



The Wolfpack Discussion Guide

Director: Crystal Moselle

Year: 2015

Time: 90 min

You might know this director from:

This is the first full-length feature from this director.

FILM SUMMARY

For most of us, movies serve as a simple diversion, a 90-minute escape from the daily humdrum, a chance to ride atop the waves of someone else's imagination. When the world throws us its ups and downs, cinema offers a steady, predictable way to unhook for a brief time and be entertained. For the Angulo brothers, however, movies were anything but a temporary escape from life. They served as only line injecting life their way.

Confined to a single apartment in a high rise in Manhattan's Lower East Side from 1995, Bhagavan, Govinda, Narayana, Mukunda, Krsna, and Jagadisa lived with their father Oscar, mother Susanne, and older sister Visnu. Not only did they sleep, eat, and receive a home-schooled education in this confined space, this home served as the backdrop to nearly every minute of their waking lives. Their borderline dictatorial father saw to that.

Consuming movie after movie from the rickety old television screen in their living room, the boys learn about the world, or at least the cinematic version of it. A scripted, often violent, romantic world, where villains abound, blood is plentiful, and stories reach a quick conclusion. With little else to do, they meticulously reenact the films, creating the props, stage, and costumes. In one of their words, "It makes me feel like I'm living a bit."

When one of them does eventually break free, walking the streets of Manhattan on his own, he sets a precedence that is soon snapped up by the others. Through their newfound freedom, they meet director Moselle, who transports THE WOLFPACK to the wide world through the very device that proved to serve not only as a metaphorical escape all those years but eventually a real one. A blisteringly raw, rock 'n' roll ride, THE WOLFPACK experience feels like biting into your first apple ever. Dauntingly gorgeous and boldly unjudgmental, director Moselle brings us the wonderment of THE WOLFPACK.

FILM THEMES

Isolated from all physical interactions with the outside world, six brothers create their own apartment-bound reality through unlimited access to movies and acting out an alternative existence.

THE ENTERTAINMENT LIFELINE

Manhattan is one of the most vibrant places on earth, with movement, color, and noise shooting off in all directions. However for the Angulo brothers, it was little more than a distant backdrop, a taunting blur on the streets outside their high-rise windows. Unable to access the real deal, they were however granted a free pass to the cinematic world, a collection of 5,000 films available for their consumption. And devour they did, living as vicariously as can be expected through the fictional worlds brought to them courtesy of Hollywood. "Movies opened up another world," exclaimed one of the brothers, and by reenacting their beloved films, they found a way to internally break free.

FEAR AND ISOLATION

When asked about her parenting philosophy, Susanne replied, "We try to keep them a little removed." A little may seem like an understatement to the vast majority who spend their waking time in the company of others in the open world. Plagued by a crippling fear of society - of New York City in particular and the world in general - Oscar took on the role of patriarchal dictator, imprisoning his wife and children within the walls of a small apartment. "We were frightened kids," one declared. Rather than instilling in them a sense of trust in the world and their innate abilities, he reflected his own insecurities and paranoia onto the entire family.

NORMAL?

Though there is no rulebook for life, society has its norms, an unspoken set of guidelines the majority of us abide by. Most people ascribe to the notion that we live in a world with others, people we have never met, strangers that may become friends, working alongside others with whom we don't always share bloodlines. The Angulo family classified as an odd, a captive clan, who were anything but normal. Without needing to spell out the norm, we react to the Angulo life formula with a jolt, internally gawking at the mechanism in effect for nearly 20 years. Faced with a family set-up so unfamiliar, we fine tune our notion of normal and watch as these boys - forever isolated from what we consider the everyday - try on society's robes for the first time.

EXERTING INDEPENDENCE

Knowing no other way of life, the Angulo brothers carried on. But with each passing year, each hidden developmental stage taking place within their minds and bodies, a metamorphosis was underway. One day, the unspoken happened in the form of Mukunda walking out the door on his own and venturing into the unprotected world, the place they had all been taught to fear. By returning in one piece, he set an example that was soon followed, beginning a process that was arguably inevitable and impossible to reverse once underway. A natural leader emerges, beckoning, and the pack heeds the call and claims their freedom.

"We didn't know the world, so we had no world. The movies helped us create our own kind of world."

Angulo brother

"My biggest fear was being so ignorant of the world that I wouldn't be able to handle it."

Angulo brother

"The only thing we could do is get through (life) and not break."

Angulo brother

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Discuss your initial impressions of the film. Were you satisfied with director Moselle's handling of the subject matter, or were you left with unanswered questions that interfered with your experience?
2. Do you have any personal experience of a large city like New York? If you have, do you find big cities to be threatening? Would you feel comfortable raising children in that type of environment? Was Oscar Angulo's decision to shelter his children from the outside world justified in any way?
3. What do you think of homeschooling? How much of education concerns the facts and knowledge we acquire versus the socialization we are exposed to by interacting with others?
4. Did the Angulo brothers seem maladjusted? Do you think they will go on to lead healthy, balanced lives?
5. What influence do movies have on your life? Do you have a relationship with any aspect of popular culture (film, art, music, etc.) in a similar way to the Angulo brothers' relationship to film?
6. In your opinion, is Oscar Angulo guilty of abuse? Was enough information provided in the film to prove that he wrongly raised his children? As Susanne is also their legal guardian and responsible for their upbringing, does she also have a burden to bear?
7. Although their father forbid them from interacting with the outside world, he did not seem to censor the movies they watch. Do you think the violence they were exposed to was inappropriate and ahead of their time? What negative/positive effects can film have on a child's mind?
8. What were your impressions of Oscar and Susanne, and the nature of their relationship? Now that a film has been made about their family life, what - if any - changes do you think either of them will make in their own lives?
9. Do you think the director made a spectacle of the Angulo family in any sense? Did she do them more of a justice or harm by telling their story?
10. When Mukunda left the apartment on his own - the first brother to do so - he upset the previous family chemistry and unspoken balance. Have you ever done anything rebellious that has spurred on others to follow your lead? Do you believe that major change - major movements - in life require a sort of leader, someone who makes the first move? Discuss.

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- After premiering at Sundance, **THE WOLFPACK** voraciously collected a number of prestigious awards and nominations, including winning the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and Best Documentary Feature Film at the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Nominations include Best International Film at the DocAviv Film Festival and the Golden Gate Award at the San Francisco International Film Festival.
- When asked which member of the Angulo family changed the most over the 5 years she spent filming them, Moselle responded, “the mother.” Susanne recently changed to her maiden name.
- The Angulo family are practicing Hare Krishnas. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in 1966 in New York City, and now boasts millions of members worldwide.
- The Angulo brothers were all given Sanskrit names. In order of eldest to youngest, their names mean: Bhagavan, fortunate or blessed; Govinda, Lord Krishna; Narayana, Lord Vishnu, refuge of man; Mukunda, freedom giver; Krsna, the dark one; Jagadisa, king of the universe. Krsna and Jagadisa have since changed their names to Glenn Hughes Reisenbichler and Eddie Vaughan Reisenbichler respectively, inspired by their favorite decade – the 1980s.
- Film editor Enat Sidi has previously worked on “The Boys of Baraka,” “Jesus Camp,” and “Bully.”
- Director Moselle first spotted the Angulo brothers in the East Village and struck up conversation with them. She initially spent time with them discussing filmmaking and teaching them the craft of making a movie. After spending time with them for 2 years, they invited her into their home on the Lower East Side, the first time an outside had ever entered their apartment.
- After meeting in Peru in 1989, Oscar and Susanne moved to a Hare Krishna Center in West Virginia in 1990, where their first 4 children were born. In 1994, they began traveling and living in a van, spending time in Los Angeles, where their 5th child was born. They headed to New York City in 1995, where the last two boys were born.
- Visnu, the sole Angulo daughter and eldest of the siblings, was born in 1990. As she was born with Turner syndrome – a condition that affects between 1 in every 5,000 females – she continues to live with her parents at home.
- Three of the six Angulo brothers have gone on to work in film. The youngest two are aspiring musicians who love old time rock ‘n’ roll, while the eldest is a yoga teacher and hip-hop dancer. Only two of the boys have kept their long hair.
- The Angulo brothers list their favorite films as including “I Heart Huckabees,” “Double Indemnity,” “Robocop,” and “The Godfather.” Their favorite actors include Marlon Brando, Sean Penn, Jane Fonda, and Katherine Hepburn.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give others the chance to learn from its story.
2. **Learn** about [the International Society for Krishna Consciousness](#), more commonly known as Hare Krishna, the religion practiced by the Angulo family.
3. **Learn** more about Turner syndrome, the condition Visnu, the Wolfpack brothers’ only sister, suffers from. Consider donating time or money to the [Turner Syndrome Society](#).
4. **Follow** the example of Narayana, one of the twin Angulo boys, who campaigns for the environment. Learn about [the New York Public Interest Research Group](#), where he works.
5. **Support** [the National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) offers help for those in abusive relationships. Get involved.

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