



Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival
Education Outreach Program Screening: *The Chorus*
Director: Christophe Barratier
97 minutes

Please use the below synopsis/Study questions 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. **Schools who do not send in essay requirement will not be allowed to attend future Education Outreach Screenings.**

Synopsis

The Chorus follows the journey of a newly-hired prefect at a school for troubled boys, as he reaches out to his new students through music, attempting to gain their trust and friendship, and show them their potential. The film illustrates the struggle of several students at the Fond De L'étang School for boys as they act out against their headmaster, play tricks on their teachers, and all around just misbehave. However, when the new school Prefect Clement Mathieu arrives, things at the school begin to change. Mathieu attempts to get to know the boys, calmly endures all of their jokes, and eventually gains their trust and respect.

Reform Schools for Boys

The conditions of the Fond De L'étang School are reminiscent of the harsh living conditions of the many young boys institutionalized during the 20th Century. Reform schools, like the one we see in the film, were used as boarding school institutions, and sometimes alternatives to prison for young delinquent males. Many residents were sent to reform schools for more serious crimes such as theft and murder, but more commonly, they were sent to the schools for trying to run away from home or for being expelled from school, like Morhange. Some boys were sent to live at the schools simply because they were orphans, like Pepinòt.

Boys living in reform schools were often subject to routine beatings, neglect, and overall poor living conditions, all of which are seen at Fond De L'étang. Many boys attempted to escape the schools, though the success rate was very low. Because most residents lived in fear of the severe punishment methods at the schools, the truth about the living conditions often remained hidden until many years later.

At the end of *The Chorus*, the Fond De L'étang School for boys is reformed; after the Headmaster's horrible treatment of the students is revealed. But this is a somewhat happier ending than many of the reform schools around the world. Some schools that were infamous for their horrible treatment of their

students in the early to mid-1900 have only recently been closed down, and the treatment of the students exposed.

Corporal Punishment in Schools

Corporal punishment in the school system is the practice of teachers and administrators physically punishing students for the breaking of school rules or misbehavior. We see corporal punishment being used by the Headmaster in the Fond De L'etang School, which is one of the reasons he gets fired in the end of the film. But in actuality, corporal punishment in the school system is legal in France, as well as 19 of the 50 states in the U.S.

Study Ideas/Questions

1. The disciplinary motto of the teachers at the School is "Action-Reaction". How does Mathieu's treatment of the students, and their response to him, demonstrate that this method of punishment isn't working?
2. In the beginning of the film, Le Querrec plays a trick on Maxence, causing him to become seriously injured. Rather than turning him into the Headmaster, Mathieu tells him he must act as a nurse to Maxence. Is this a more suitable punishment for Le Querrec than locking him up? What does he learn?
3. What do you think Mathieu accomplishes by having the boys participate in a chorus? How and why, if at all, is it successful in changing the boy's attitudes/behavior?
4. Why is Mondain so resistant to trust Mathieu and the other teachers at the school? How might the experiences he had at his previous school have affected him?
5. Mathieu says that he is inspired by the boys to compose music for them. In what way does Mathieu being inspired by the boys, allow the boys to feel inspired by him?
6. It is mentioned in the film that one of the students at the school jumped off of the roof and died. Why do you think the student did this?
7. Do you think corporal punishment should be allowed in schools? Why or why not?
8. Based on what you saw in the film, do you think students respond to physical punishment as a form of discipline? Why or why not?

Interested in Film?

The Chicago International Film Festival's Student Film Council is a program for students who have a passion and appreciation for film, cinema and the moving image. During the school year, Council members will experience and attend the numerous film festivals and film centers in Chicago and engage in conversations with directors, producers and festival programmers.

Adobe Youth Voices helps students/teachers get a film club started at their school to encourage students to foster their creativity, practice their storytelling techniques, and even influence change through experimenting with society's most powerful medium. Find out more: youthvoices.adobe.com