The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena) is part of a collection of European films: the CinEd collection, a film education programme for young people.

This student sheet allows me to rediscover the film, to go through it in words and images, to know more about where the characters live and their time, to create and invent, to go further by discovering other works: films, books, music, photographs, paintings...

By participating in CinEd, I share the discovery of films with young people from other countries, all over Europe!
A The film

The Spirit of the Beehive

1 Seen in the film

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(6)

(7)

(8)

(9)

(10)
The film

Ana: If he only comes out at night, how can you talk to him?
Isabel: I told you he was a spirit.
    If you’re his friend, you can talk to him whenever you want.
    Just close your eyes... And call him.
    “It’s me, Ana”, “It’s me, Ana”...

(1) The mobile cinema arrives in Hoyuelos for the screening of Frankenstein. The faces of Ana and Isabel appear among the impatient spectators.

(2) Teresa reads the letter she writes: about family, absences, lack of news...

(3) Science lesson at school. Ana puts her eyes out: "Don José can see now," says the teacher.

(4) Ana and Isabel explore a small house with a well in the middle of the fields. We can hear the melody of Vamos a contar mentiras.

(5) Ana goes back to the house alone. She explores the well, the empty interior and finds a large footprint in the ruts of the path.

(6) In the woods, the father explains to Isabel and Ana how to recognize mushrooms and warns them of the dangers associated with poisonous mushrooms.

(7) The girls play in their beds until they are scolded by Milagros.

(8) Ana and Isabel are waiting for the train to pass. Ana has trouble getting away from the tracks.

(9) Ana searches Milagros in vain after finding Isabel on the ground. In one of the rooms, she finds the window open and a broken flower pot.

(10) A man in a military jacket jumps off the train and heads for the well house.

(11) Breakfast in silence of the four characters in the house. Fernando looks at the watch and rings it. Exchange of looks between Ana and the father.

(12) Ana runs to the house, where she discovers remains of blood. Fernando watches her from the threshold. She walks away, ignoring the father’s call.
Reflections by Víctor Erice
Director of « The Spirit of the Beehive »

« When I make a film, I always hope be able to discover something new about life. In this sense, filmmaking for me is, among other things, a working instrument and a learning opportunity. It is a language which, ultimately, aspires to become a form of total knowledge. […] 

Often I do not trust words, because sometimes they can limit the sense of what you want to express. In film, meaning cannot be separated from the image and sound. Above all, the filmmaker’s experience is a visual experience. »

How do you say The Spirit of the Beehive in other countries?

United Kingdom: The spirit of the bee hive

France: L’Esprit de la ruche

Spain: El espíritu de la colmena

Portugal: O espírito da colméia

Italy: Lo spirito dell’alveare

Finland: Mehliläispesän henki

Lithuania: Avilio Dvasia

Czech Republic: Duch úlu

Romania: Spiritul stupului

Bulgaria: Духът на кошера
The Spirit of the Beehive was the first feature length film by Víctor Erice (Spain, 1940). It was filmed between February and March 1973, and in September of the same year presented at the San Sebastian International Film Festival. The film is set in “a place on the Castilian plateau in around 1940” (filmed in a village in central Spain), shortly after the end of the Civil War which raged in Spain from 1936 to 1939 between the democratically-elected Republican government troops and the rebel troops of the army led by Francisco Franco and helped by the governments of Italy and Germany. The Spirit of the Beehive is set early in the Franco dictatorship and was filmed and first shown when the dictatorship was coming to an end.

It was the first feature length film by Erice, whose film background was shaped by the early discovery of the Nouvelle Vague (the movement marking the beginning of modern cinema in France), especially *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959) and *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959) and, once he became a critic, the Italian auteurs, heirs of neorealism, including Ermanno Olmi.

If I could give *The Spirit of the Beehive* another title, it would be…

What would you like to know about the dictatorship of Francisco Franco and life in Spain in the 1940s? What surprises you?

Imaginary diary of a character

Ana is unable to express her emotions, fears and concerns. But maybe you can imagine that she is able to express herself in her diary...Choose some of the important moments in the film and write Ana’s diary for that day.

Can you imagine what she writes, for example, after the showing of *Doctor Frankenstein* in the cinema, after finding the fugitive or when she returns home after her nocturnal escape?

Dear Víctor...

Write a letter to Víctor Erice to describe which moments of the film you find most striking, what moved you about the characters, if there is anything you don’t understand, the moments you remember best, the light, the spaces he chose, the script or the cinematographic choices...
The film and me

1. I put images in interaction with one another.

Do these three images from *The Spirit of the Beehive* make you think of other images you are familiar with? These can be other films, paintings, comics, photographs, video clips, advertisements, etc.

2. I make my own poster of the film.

3. I choose images from the film (using the Young Spectator Space) or I produce my own shots.

Photographs in the style of *The Spirit of the Beehive*:

- Take portraits trying to reproduce the different effects of light on the face (e.g. playing with shadows, different colours of light, light at the different times of day).
- Take photographs of indoor and/or outdoor spaces in a similar style to the film: pay special attention to the spaces, the frames, how the light falls, the transformations of these spaces over the course of the day, etc.

4. In the Young Spectator Space choose the 10 images that have most marked, moved or affected you (whatever the emotion you felt).

5. I can also choose the moments of Ana’s face that I remember more intensely, or the places that impressed me.

6. Compose a series of images based on your selection. You can propose a visual poem mixing images and words.

Young Spectator Space
Cined.eu/en/youngsters-space

To go further

Some extracts of *The Spirit of the Beehive* are available in the educational films: «At the table», «Escaping», «Looks», «Distance».

If I liked *The Spirit of the Beehive*, I might also like:

- *Rentrée des classes* (1956, France)
  by Jacques Rozier
  (FILM IN THE CINED COLLECTION)
  The film tells Rene’s (a fearless, sensitive young boy) adventure by the river after running away from school.
To go further

Il posto (1961, Italy)
by Ermanno Olmi
(FILM IN THE CinEd COLLECTION)
Il posto shows Domenico’s first days in Milano and in the office where he starts working. There he steps into his adult life, he discovers the city and meets Magali…

Les Quatre Cents Coups / The 400 blows (1959, France), by François Truffaut
Nouvelle Vague’s pinnacle work that meant initiation to cinema to many filmmakers and cinephiles. It was François Truffaut’s debut feature film and one of his most personal projects. Through this film we share Antoine’s adventures and we witness his efforts in being happy (specially through his walking around Paris streets, his getaways to the movies together with his friend René…) and the successive disillusions he has to face.

Ladri di biciclette / Bicycle thieve
(1948, Italy) by Vittorio De Sica
Bicycle thieve, Italian cinema’s great classic, where we live the misfortunes of a father and his son who struggle to remain steadfast in front of the hardships of economic crisis and unemployment.

Beepie (1965, the Netherlands), by Johan Van der Keuken
Portrait of a lively, intelligent girl with a strong personality living in Amsterdam in the 60s.
Estiu 1993 / Summer 1993 (2007, Spain)
by Carla Simón

One of the greatest films of the last years, by young filmmaker Carla Simón, who admires Erice and his film *The Spirit of the Beehive*. After her mother’s death, Frida is adopted by her uncle and aunt, who live in a farmhouse with their little daughter. Between her mourning and her discovery of a different life, Frida has to find her place.

If I liked *The Spirit of the Beehive*, I might also like these painters:

- **Johannes Vermeer**
  (Delft, 1632-1675)
  *The Music Lesson*

- **Vilhelm Hammershøi**
  (Copenhagen, 1864-1916)
  *Interior. With Piano and Woman in Black*
If I liked *The Spirit of the Beehive*, I might also like these photographs:

- **Julia Margaret Cameron**  
  (Calcutta, 1815-Kalutara, 1879)  
  *Henry Taylor*

- **Humberto Rivas**  
  (Buenos Aires, 1937-Barcelona, 2009)

**The songs of Paco Ibáñez** (1934)
Starting at a very young age, Ibáñez turned his music into a resistance and fight weapon, first in exile in France (in 1937, when he was a child, his father, an anarchist sympathizer, had to flee the Spanish Civil War) and later living and performing in Spain. He is a singer and songwriter very sensitive to poetry, able to add music to poems by authors such as Rafael Alberti, Luis de Góngora, Blas de Otero, Gabriel Celaya, Antonio Machado, Miguel Hernández, Luis Cernuda or Francisco de Quevedo who are great Spanish or Latin American authors.

**Franz Schubert’s (1797 – 1828) chamber music**
Schubert is considered one of the founders of music Romanticism. Halfway between happiness and melancholy, his chamber music invites us to dreaminess.
If I liked *The Spirit of the Beehive*, I might also like these books:

**Frankenstein**  
(Mary Shelley, 1818)

In 1818 British writer Mary Shelley created the character of Frankenstein which originated James Whale’s film of the same title, that Ana discovers in *The Spirit of the Beehive*. The novel tells about the experiments of Dr Frankenstein to give life to a creature engendered by connecting fragments of criminals’ dissected corpses. The film reflects also on the limits and dangers of scientific developments and of human ambition.

**The poems and legends of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer**  
(1836-1870)

With humble words, Bécquer is able to create intimacy through his verse and prose, and he makes us share his fascination with magic and phantasmagoria of the night and the full moon, his amazed wonder in front of nature and bird songs, his fragile and tender melancholy.

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