



# The Chicago International Film Festival

Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival  
Education Outreach Program Screening: *Central Station*  
Director: Walter Salles  
113 minutes, in Portuguese with English subtitles

Please use the below synopsis, study ideas/questions and helpful websites to lead your students in preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the film, students are required to respond to the screening with a one-page essay. Essays (either all or select) must be sent to Cinema/Chicago.\*

**Synopsis:** In Rio de Janeiro's central railroad station, callous Dora works at a stand where she writes letters for a parade of poor and illiterate. One of her customers is a woman whose nine-year-old son Josué hopes to see the father he has never met, but after the mother dictates two letters to the father, she's killed when hit by a bus. Since Josué is left homeless, Dora reluctantly embarks on a journey with him to find his estranged father. During their penniless voyage they face challenges and come to realize how important they have become to one another.

**Recommended for:** cultural studies, international studies, humanities studies, film and video students  
**Most appropriate for:** 9-12 grade (contains some adult language)

## Study Ideas/Questions:

1. The film starts with people speaking to someone we don't see, dictating letters to be written. Why do you think we don't see the letter writer yet? Why does the filmmaker choose to only show those who are dictating the letters?
2. Think about Dora's life before she meets Do you think she is lonely, or does she prefer to be alone?
3. Dora and Irene look through the letters Dora writes each day and analyze them – ripping them up, putting them in a drawer or deciding to mail them. Why do you think they do this, and what do you think about this ritual?
4. Imagine you get paid to write and mail letters for strangers. Do you think you would be good at it? Would you mail the letters each day as promised or do what Dora does and hold on to some?
5. After Josué's mother dies, he hides out and tries to survive in the train station. Dora comes to his aid and takes him home with her. What do you think would have happened to Josué if she had not done this?
6. Why does Dora take Josué to Pedrão apartment? And, why does she later rescue him? Watching the film, what was your opinion of Dora when she left Josué there, and how did/didn't that opinion of her change when she came back for him?

7. Josué tells Dora that she can't lie anymore. Why does she lie, and who does she lie to? Do you lie? If you do, why do you lie? Do you think all lies are bad, even if they are told to protect the liar or someone they care about?
8. Dora and Josué get a ride from a kind truck driver, who later abandons them. Why does he leave them behind?
9. How does Dora and Josué's relationship change during the movie? What do they mean to each other in the beginning of the film, and what do they mean for each other in the end of the film?
10. How does Dora change in the film, and what do you think she will do when she returns home?
11. How does Josué change in the film, and what do you think will happen to him?
12. Define the word family. What does it mean to you? Is family just the people you are related to, or can family also be your friends, your mentors, your guides? Why or why not.
13. Why is family – either relatives or friends – important? How does our family support us and help us grow?

**Useful Links and Resources:**

Roger Ebert's review of Central Station: <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/central-station-1998>

Central Station trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ako8metwIAY>

Information about Cinema/Chicago's Education Outreach Program:  
<http://cinemachicago.org/education/>

\*Schools who do not send in essay requirement will not be allowed to attend future Education Outreach Screenings.