



March of the Penguins Discussion Guide

Director: Luc Jacquet

Year: 2005

Time: 80 min

You might know this director from:

Once Upon a Forest (2013)

The Fox & the Child (2007)

FILM SUMMARY

Antarctica is one of the most harsh environments to survive in on Earth. Yet, the emperor penguin knows of no better place to call home. MARCH OF THE PENGUINS grants these hardy hearty creatures screen time to tell their annual tale of perseverance in the face of extremes, life in the face of death.

The original French release - "La marche de l'empereur" -tells the emperor's tale of its quest to procreate through a trio of narrators taking on the penguin's perspective, coupled with an electronic soundtrack. Once National Geographic bought the film rights, they set out to adapt the film for an American audience, which involved a more delicately classical musical score and a third-person narration from the iconic father of smooth wisdom, Morgan Freeman. The result: over 80 sub-arctic minutes offering a meditation on the vulnerabilities and invincibilities of life.

One of the few monogamous mammals in existence, emperor penguins stand by their chosen mate until the resultant offspring of their love affair is able to fend for itself, an experience that is sweetened with Freeman's narration and the magnitude of the footage unveiled. Yet, there is nothing easy about the life of an emperor penguin. Only once they have battled blizzards, dodged predators, endured months without food, and nurtured a baby chick to life against all imaginable odds are they allocated 3 months of play time in the sparkling ocean depths. It takes 9 months in the life of a penguin to reach this respite. But such is the life for emperor penguins, who station themselves boldly atop the impenetrable polar icecaps, from where they play out the cycle of life.

FILM THEMES

SURVIVAL INSTINCT

Endurance is put to the ultimate test in Antarctica. As Freeman states, “Winter may have ended, but the dangers have not.” Even once the intense threats of the bitter cold have passed, continuing on in the land of the living is not a given fact. Emperor penguins trudge onwards, consistently abiding to the beating heart of instinct within them. Following the internal compass that guides them 70 miles across the tundra, passing an egg meticulously from one parent’s feet to the other’s, limping back to the ocean’s edge to dive down to the promise of nourishment, and trekking back again to nurture life’s newest member, penguins battle countless threats in honor of the instinct to survive.

POTENCY OF MONOGAMY

The jury is out on whether penguins experience what we refer to as love, and yet as they gracefully bask in the presence of their selected mate, heartwarming shivers are sent up even the most frigid of spines. Does the natural world have the same emotional triggers for selecting monogamy as we humans do? Perhaps an emperor penguin chooses a single partner for a single season out of necessity, not passion. Perhaps the barriers stacked against the survival of that single egg are so monumental that only the most fickle of creatures would choose to fritter about with multiple partners, placing their offspring in the hands of chance. Romantic or not, monogamy provides a sure-fire chance of survival in the heartless landscape of the poles.

NATURE’S POLAR OPPOSITES

Heads bowed, emperor penguins resign themselves to nature’s will, abandoning the fight in the throes of winter. Nature rears its vicious head, exposing the penguins the harshest conditions, thrashing at the helpless birds, beating them in their state of starvation, challenging them to life over death. As the newborn chicks face their new habitat, they are threatened with predators swooping down from the skies above as their parents face danger in the waters below as they paddle through for sustenance. Just as the fight against nature seems unbeatable, love appears and the graceful gorgeous caress of nature is unveiled. A female finds a male, and they bow in an age-old ceremony of love’s light over darkness, life over death, and the future over the past. Nature embodies it all.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF EXISTENCE

Everything and everyone fulfills a role in maintaining an unbroken cycle of life. From the ice to the sun, the oceans to the rocky terrain, the predator to the prey, the child to the ancestor. The emperor penguins move as an unbroken chain of life across the deathly ice, utilizing the warmth and strength in numbers, the sense of direction in one penguin and the endurance of another, each playing their part in the dance of the natural world. By honoring our instincts, we too tap into the universal world in which we are a part, understanding that what we do in our backyards has global ramifications.

“They will march just as they have done for centuries, ever since the emperor penguin decided to stay, to live and love in the harshest place on Earth.”

Morgan Freeman, Narrator

“Though he is a bird, he won’t fly. Though he lives in the sea, he won’t swim. Mostly, he will walk. But he won’t walk alone.”

Morgan Freeman, Narrator

FILM FACTS:

- Soon after its release in 2005, **MARCH OF THE PENGUINS** went on to receive a host of awards and honors, including the Oscar for Best Documentary, a National Board of Review Award, a Women Film Critics Circle Award, Best Edited Documentary from the American Cinema Editors, and a BMI Film Music Award. The film was also nominated for numerous prestigious awards: a Chicago Film Critics Association Award, a David di Donatello Award, a European Film Award, and an Online Film Critics Society Award.
- The soundtrack for the original French version of the film – “La Marche de l’empereur” – was composed and performed by Émilie Simon, a French electronic musician. Alex Wurman, an American composer, spent six weeks writing, composing, and recording the more classical soundtrack for the English version of the film.
- The French version of the film uses three narrators to tell the tale, speaking as if they are the penguins themselves. A woman narrates the mother, a man narrates the father, and the baby penguin is narrated by a boy. While some of the international versions use a single narrator (English, Belgian, Indian, Swedish, Polish), some follow the original French format (Hungarian, German, Danish, Cantonese).
- Morgan Freeman recorded his narration in 1 day.
- Jordan Roberts had 3 months to write, research, and record the script for the English film version.
- There are a total of 17 known penguin species, and all are native to the southern hemisphere. Emperor penguins are the tallest and heaviest of all penguins, and both males and females reach around 48 inches (122cm) in height and weigh between 50 to 100 lbs (22 to 45 kg). The average lifespan of a wild emperor penguin is 20 years, although some have been known to have lived to the age of 50. As emperor penguins have no fixed nesting grounds, they rely heavily on the sounds they make to communicate with their partners and family members, displaying the widest array of individual calls of all penguins.
- Once an emperor penguin has located its mate for the season, the pair waddles around the colony, the female generally following the male. By bowing to its mate with its bill pointed closely to the ground, one of the mates indicates that it is the time for copulation. Around 15% of adult emperor penguins remain loyal to the same partner the following breeding season.
- A chick takes 2-3 days to hatch from its egg, and the mother returns any time from hatching to 10 days after the chick has been born.
- Satellite images of Antarctica from 2012 enabled scientists to count 595,000 emperor penguins.
- Around 5% of mammals practice monogamy, and include humans, most penguins, mute swans, albatrosses, vultures, shingleback skink lizards, Kirk’s Dik-dik deer, gibbons, and bald eagles.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give others the chance to enjoy this beautiful doc and learn from its story.
2. **Visit [Defenders of Wildlife](#)**. They offer a wealth of resources on penguins and how you can become involved in helping their survival, as easily as signing up for their newsletter or adopting a penguin.
3. **Learn** more about [The Climate Reality Project](#), an international grassroots organization actively working to positively affect climate change, which has a direct impact on the lives of emperor penguins.
4. **Write** a list of 3 goals that you want to achieve but think you aren’t capable of. Pick one of these things and put your mind to it – whether you succeed or fail, you will have tried courageously.
5. **Ensure** that the Endangered Species Act is maintained in order to put the focus on those species that require the most protection. The National Wildlife Federation provides extensive information and materials.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.