



***Les Choristes***  
**(France 2003, 95 min, French with English subtitles)**  
**Director: Christophe Barratier**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Most of the pupils at the austere Fond de l'Étang (which translates as "bottom of the pond") boarding school are bullies and pranksters whose parents have given up on them; others are orphans who have recently lost their families to World War II. These rebellious youngsters endure day after day under the thumb of headmaster Rachin, a sour-faced disciplinarian who terrifies his students and resolves issues by banishing boys into solitary confinement. Into this decidedly unhappy environment comes Clément Mathieu, a beautiful dreamer trapped in the form of a frumpy, middle-aged music teacher. Hired as a mere assistant, the big-hearted Clément quickly recognizes the pupils' desperation for real encouragement and respect. When he discovers that several of the boys are gifted singers, Clément skirts around Rachin's policies and arranges the students into a choir. While incurring the wrath of his superior, the teacher gamely suffers the boys' pranks, nurtures their talents and eventually wins their trust through the music they create together. Remarkably, the worst of the bullies even emerges as the choir's angel-voiced soloist.

**Themes in the Film**

Redemption  
Music  
Post-WWII France

**Study Questions**

- What do you imagine would make someone choose a teaching career?
- What about choosing to teach in particularly difficult circumstances, such as a reform school or remote location? Who would make those kinds of choices and why?
- What happened to the children whose families were affected by the war, through separation, death, destruction of homes or loss of possessions?
- How do you think it affected their education and upbringing?
- How did WWII affect the different social classes in France?

**Discussion Questions**

- What did M. Mathieu do before and what brought him to Fond de L'Étang?
- How does Pierre Morhange feel about his mother?

- What are some of the various reasons the boys are at Fond de L'Etang?
- Who was "redeemed" in the story? Who was "condemned"? Why?