

# Monsieur Lazhar

Cert 12A Canada 2011 95 mins

## Crew

Director/screenplay Philippe Falardeau  
 Cinematography Ronald Plante  
 Film Editing Stéphane Lafleur  
 Original music Martin Léon

## Cast

Mohamed Saïd Fellag Bashir Lazhar  
 Sophie Nélisse Alice L'Écuyer  
 Émilien Néron Simon  
 Danielle Proulx Madame Vaillancourt  
 Brigitte Poupart Claire Lajoie  
 Jules Philip Gaston

## Synopsis

*Montreal, the recent past. Bachir Lazhar, a 55-year-old Algerian immigrant, reads in the newspaper about the sudden death of a teacher at an inner-city school. He offers his services as a substitute, and, with the school in turmoil, is quickly hired.*

*Though the cultural gap between Bachir and his pupils is made immediately apparent, little by little he gets to know them better, and helps them come to terms with their teacher's death.*

*But nobody in the school is aware of Bachir's own painful history, or of the fate that awaits him imminently....*



- Philippe Falardeau adapted the screenplay from *Bashir Lazhar*, a one-character play by Évelyne de la Chenelière - who plays the part of Alice's mother in the film.
- As well as the Best Foreign Language Oscar nomination (mentioned in the reviews), the film was recommended for 9 Genie Awards - Canada's Oscar equivalent. It won 6 of them, including Sophie Nélisse as 'Best Actress', at 11 years old, the youngest ever recipient of the award.



## Reviews

Philippe Falardeau's *Monsieur Lazhar* was nominated for Best Picture in a Foreign Language at this year's Academy Awards, losing out to the Iranian *A Separation*.

Though the social and political context of the two films is quite different, you can detect surprising resonances between them. They both address issues of guilt and grief and responsibility; even more intriguingly, they set the individual conscience against the interfering machinations of state law. French-speaking Montreal is certainly not Tehran, yet both films examine the way a country's legal system may constrict and undermine the integrity, and indeed the humanity, of its citizens.

*Monsieur Lazhar*, while a less fraught and subtle film than *A Separation*, has something that any social-issue picture needs, namely, a heart....

...Falardeau, despite handling weighty questions, moves the film along with an unfussy grace and a bright sense of location. (Really bright - I've never seen such clean reflective surfaces in a school before). It's a rare achievement to keep such a sympathetic balance between a child's view of schooling and an adult's; rarer still to lend it such wit and warmth. "A classroom," says Lazhar, "is a place of friendship, of work, of courtesy - yes, courtesy." In that moment you hear the true gentleman, and the great teacher you never had.

**Anthony Quinn, *the Independent*, May 2012**

....Lazhar isn't without humour, but its quips are all intelligently cracked. The gently unfolding story swells with thoughtful observations and Falardeau draws fascinating comparisons between today's overly-paranoid education system and the government's treatment of suspect immigrants.

The performances are key. As the eponymous wisdom-giver, Fellag puts in a beautifully understated turn, effectively spinning Lazhar into a mythical figure of the Mary Poppins mould (minus the schmaltz). It's through him that many of Falardeau's ideas are nimbly explored.

The kids, meanwhile, are nothing short of mesmerising. Of them all, first-timer Sophie Nélisse gets top marks - her shell-shocked student forms a touching bond with her teacher, and her emotional monologue is a guaranteed nose-blower.

**Josh Winning, *Little White Lies*, May 2012**