

imagination
stage

THEATRE
FOR
change

Óyeme, the beautiful

By: Miriam Gonzales

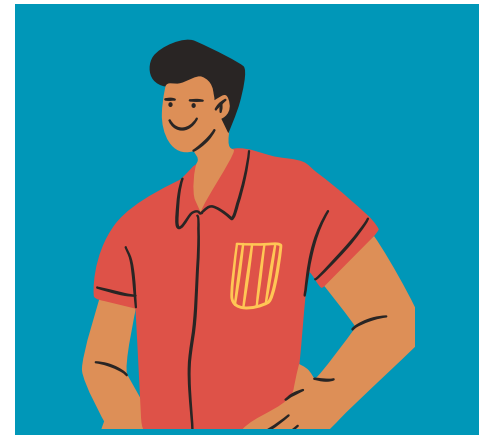
LEARNING GUIDE



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AGE RANGE:

This learning guide is recommended for grades 7-12.

CONTENT:

Óyeme, the beautiful is a modern drama that depicts the life of immigrant students in American schools and the push factors that led them to this country.

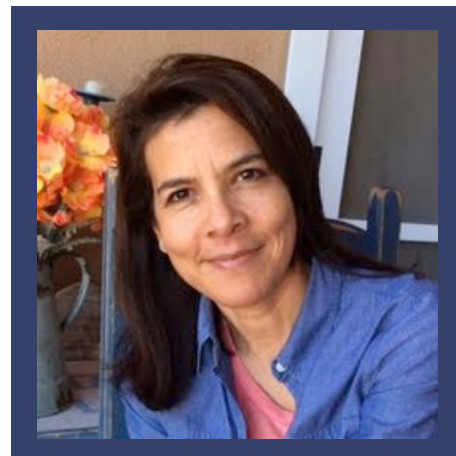
LEARNING GUIDE:

This learning guide is a resource designed to enhance your theatre experience. Its goal is twofold: to nurture the teaching and learning of theatre arts and to encourage essential questions that lead to enduring understandings of the play's meaning and relevance.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Miriam Gonzales

Miriam Gonzales' works include: *The Smartest Girl in the World*; *Sunny and Licorice*; *Bertie*, *Maggie and the Magic Zero*; *Óyeme*, the beautiful; *The South Overlook Oaks* (adaptation); and *Girl Power!* (Kennedy Center, NSO youth concert series). Her work has been produced at Childsplay (Tempe, Ariz.), Imagination Stage (Bethesda, Md.), Arts on the Horizon (Alexandria, Va.), Atlas Performing Arts Center (Washington, D.C.), Columbus Children's Theatre (Columbus, Ohio) and Austin Playhouse (Austin, Texas). In addition to stage productions, her work has toured extensively into schools and communities throughout the D.C. area and Arizona. Her work has been developed and has received professional readings at the Write Now Festival, La Jolla Playhouse's DNA New Works Series, Northwestern University's PLAYground Festival, the AATE National Conference, Imagination Stage, Latinx Theatre Commons, Georgetown University's CrossCurrents festival and the TCG National Conference. Gonzales is a former teaching artist with Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT) in Washington, D.C., and served as YPT's board chair. She currently serves on the board of the Children's Theatre Foundation of America. Gonzales is the codeveloper of Imagination Stage's ¡Óyeme! project, which is a theatre arts program for Central American refugee youth. Gonzales is the recipient of the Write Now Award, the Aurand Harris Memorial Playwriting Award, the AATE Distinguished Play Award and Imagination Stage's Imagination Award. She is a graduate of Brown University and received her Ph.D. in education and M.A. in sociology from Stanford University. Gonzales hails from Corpus Christi, Texas, and currently lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband and two daughters.



PLAY DESCRIPTION

Laura and Valentina are teenagers just trying to make it through another day in middle school. However, unlike many of their peers, they are refugees from Central America who have fled brutal violence in their home countries to find shelter and pursue their dreams in the United States. Step inside their shoes, hear their stories, see their struggle, and feel their strength as we move through their day. *Óyeme, the Beautiful* brings to light the undaunted courage and beautiful spirit that fuels these young people, and teaches us the power of friendship, family, and hope.



THE CHARACTERS

VALENTINA: 14 years old, a refugee student from El Salvador, Laura's best friend.

LAURA: 14 years old, a refugee student from Honduras, Valentina's best friend.

ESTEBAN: 15 years old, a refugee student from El Salvador, Valentina's brother.

ROBERTO: 13 years old, a refugee student from Guatemala.

RUBEN: 17 years old, a refugee from El Salvador; Laura's fellow traveler - her angel.

MAMI: Valentina and Esteban's mother.

PAPI: Valentina and Esteban's father.

ABUELA: Laura's grandmother.



GLOSSARY

La Bestia (the Beast): Otherwise known as “El tren de la muerte” (the Death Train), this refers to freight trains that travel north across Mexico, crowded with immigrants trying to reach the U.S. border. The journey involves risk of physical injury or death from trying to board and ride on the train, as immigrants usually crowd onto the roof or cling to the sides. In addition, the routes are often controlled by gangs, who extort or brutalize travelers. For women in particular, there are added risks of sexual assault or abuse during the journey across Mexico.



Chanchi: Latino/a students who have been in the U.S. longer and consider themselves to be American use this insult against recent arrivals. A very offensive, hateful word, it literally means a “dirty animal” or “pig”, and reduces the recent immigrants to an inferior status.

La migra: Spanish slang for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the group responsible for enforcing federal laws that control borders, customs, trade and immigration.

GLOSSARY

Las maras: Spanish for gangs. These groups are notorious for their violence and murders, and are often involved in the drug trade.

Quinceañera: The quinceañera (which can refer to the girl and the occasion) is a traditional celebration from Mexico and many other Central and South American countries. It occurs when a girl turns 15, and represents her transition from childhood to adulthood. Many family and friends are invited to attend what can be a very elaborate event. The celebration begins with a religious ceremony, which is followed by a reception that usually includes food and music, including a special choreographed waltz performed by the quinceañera and her court. The quinceañera wears an elaborate ball gown as well as a tiara.



Remittances: Money that immigrants send back to their families still living in the country from which they emigrated. This money plays a large part in the economy of countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

GLOSSARY

El coyote: Also referred to as a human smuggler, these are people who guide and/or arrange transportation for immigrants to cross the U.S.-Mexico border without the legal papers. In contrast to human trafficking, which involves forcibly transporting someone, immigrants pay the coyotes to transport them. However, as the situation with the drug cartels becomes more dangerous, coyotes may take advantage of immigrants, forcing them to work in certain jobs to pay back the cost of the border crossing, which can be several thousand dollars.

The Journey (El camino): In order to arrive in the U.S. from different countries, immigrants must travel thousands of miles across the length of Mexico just to reach the U.S./Mexican border. While some people do obtain the permission needed to enter the country legally, many others will cross in any way that they can, desperate to find a better life for themselves and their families. Some of these people are unaccompanied minors, who often want to join family members or parents already in the U.S.

Immigration: The action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country.

Immigrant: A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

GLOSSARY

Refugee: A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. An official entity such as the government or the United Nations Refugee Agency determines whether someone qualifies as a refugee.

Refugees from Ukraine board a bus at the Medyka border crossing, Poland.

Photo: Francesco Pistilli for the IRC



Asylum Seeker: A person who is also seeking international protection from dangers in his or her home country, but whose claim for refugee status hasn't been determined legally. They must apply for protection in the country of destination—meaning they must arrive at or cross a border in order to apply.

Crossing an international border for asylum is not illegal and an asylum seeker's case must be heard, according to U.S. and international law. *"It doesn't matter how you enter the country: If you're in the U.S. or you arrive at a port of entry you can seek asylum. There's no way to ask for a visa or any type of authorization in advance, you just have to show up,"* said the IRC's director of immigration Olga Byrne.

Discussion Question: What's the difference between a refugee, an asylum seeker, and an immigrant?

SPOTLIGHT ON IMMIGRATION

Why Immigrate?

There are a variety of factors that would cause someone to immigrate, or travel to live permanently in a foreign country. These factors belong to two categories, “**Push Factors**” and “**Pull Factors**”.

Push Factors: causes that force someone to leave their country.
Pull Factors: reasons someone would want to live in another country.

Which of the reasons below are Push Factors and which are Pull Factors? Could any of them be both?

1. Rachel's country is being attacked with bombs and violence, killing many people and destroying homes. (Push/Pull)
2. Jaime wants to go to a doctor who knows how to treat her rare heart condition. (Push/Pull)
3. Evan was told that if he didn't join a local gang, his sister would be killed. (Push/Pull)
4. Laura and Simon haven't been able to feed their children because the bad weather is destroying their crops. (Push/Pull)
5. Sara wants her children to be able to complete high school in a good school and have a chance to go to college. (Push/Pull)
6. Amanda's parents emigrated when she was a baby and she hasn't seen them for the past ten years. (Push/Pull)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why did Laura's and Valentina's families send them to the U.S.?
- What do you think Laura/Valentina/Roberto/Esteban's hopes and dreams for living in the U.S. are? What does the "American Dream" represent?
- Laura and Valentina hold on to certain images from their countries of origin (Volcán Izalco, etc.). What images would you use to represent your country, either the U.S. or another country you consider home?
- Everyone has an immigrant in their family history. What is your immigration story?
- If Valentina/Laura/Roberto/Esteban were your classmates or friends, knowing the kinds of challenges they faced in the play, what advice could you offer them? How could you make them feel welcome?
- What could your school do to make them feel more welcome? What are examples of bullying that we see in this play? Have you ever felt different or like you didn't fit in? What would you tell Laura or Valentina if you could?
- In what ways can you relate to Laura/Roberto/Esteban/Valentina's stories?

¡Óyeme! Program

¡Óyeme! is a collaborative project that responds to the surge of refugee children fleeing violence in Central America who have arrived in Montgomery County. Many of the children have experienced horrific circumstances in their country of origin as well as in the migration here. Our project partners include Imagination Stage, The Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF), Montgomery County Department of Recreation, and the Department of Health and Human Service's Street Outreach Network (SON).

¡Óyeme! strives to provide a creative arts outlet for young people, utilizing best practice, culturally based, trauma-informed theatre and arts activities to create a sense of community among the participants, and provide a safe space for immigrant youth to share their stories. Our hope is that as a result of our efforts not only can the children feel welcomed, but they also can begin the healing process that will allow them to assimilate into their new community. Óyeme, the Beautiful is informed and inspired by the stories of students in the ¡Óyeme! program.

The following Creative Expression section includes activities that have been used with students in the ¡Óyeme! program to help them tell their stories. Try them with your students to give them a chance to reflect on the content of the show and how it relates to their lives and experiences.

ACTIVITY

Creative Expression:

Cultural Mapping

The challenge of building a new home and community in the U.S. is something that all of the characters in the play struggle with. In this activity, students will think about their own sense of place and belonging. Give each student a blank sheet of paper. Tell them to draw themselves in the center (it can be a stick figure). Around it, have them draw various different places from their community, or some other place they consider home, using the following prompts:

- a. Draw a place where you love to eat.
- b. Draw a place where you feel happy.
- c. Draw a place where you like to go with friends.
- d. Draw a place where you feel unwelcome.
- e. Draw a place where you feel safe.
- f. Draw the place where you live.
- g. Etc. (Continue with any other locations you would like).

Next, have students pair with a partner and share their map, giving their partner a tour of their community.

ACTIVITY

Social Emotional Learning/Visual Art:

Shield

Laura experienced many hardships during her journey, but fortunately, Ruben helped her every step of the way. Why did she choose the rose as her symbol? Why was Ruben's and Laura's relationship so unique and special?

Pick a symbol that best describes something important in your lives. It could be a memory or something related to an important person. Draw or paint that symbol. Explain your artistic choice.

ACTIVITY

Conflict and Resolution:

Script

- Think about the scene between Esteban and Valentina that occurs near the end of the play. Esteban is struggling with the question of gang involvement, and they talk about what the reality of their time in the U.S. has been. How do you think this scene resolves? What did Esteban decide? What else could Valentina have said to him?
- Have students write the script for an extended scene where Esteban makes a clear choice. What happens next?

RESOURCES

- CARECEN: Latino Resource and Justice Center
<http://www.carecendc.org/> A community organization that empowers local Latino/as by providing information on housing, immigration and citizenship.
- CASA MD
<http://wearecasa.org/> A community resource centered around the Latino community that provides various classes and support systems.
- United We Dream
<https://unitedwedream.org/resources/> United We Dream is the largest immigrant youth-led community in the country.
- The Immigrant Learning Center
<https://www.ilctr.org/understanding-immigrant-trauma/> This organization provides free ESOL classes, informs Americans about immigration, and conducts research on the economic contributions of immigrants.
- Kids in Need of Defense
www.supportkind.org This program offers ways to get involved in helping unaccompanied minors who have immigrated to the U.S. and provides legal aid to children in deportation proceedings.
- The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing
<http://www.wendtcenter.org/> This center provides programming for children and adults dealing with grief and loss.