

PENGUINS BEHIND BARS

A shockingly frank, no-holds-barred look at life inside a women's prison... penguin style!

Doris, a beautiful young penguin from a loving family, meets Charlie Abaloney, a flashy, big-beaked, small-time gangster. Charlie sweeps her off her flippers and hoodwinks her into helping him with a heist. The caper goes sour and Doris is left holding the bag, a bag of stolen pearls! Now she has to serve time in a maximum security penguinententiary teeming with sleazy birds!

Can she survive in this concrete jungle? Will she stay afloat in a sea of savage penguins? Can she clear her good name and turn the tables on Charlie?


Penguins Behind Bars follows in the great tradition of prison movies from an earlier era—a dramatic story starring an innocent inmate who finds herself in a jail full of classic characters.

CREATED AND DIRECTED BY
Janet Perlman

PRODUCERS
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PRODUCERS FOR THE NATIONAL
FILM BOARD OF CANADA
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23 minutes 2 seconds
Order Number: C9103 028

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PENGUINS
BEHIND
BARS

PENGUINS BEHIND BARS

Few know what really goes on
behind prison walls...until now!

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Before screening the video, be sure to tell your viewers about the long and frequently hilarious history of prison movies. The James Cagney films from the 1930s and 1940s are good examples. These movies established a pattern for prison films: the use of black-and-white and low lighting, the melodrama, the vicious guards and deadly battles between inmates. Frequent flashbacks to life before imprisonment usually showed the family/mother/girlfriend left behind.

In the late 1950s, movies began portraying women behind bars. While these productions seemed to mirror the men-in-prison scenarios, the women-in-prison stories became a class of peculiar and unintentionally funny entertainment. *Penguins Behind Bars* follows in this great tradition.

After showing the film, review the main plot of the story. Point out that the film begins with the flashback technique, showing how the young and foolish Doris Fairfeather falls in love with Charlie Abaloney and, blinded by love, fails to see that he is a pearl thief. Doris innocently drives the get-away car while Charlie holds up a bank. He escapes while Doris is arrested and tried. Her lawyer is suspiciously incompetent, and Doris is sentenced to ten years in the penguinentiary. There she meets the classic cast of jail characters—the wise old con Mad'm Millie, the poor half-mad Flotsam and her shrimp doll, Babs the bully inmate, Matron Ruffwater and the sadistic warden.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE FILM

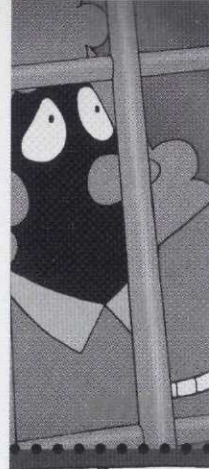
Penguins Behind Bars is full of wonderful wordplay. Ask the viewers to recall some examples: *beakstick* (lipstick), *goody two-flippers* (shoes), *poultrygeists* (poltergeists), *two shakes of a shark's tail* (lamb's tail), *penguinentiary* (penitentiary), etc. What if the characters had been cats, dogs or some other animal? What expressions and terms would have been appropriate to those creatures? If the movie had been about cats, the cells might have been searched for catnip instead of krill (tiny shrimp); if the story had been about dogs, the search might have been for dog bones. Encourage viewers to think of some clever wordplays based on those animals. This experiment in language should emphasize creativity, so there are no right and wrong answers.

THE COLOURS AND MUSIC

Discuss the somber colours and the predominant shades of grey and black. They add to the "prison" mood and suggest the old black-and-white films from the Forties. (The use of muted colours suggests the dimly lit interiors of a prison, the dull uniforms and the dreary life of the inmates.) Ask what else adds to the mood of the film. Discuss the music. Does the soundtrack fit the story? (The music evokes an earlier time and the old movies themselves.)

PENGUINS AND OTHER ANIMALS IN FILMS

Point out that while we usually view penguins as harmless and amusing birds, they also have a "criminal side" in pop culture. Ask viewers to think of other movies with penguins as criminals. (The Penguin in the *Batman* series and the jewel thief penguin in *Wallace & Gromit*.) Would *Penguins Behind Bars* have worked as well with flamingos? Supplementary activity: Write a short script for a flamingo version (*Flamingos in Stirl!*) with story boards for various scenes.



23 minutes 2 seconds
C9103 028



RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Atwater, Richard and Florence, *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, 1994, Scholastic Canada: The unexpected arrival of a penguin completely changes the life of a house painter.

Dyer, Heather, *Tina and the Penguin*, 2002, Kids Can Press, Toronto: Have you ever thought about bringing home a stray cat or dog? What about a penguin? When Tina meets a penguin who's tired of living in the zoo, she decides to help him escape!

Perlman, Janet, *Cinderella Penguin, or, The Little Glass Flipper*, 1992, Kids Can Press, Toronto: Based on the award-winning NFB animated film, this is a Cinderella story for the twenty-first century.

Perlman, Janet, *Emperor Penguin's New Clothes*, 1994, Kids Can Press, Toronto: This penguinized retelling of the popular Hans Christian Andersen tale will leave everyone blushing just like the Emperor Penguin when he appears in the grand parade — wearing only his crown!

RELATED NFB VIDEOS

Bob's Birthday, 1993, 12 min

Bully Dance, 2000, 10 min

Cinderella, Cinderella, Cinderella, 1996 compilation, 27 min

Dinner for Two, 1996, 7 min

Feline Fantasies, 1995 compilation, 29 min

Lady Fishbourne's Complete Guide to Better Table Manners, 1976, 6 min

The Tender Tale of Cinderella Penguin, 1981, 10 min

Why Me, 1978, 9 min

Created and directed by

Janet Perlman

Written by

Derek Lamb, with Janet Perlman

Storyboard

Derek Lamb and Janet Perlman

Original Music and Sound Supervision

Judith Gruber-Stitzer

With the voice of

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Louise Johnson

Les Drew

Magnus Hjerpe

Yann Tremblay

Luigi Allemano

Zhigang Wang

Janet Perlman

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Sound Editing

Judith Gruber-Stitzer

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