforward, affecting and insightful, the film at times plays like a documentary companion to Laurent Cantet's Palme d'Or winner, *The Class*, even though the kids depicted there were (semi-)fictional and not immigrants with special educational needs.

School of Babel, which had its European premiere at the Rome Film Festival, will be released in France in March 2014 and should be able to drum up significant media attention. It will be a harder but not impossible sell abroad, where films such as Nicolas Philibert's *To Be and To Have* and Pascal Plisson's recent *On the Way to School* have proven that there's a potential niche market for French films about education even beyond Francophone venues.

In one of the first scenes, and apparently also one of the class's first lessons, the teacher, Brigitte Cervoni, asks her pupils, ages 11-15, to write "bonjour" in their own language, an effective ice-breaker that allows each child, some of them with barely any notion of French, to introduce themselves with something they do know and explain something about their background. Tellingly,

even with such a seemingly straightforward exercise, a heated discussion already erupts, with a pupil from Senegal suggesting "Salam Aleykum" is used in Wolof to say hello and an Egyptian-Libyan student refusing to believe any non-Muslim would ever use this type of greeting anywhere.

Bertuccelli, the daughter of *Ramparts of Clay* director Jean-Louis Bertuccelli, is better known for her fiction features *Since Otar Left* and *The Tree with Charlotte Gainsbourg* but actually started her directorial career with the TV documentary *The World in Fusion*.

She does her own camerawork here and is also present at parent-teacher meetings in which the progress of the children is discussed with the parents or guardians and the pupils, with the latter occasionally having to act as underage interpreters. These conversations reveal more about the families' backgrounds and some of the reasons for emigrating, which range from getting a top education as a cellist for a Venezuelan boy to a Jewish family's persecution by a group of Serbian Neo-Nazis to the fear of female excision in Guinea.

Some children have come to join their parents who were already working in France, including Xin, who lived for 10 years with her grandmother in China and did not see her mother once until she finally came to Paris. Being a child and growing up would already be plenty difficult without having to deal with traumas such as these on top of that. Thankfully, Bertuccelli allows the material to speak for itself, never editing or zooming in to heighten the drama. There are frank discussions about thorny subjects such as religion and the youngsters' hopes and fears and it's clear from the footage that they bond over their shared status as outsiders.

The kids themselves also make their own film about themselves for a student film festival and this where things become a little confusing, as some of the footage spied in the class's film is also in Bertuccelli's film, so it's not entirely clear who shot what and for



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whom. That said, it's a great bonding experience for the kids and their work even goes on to win a couple of awards.

Mostly heard offscreen rather than actually seen, Cervoni is an almost saint-like teacher with a lot of experience in the field; she has even co-authored a book about teaching French to immigrant children. The teary closing scenes pack an emotional wallop not only for the audience and the kids but also for Cervoni, for whom this batch of kids was her last class.

The French title, *La Cour de Babel*, is a play on the Tower of Babel ("La Tour de Babel"), with "cour" actually meaning schoolyard, here glimpsed in brief interludes set to Olivier Daviaud's score. Incidentally, "cour" also sounds like "cours," which translates as "lessons."