> The Man Without a Past (Mies vailla menneisyyttä) 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!
The film

A

The Man Without a Past

(1) M arrives in Helsinki by train, gets beaten up, dies (according to the doctor) and starts a new life.

(2) M gets help and support from people around him.

(3) M meets Irma.

(4) M settles down and makes himself a home.

(5) M’s loss of memory gets him from one trouble to another with the organized society.

(6) Still M is ready help a man in difficulty.

(7) M’s past is discovered and he visits his previous life.

(8) M returns to his new life and to Irma.

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Seen in the film

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CinEd — Student sheet
Irma: "There's a wretched man out there. I think we should help him."

The electrician who helps M: "If you see me face down in the gutter, turn me onto my back."

"Poor people have nothing to loose anymore. They don't have anything. I would say that they only have this, morals, friendship, solidarity, honesty, dignity and love between humour and nightmare. If they haven't inherited money from their family, at least they have got pride. And that is extremely important because if one loses that, everything collapses. This is why poor people are proud, at least most of them, for that they can survive."

Aki Kaurismäki, L’Humanité, 24 mai 2002

"[In The Man Without a Past] it’s question of the same construction play than in my previous dramas staging proletarians and losers and after some starting and warming difficulties, I wrote it – as always – in just a few days once I took the risk and sat down at my typewriter. No serious filmmaker has loads of themes – the professionals, as they put it, are an exception: they are able to make an impersonal film on whatever theme."

Aki Kaurismäki in the book of Peter von Bagh Aki Kaurismäki, WSOY, 2006/2012

How do you say The Man Without a Past in other countries?

- **United Kingdom:** The man without a past
- **France:** L’homme sans passé
- **Spain:** Un hombre sin pasado
- **Portugal:** O Homem Sem Passado
- **Italy:** L’uomo senza passato
- **Finland:** Mies vailla menneisyyttä
- **Lithuania:** Žmogus be praeties
- **Czech Republic:** Muž bez minulosti
- **Romania:** Omul fără trecut
- **Bulgaria:** Мъжът без минало
In Europe and elsewhere

Context:
The film was released in 2002. The story takes place in the beginning of 1990’s and the financial depression at the time. Finland faced a big struggle after the breakup of the USSR and the end of profitable foreign trade with the huge neighbouring country. Lots of people lost their jobs and had to leave their homes in the countryside to find work in cities. Since the distress touched everyone, people invented new ways to help each other and get through the hard times. In Finland a large number of second-hand shops were founded, the charity organizations started to distribute food aid to people when the state couldn’t help all in need.

The film and me

I learn and I imagine

- At the end of the film, how do I feel? What kind of music would I like to listen to after it? Why?

- In the pockets...
  M arrives to Helsinki with a suitcase and his leather jacket. Imagine what he still has in his pockets when he leaves the hospital (after being beaten up and after being declared dead).

- If I could give another title to The Man Without a Past, it would be….

- What did I discover in the film? What would I like to know more about Helsinki or Finland? What surprised me?

I write a letter to the filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki to tell him:
- what I thought about his film,
- what touched me, what I didn’t like,
- what I understood or did not understand about his choices.

- If I could read the diary of one of the characters what would I see?
  Irma the day she met M;
  M the day he woke up by the sea;
  Anttila the day he decided not to end the fight between the unknown tough guys and the people of his village;
  or the The Nieminen couple the day their children found M by the sea….
The film and me

- I make my own poster of the film.

- In the Young Spectator Space:
  I choose my top ten favourite images of the film, those that struck me, moved me, shocked me…
  I can also select images thematically: faces and looks, colours, violence.
- I build up a sequence of images from my selection. I can offer a visual poem mixing images and words.

Choosing and creating images

- In the Young Spectator Space:
  I choose some photos of The Man Without a Past. Do they remind me of other images?
- I search some images (paintings, comics, photos, video clips, adverts, other films, etc.) that seem to « discuss » with the photograms I chose. If I print them or I take a photo of them together, I can imagine their discussion.
- I imagine a different ending to the film.

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

To go further

If I liked The Man Without a Past, I might also like:

- Pierrot le Fou (1965, France) by Jean-Luc Godard
  (FILM IN THE CINED COLLECTION)
  because of the open admiration of Aki Kaurismäki to Jean-Luc Godard when he started his career. There are several elements of this admiration and especially the filmmakers habit to quote other films and art forms in his films, that are present in these two films.

- L’Atalante (1934, France) by Jean Vigo
  The love story in this great French film classic gives us hope and trust in love. L’Atalante was a real pioneer of its time in forms of cinematic expression and its images. The rhythm and the music reminds of those in The Man Without a Past.
The Gold Rush (1925, United States) by Charles Chaplin
The solitary, unlucky and poor fellow who doesn’t want to cause any harm to other people ends up in tragic (yet comically treated) situations. The sympathy is always with the protagonist, he is a lovely chap but has difficulties in adapting to the society around him.

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (1988, Spain) by Pedro Almodóvar
An exquisite palette of colours and absurd humour in European fashion. Almodóvar has also created a very recognizable cinematic world with lot of elements that are repeated from one film to another.

This fact:
Aki Kaurismäki boycotted the Academy Awards, the Oscar gala in 2003. The film was nominated but he wanted to boycott the event because of the Americans were participating to the war in Irak. In his eyes the war was unfair and in this letter, he explains his absence to the director of the Academy handing out the Oscar statues.

TO: ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES
Dear Mr. Pierson,
I thank you for the invitation to the Academy Awards Ceremony. However, I am sure that You and the Academy are well aware that we are not living in the most glorious moments of the history of the mankind. Therefore, I nor anybody else from Sputnik Ltd can participate the Oscar Gala event at the same time the government of the United States is preparing a Crime against Humanity for the purpose of shameless economical interests. For these reasons we are not in a party mood. I hope You understand that our opinion in this horrible situation is not against Academy nor the American civilians. It’s only a moral choice a grain of sand in this insane world.
The cinema has to be able to live – but the same possibility should be guaranteed also to Iraqi civilians: children, women, men.
Respects, Aki Kaurismäki
To go further

These painters and photographers:

- Edward Hopper
  (Summer evening, 1947)
- Stephen shore,
  an American photographer
- Esko Männikkö,
  a Finnish photographer

These books:

- The Grapes of Wrath (1939)
  by John Steinbeck
  The struggle against the mighty, the poor people’s difficulties and the
  human dignity are one of the most eternal themes of all arts. This is a story
  about a family who have to leave their home during the Great Depression in
  USA. Their life is not easy, sometimes it is hopeless. The book describes the
  struggle of this small family in extremely difficult times worldwide.

- The Master and Margarita
  (1967/1973)
  by Mikhail Bulgakov
  There is something profoundly
  Slavic and absurd in Aki
  Kaurismäki’s sense of humour.
  The book itself deals with
  serious things and the basic
  human questions of death
  and liberty. The whole book,
  though, can be read as an
  extremely ironical satire of the
  Soviet society (or just simply
  any society) and its activities.

- Pippi Longstocking (1945)
  by Astrid Lindgren
  The anarchistic character of Pippi
  who makes her own decisions and
  doesn’t let the world get her down
  might be a remote relative of M.
  Pippi is a young girl arriving alone
  to a small city in the countryside
  of Sweden. She doesn’t seem to
  have a past nor big plans for the
  future. Her childish way of just
  settling in and starting her own life
  with her own rules is delightful.

The author of this student sheet is Kaisa Kukkola.