



# The Chicago International Film Festival

Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival  
Education Outreach Program Screening: *Circo*  
Director: Aaron Schock  
75 minutes, in Spanish 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:** *Circo* follows the Ponce family's hardscrabble circus as it struggles to stay together despite mounting debt, dwindling audiences, and a simmering family conflict. Tino, the ringmaster, is driven by his dream to lead his parents' circus to success and corrals the energy of his whole family, including his four young children, toward this singular goal. But his wife Ivonne is determined to make a change. Feeling exploited by her in-laws, she longs to return to her kids a childhood lost to laboring in the circus. Through this intricately woven story of a marriage in trouble and of a century-old family tradition that hangs in the balance, *Circo* opens the viewer to the luminous world of a traveling circus while examining the universal themes of family bonds, filial responsibility, and the weight of cultural inheritance.

**Recommended for:** cultural studies, Spanish students, film/video students

**Appropriate for:** 6 - 12 grade

## Study Ideas/Questions:

1. Do you think it is "fair" that Tino's children, because they are part of the family, are also members of the circus troupe? Explain your answer.
2. If you were a member of the Ponce family, would you want to be part of Gran Circo Mexico? Why or why not.
3. Ivonne, Tino's wife and the mother of the family, says the children "give us too much" and wants to provide them with a different life. Where do you stand? Do you agree with Tino's loyalty to his Gran Circo Mexico, or do you agree with Ivonne?
4. Do you think the Ponce's circus will survive or be forced to close?
5. What is your opinion and experience regarding circuses? Do you like them, have you been to one?
6. Do you think the story of the Ponce family would be different if they were Americans? Europeans? How does their location and ethnicity/culture factor into their story?
7. In one scene Tino works to train his youngest child to do a handstand/learn contortions. The child is crying and clearly uncomfortable/in pain. What do you think about that scene? Was Tino abusing his child?

8. *Circo* is a documentary and unique in that there are very few “interviews” with the subjects. The director chooses more to simply observe the family in their daily lives and interactions. Did you like this style? Think about other documentaries you have seen and how they are different or similar to *Circo*. How did this style inform you about the film’s subjects?
9. Research the history of Mexican circus families. Are there traditions in your family or community that are similar?
10. Does your family have a business or tradition that you are “forced” to participate in? How does your participation influence your life?

**Useful Links and Resources:**

Film’s website (includes trailer): <http://firstrunfeatures.com/circo/>

New York Times review of the film: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/movies/circo-looks-at-a-family-circus-review.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/movies/circo-looks-at-a-family-circus-review.html?_r=0)

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.