The Emperor's Nightingale (Císařův slavík) 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 Emperor's Nightingale

A

The film

1

Seen in the film

(1)

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A lonely boy lives in a big house surrounded by toys.

He wants to play with a little girl behind the fence, but he is afraid to do so.

The boy receives a mechanical toy nightingale for his birthday.

The boy gets ill. He dreams a puppet dream of a small Chinese emperor. The Emperor also lives in a large house - a palace - surrounded by luxury things, but without friends and real animals.

The Emperor learns from a traveler about an unknown bird of Nightingale. No one knows where the bird could live.

A little girl behind the fence helps and brings the nightingale. Nightingale’s beautiful singing impresses the Emperor and he falls in love the nightingale voice.

But for his birthday the Emperor gets a new toy - a mechanical nightingale.

The Emperor stops listening to the living nightingale and the bird flies away.

The Emperor eventually gets tired of the mechanical toy and begins to miss the real bird. He becomes ill and death comes for him. The nightingale comes at the very last minute and rescues the Emperor.

Also, the boy who dreamed the dream wakes up and gets well. He laughs and runs to play with the little girl.

I close my eyes and I listen to the sounds of the film.

Waiting for the Nightingale at the Imperial Court
(time 0:37:00 - 0:39:04)
The film

4 different tunes: nightingale, fish, frog and mechanical nightingale

15:50 min

22:50 min

31:30 min

49:25 min

The film

Said about the film

Trnka knew how to work with children, he was able to get closer to them, he became one of them and the children always enjoyed his company and laughed a lot. It has always been such a sunny and joyful work with Trnka.

Composer Vaclav Trojan on cooperation with the children’s choir on the film

Yes, this privilege is called poetry. All children have it, and adults lose it if they are careless and don’t keep it somewhere in the dark.

Trnka is a kingdom of poetry and childhood, a paradise. His needs to revive will fascinate us more and more. So let us thank him if you want to give us the chance to think that the Archangel Guard has not definitively closed this door for us.

French poet Jean Cocteau on Jiri Trnka
In Europe and elsewhere

How do you say The Emperor’s Nightingale in other countries?

- Finland: Keisarin satakieli
- Lithuania: Imperatorius lakštingala
- Czech Republic: Císařův slavík
- Romania: Privighetoarea împăratului
- Bulgaria: Славеят на императора
- United Kingdom: The Emperor’s Nightingale
- Spain: El ruiseñor del emperador
- Portugal: O roxinol do imperador
- Italy: L’usignolo dell’imperatore
- France: Le Rossignol de l’Empereur de Chine

The film and its era

Context: the film belonged to the people

The film The Emperor’s Nightingale was made by a famous Czech creator of puppet and cartoon films Jiri Trnka. Jiri Trnka was also a painter and he illustrated books, designed toys and puppets for the theater.

The film was made only a few years after the end of World War II, at the time when films in Czechoslovakia were not allowed to be made by private companies, but only by the state. On the one hand, it brought a lot of trouble, because the communist politicians could forbid films they didn’t like. On the other hand, it was also possible to make beautiful films that otherwise could not be made because it would be difficult to get money for them. And such films were those by Jiri Trnka.

We do not know exactly when the film The Emperor’s Nightingale takes place. But we can assume that it was before World War I, perhaps even at the end of the 19th century. We can tell by the costumes or toys that appear in the film.
The Emperor's Nightingale

I imagine that:

... I am a screenwriter.
In my opinion, the film The Emperor’s Nightingale could continue as follows: …
I write the story of the film from the point of view of the little girl.
I write the story of the boy before the film begins.

... I am in the film.
Who would I choose to be? Why?

... I am working with Jiri Trnka on the film.
What advice would I give to him? What could I do differently in the story (characters, setting, sound, colours, etc.)?

Choosing and creating images

I create a film poster. The film posters that exist are old. I create a new one that would appeal to today’s kids but including all important information on the film.

I make up my own story based on photos from the film in the Young Spectator space. I choose several images. I stick the pictures to a sheet of paper and describe them. Why do I choose these pictures (because of the story, or do I like anything else about them)? Are there other moments in the film I remember? I can draw them, or make my own captures of the film (with the help of my teacher, for instance).

I create a place for the emperor to enjoy.
The Emperor lives in the palace, but it seems that he would at least occasionally escape somewhere completely different. I think of an environment that the Emperor will like, either with drawing or making a collage of magazine pictures, or making photos. I stick the cut-out figure of the emperor from the film into the finished environment.
The house of the young boy is also old, a bit sad. I can also create a new place for the young boy to enjoy.
If I liked film *The Emperor’s Nightingale*, I might also find interesting other films from the CinEd collection:

- The Blue Tiger, 2012, is a Czech film directed by Petr Oukropec. It tells the story of a little girl Johanka and her friend Matyas, who live in an old botanical garden in the middle of a city. But the garden is in danger, some people want to destroy it and therefore a magical blue tiger comes into the city and might help and put things right.

- A little girl Ana, the main character of the Spanish film *The Spirit of the Beehive*, lives with her sister and parents in a big house. She visits a film performance that changes her life. The film was made in 1973 by Victor Erice.

I might also like other films:

- A famous French film *My Uncle* is addressed to children and adults. A little boy lives in a new fancy house where robots and machines take care of everything. But he enjoys running to his friends and his uncle who lives in the old suburbs. The film was made in 1958 by Jacques Tati and we can also find a statue of a fish in this film that noticeably resembles that from *The Emperor’s Nightingale*.

- A short film *The Cybernetic Grandma* was made by Jirí Trnka in 1962. However, the theme is similar to *The Emperor’s Nightingale*. Children are surrounded by new technologies and robots; however, it would be better for them to play with a ball somewhere outside.
To go further

These artworks:

The Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen wrote a fairy tale called The Nightingale, as early as 1843. Jiří Trnka liked Andersen’s fairy tales very much and this is one of his most famous book illustrations he has ever drew. Does it remind me any part from the film?

The statue of Infant Jesus of Prague can be found in the Church of Our Lady Victorious, Prague. It is still worshiped by people from many countries of the world who believe in its supernatural powers. It was made in the 16th century in Spain. Does it remind me of any of The Emperor’s Nightingale characters? If so, which one and why?

This student sheet was written by Tereza Dvorakova.