

# IN THE HEIGHTS

By Lin Manuel Miranda (music & lyrics)  
& Quiara Alegría Hudes (book)

## A Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide

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and Community Engagement)

Wheelock Family Theater 2017



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# I. About Wheelock Family Theatre



## Our Mission

Wheelock Family Theatre creates intergenerational and multicultural productions that provide a shared experience for the whole family. The Theatre realizes the mission of Wheelock College to improve the lives of children and families. Among increasingly few institutions, we are committed to serving and supporting families of all kinds. Indeed, our productions celebrate

the diverse range of families found in the world today and seek to unite them in the shared experience of live theatre. We are especially dedicated to those who are historically under-served: people of color, people with disabilities, and low-income families. We know that it is not only children who are “at risk” in our society — but entire families and communities.

We are devoted to the ideal of complete access and reject the notion that the arts should be available only to audiences of privilege. Our play selection, casting policy, affordable ticket prices, Education Program, and access provisions for people with disabilities reflect an unwavering commitment to inclusive, community-based theatre. We believe theatre is a crucial element of human experience. It is both a means of self-revelation and a basis for empathy with others; it inspires both individualism and responsibility through the giving and the receiving of human experience.

You can read more about our company’s history and programming at [www.wheelockfamilytheatre.org](http://www.wheelockfamilytheatre.org)

## Our Staff - alphabetical order

Jamie Aznive, *Audience Services Manager*

Linda Chin, *Producing Artistic Director*

Kay Elliott, *Special Projects Manager*

Jeri Hammond, *Director of Education, Outreach, and Community Engagement*

Matthew Lazure, *Resident Designer and Properties Coordinator*

Steve McGonagle, *Technical Director*

Keith Orr, *Manager of Marketing and Development*

Nick Vargas, *Associate Artistic and Education Director*

BC Williams, *Assistant Technical Director*

## Upcoming Shows



### **DISNEY'S BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**

**February 2- March 4, 2018**

Music by **Alan Menken**

Lyrics by **Howard Ashman and Tim Rice**

Book by **Linda Woolverton**

Based on the Academy Award-winning animated film, this “tale as old as time” follows Belle, a young woman who doesn’t quite fit in, and the Beast, a prince who longs to escape from a curse.

**Recommended for ages 6+**

Directed by **Jane Staab**

Choreographed by **Laurel Conrad**

Musical Direction by **Steven Bergman**



### **STUART LITTLE**

**April 13- May 13, 2018**

Adapted by **Joseph Robinette**

Based on the book by **E.B. White**

E.B. White’s (*Charlotte’s Web* and *Trumpet of the Swan*) endearing classic story follows Stuart, a mouse born into a New York family, and his many “larger than life” adventures.

**Recommended for ages 4+**

Directed by **Nick Vargas**



Wheelock Family Theatre creates high quality, affordable, and accessible programming in our productions and Education Program.

Our classes, led by an experienced team of teaching artists, comprised of Wheelock College faculty and working Boston-area theatre professionals, provide young people the opportunity to learn the fundamental building blocks of drama and experience the joy of discovery, within a fun, inclusive, and supportive environment.

We offer weekend classes, vacation week programs, and more! For grades Pre-K-12.

Visit [wheelockfamilytheatre.org/classes](http://wheelockfamilytheatre.org/classes)



## II. About *In the Heights*

### INTRODUCTION

From <http://www.olneytheatre.org/shows-a-events/in-the-heights/guide-to-in-the-heights>

*In the Heights* starts at “the break of day,” in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City, but even at this early hour, people are heading to work. There’s the Puerto Rican taxi dispatcher, the hair stylist who remembers “the hills of Vega Alta,” and the Dominican bodega guy. All are immigrants. All own small-businesses. And all, as Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes’ musical begins, are fighting to stay afloat in a rapidly gentrifying New York City.

The struggle for economic prosperity while maintaining cultural heritage is a deeply American one. Since our country’s founding, immigrants have brought pieces of their old worlds with them to these shores, and used those fragments to build a new one. But for Abuela Claudia, who belts out her Cuban mother’s motto of “Paciencia y fe” (“Patience and faith”) or Kevin Rosario, who seeks to support his daughter in a way his own Puerto Rican farmer father never could, this dream is in jeopardy. Having come with nothing to this country, having labored to build a new American home, they may end up with nothing once more. Meanwhile their descendants, like high-achieving Stanford freshman Nina or hardworking Usnavi, find themselves struggling in the land of opportunity, striving to achieve their parents’ goals, yet facing obstacles at every turn.

Our characters stand to lose everything, not just economically, but culturally as well. In shutting down a bodega, a taxi service, or a salon, the forces of big business and gentrification aren’t just closing some “raggedy little business,” to quote Usnavi. They are seeking to homogenize and erase, creating a world of sameness and conformity. Having believed in the American Dream, like so many before them, they have nowhere to turn as they begin questioning that dream’s existence. As Usnavi’s young, idealistic cousin raps: *The rent is escalatin’/The rich are penetratin’/We’re paying corporations when we should be demonstratin’*.

*In the Heights* doesn’t suggest a solution to this problem. It does, however, present a passionate defense of the “barrio,” depicting the cultural riches, economic ambitions, and American spirit of this majority-Latinx neighborhood. Is Usnavi, seeking to pass on his parents’ legacy to the next generation, all that different from George Bailey of *It’s a Wonderful Life*? Lin-Manuel Miranda doesn’t think so, slyly including “‘Merry Christmas you ole’ Building and Loan,’ I’m home!” as Usnavi jubilantly proclaims his allegiance to his neighborhood.

In giving voice to the woman who cuts hair in a small salon, the voice on the taxi dispatch radio, and the cashier behind the bodega counter, *In the Heights* reveals their strength and courage. All have their own stories, and as Usnavi reminds us, “some have happy endings, some are bittersweet.” And all are American.

-- Gabrielle Hoyt, the Literary Manager at Round House Theater



## CHARACTERS

**Usnavi De La Vega:** Usnavi is in his mid-twenties and runs his neighborhood's bodega (family-owned convenience store). His parents immigrated to America from the Dominican Republic and opened the store. When they passed away, Usnavi was raised by Abuela Claudia and eventually took over his parents' store. He dreams of traveling to the Dominican Republic to connect with his roots.



**Sonny De La Vega:** Usnavi's teenage cousin Sonny works at the bodega with Usnavi. Sonny has activist aspirations, hoping to fix the social and economic problems of his neighborhood. His closest friend is Graffiti Pete.

**Abuela Claudia:** Though she is not Usnavi's biological grandmother, she has taken care of him like a grandmother. In fact, Claudia has acted as a grandmother to almost the entire neighborhood, and holds the memories of the people she knows there. Claudia immigrated to America from Cuba with her mother in 1943.

**Vanessa:** Vanessa, in her early twenties, is a strong and independent young woman who is both ambitious and fun-loving. She works in the neighborhood salon, but dreams of moving downtown and out of her mother's house.

**Benny:** Benny is in his mid-twenties and grew up with Usnavi in the neighborhood. He works at the Rosarios' car service and dreams of one day running his own business. Benny has always been close to the Rosarios, and falls in love with Nina when she comes home from college.

**Nina Rosario:** Nina is a college freshman at Stanford University. She is the daughter of Kevin and Camila Rosario and good friends with Vanessa. Nina feels a lot of pressure to succeed because she is the first in her family and her community to go to college.

**Kevin Rosario:** Kevin was born in Puerto Rico and immigrated to America with his wife Camila when they were in their early twenties. Together they opened Rosario's Car and Limousine and raised their daughter Nina. Kevin works incredibly hard to allow his daughter to succeed, but is sometimes blinded by his dedication and hard work.

**Camila Rosario:** Camila was born in Puerto Rico and immigrated to America with her husband Kevin. She works equally as hard as her husband to help their beloved daughter Nina succeed, but Camila is a bit more open-minded than her husband.

**Daniela:** Daniela owns the neighborhood salon where she works with Carla and Vanessa. She and Carla are best friends as well as the gossip queens of the neighborhood. Daniela acts as a mother figure for Vanessa. She is strong but struggles with the rising cost of

rent.

**Carla:** Carla was born in Queens and now works at the salon in Washington Heights with Daniela and Vanessa. She is very well-meaning and caring, but a bit naive.

**Graffiti Pete:** Graffiti Pete is in his teens and best friends with Sonny. Usnavi holds a grudge against Graffiti Pete for constantly spray painting his bodega. But perhaps Graffiti Pete is a true artist.

**Piragua Guy:** The Piragua Guy sells piragua (a sweet, shaved ice treat) for a living. His nemesis is Mr. Softy, the ice cream truck. Piragua Guy always works hard and tries to keep a positive attitude despite the obstacles in his way.

## SYNOPSIS

### *ADAPTED FROM PRODUCTION PREVIEW GUIDE*

([https://wheelockfamilytheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/In\\_the\\_Heights-Production\\_Preview\\_Guide.pdf](https://wheelockfamilytheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/In_the_Heights-Production_Preview_Guide.pdf))

*In the Heights* takes place over the course of three days, July 3 - July 5, in present-day Washington Heights, a neighborhood in Manhattan, NY.

## ACT I

The show begins in the Washington Heights neighborhood in Manhattan. Usnavi is opening his bodega (convenience store/mini-mart) for the morning and chasing away a graffiti artist. As he opens the store, the audience is introduced to Usnavi's Latinx community and each of the prominent characters throughout the song "In the Heights."

Nina Rosario enters at the end of the song, back from her first year at Stanford University in California, and heads to Usnavi's bodega. He and other friends congratulate Nina for her hard work and completing her first year at a prestigious school. When they all leave, Nina reflects on her time away from home in the song "Breathe" and reveals that she is nervous to be back in the Heights. She prepares to deliver some bad news to her parents.

Nina's parents, Kevin and Camila Rosario, run Rosario's Car and Limousine service. They let their non-Latinx employee, Benny, run the dispatch while they are out applying for a loan. Benny talks to the drivers in "Benny's Dispatch" with the help of Nina.

Vanessa struggles with a bill issue on the phone at the salon. She reveals to Daniela and Carla that her mother spent half of her check on her drinking problem and now their electricity is shut off. Vanessa longs to leave the Heights and move downtown as she sings in "It Won't Be Long Now."

Usnavi tries to flirt with Vanessa, but his younger cousin, Sonny, ends up asking Vanessa



Photo Credit: Randy H. Goodman All Rights Reserved Randy@RandyGoodmanPhotography.com

on a date on Usnavi's behalf. Vanessa agrees and Usnavi is elated.

Kevin and Camila return to the dispatch and Nina reveals her bad news. She was unable to keep up with her studies and her two jobs and so she lost her academic scholarship and was forced to take a leave of absence. Her parents are shocked, and ask her why she didn't ask them for financial help. Nina explains that she didn't want to put their already struggling business at risk. Kevin is devastated that he can't provide for his daughter, and reflects on his own issues with his father in "Inutil."

Usnavi discovers that he has sold a winning lottery ticket for a prize of \$96,000. The characters all imagine what they would do if they won the money in the song "96,000." Abuela Claudia, away from the celebrations, reminisces on her immigration to America from Cuba in 1943 in the song "Paciencia y Fe." She also reveals who has the winning lottery ticket.

The neighborhood gathers at the Rosario house to celebrate Nina's homecoming with a dinner party. Kevin reveals he has sold his business to pay for Nina's tuition, which means that Benny is out of a job. Everyone is shocked, especially Nina and Camila. The dinner party breaks up, and Nina, Benny, Usnavi, and Vanessa go out for a night of dancing. Suddenly the power goes out in the whole neighborhood and the characters lose each other in the chaos during the song "Blackout," as the act ends.

## ACT II

The act opens with Benny and Nina on Benny's fire escape after spending the night together. In the song "Sunrise," Nina teaches Benny Spanish. Meanwhile, Kevin and Camila search for Nina, who hasn't told them where she is, and Usnavi discovers that his bodega has been looted. Dejected, Usnavi goes to make sure Abuela Claudia is okay. She tells him about her newfound money and they make plans to move out of the Heights and onto a Caribbean island in the song "Hundreds of Stories."

Kevin and Camila find Nina with Benny and confront them. Kevin and Benny get in an argument, with Kevin insisting that Benny knows nothing about Latinx culture and doesn't deserve his daughter. Camila finally interrupts the argument ("Enough") and tells Kevin that decisions—any kind of decision—are made by the family, not individually.

By the time the afternoon hits the power still hasn't been fixed. The weather is brutally hot and people are angry and uncomfortable. To lift people's spirits, Daniela leads everyone in the neighborhood in a "Carnaval Del Barrio," celebrating their heritage and their community. Soon after the celebration, bad news of endings—of relationships, businesses, and lives—throughout the neighborhood hits.

Kevin announces in "Atencion" that Abuela Claudia has died in her sleep. The neighborhood sings "Alabanza" in honor of her memory. Later, Usnavi and Nina go through Abuela Claudia's things, reflecting on her life in the song "Everything I Know." Kevin and Camila enter and talk to her about Stanford and her relationship with Benny. They officially decide to sell their business and Nina accepts their financial help and decides to return to Stanford in the fall.





Daniela and Carla close up their salon in preparation to move to the Bronx. Before she leaves, Daniela reveals that she has co-signed on Vanessa's lease on a new apartment downtown, at Usnavi's suggestion. To celebrate and thank Usnavi, Vanessa brings him a bottle of champagne and tells him she's sad that he's leaving in the song "Champagne." She kisses him, leaving Usnavi confused. Meanwhile, Benny and Nina decide to try to make their relationship work while Nina is away at Stanford in the song "When the Sun Goes Down."

The next morning, the Rosarios close down their company and Usnavi gets ready to shut down his bodega. But before he can, Sonny and Graffiti Pete have prepared an artistic surprise for Usnavi that changes his entire future plans. The show ends with the neighborhood gathered in Washington Heights: the one place that will always be home for all of them, no matter where each of their journeys takes them.

### A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR, RACHEL BERTONE



*If you want something to change in your life, you must first look inside yourself and then take action.*

This is a story with a message that needs to be told right now. The subject matter Lin-Manuel Miranda presented almost 10 years ago is still, if not more, relevant today. The world is hurting, and there are voices that desperately need to be heard. Our mission is to give hope to those who are seemingly powerless and remind them that anyone can rise up, go far, and reach their dreams.

Miranda has an amazing ability to make everyone (actors and audiences alike) feel included. Regardless of race or age, audience members can't help but empathize with the characters in his stories. What I find most incredible is that he knows how to connect on a deep heart level. My goal is for this cast to be able to connect with our audiences in the same way—to make everyone in our theatre feel a part of the community we have built.

## ABOUT THE ORIGINAL CREATIVE TEAM



**Lin-Manuel Miranda:** Lin-Manuel Miranda is the lyricist and composer of the musicals *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*, as well as co-composer and lyricist for *Bring It On: the Musical*, and for the movie *Moana*. He is originally from the Inwood neighborhood of New York City. Miranda is a first-generation American, whose parents both immigrated to the U.S. from Puerto Rico. Miranda loved music and performance at a young age, and majored in theatre at Wesleyan University. While there, he was inspired to create what would eventually become *In the Heights*, because he wanted to make a musical that told his story, and the story of millions of Americans who shared that story.



**Quiara Alegria Hudes:** Quiara Alegria Hudes has written for the musicals *In the Heights*, *Miss You Like Hell*, and *Barrio Grrr! The Musical*. She is also the playwright of *Daphne's Dive*, *Water by the Spoonful*, *Elliot A Soldier's Fugue*, *The Happiest Songs Play Last*, *26 Miles*, *Yemaya's Belly*, and *Lulu's Golden Shoes*. Born in Philadelphia, PA to Puerto Rican and Jewish parents, Hudes went on to get a BA from Yale University and an MFA from Brown University. Hudes' work champions the positive and diverse depiction of Latinx women and femmes. Currently Hudes is writing the screenplay for the movie version of *In the Heights*.

## ABOUT THE MUSICAL STYLES LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA USED IN COMPOSING *IN THE HEIGHTS*

Lin-Manuel Miranda describes the music of *In the Heights* as the sound of the city he grew up in: "We've got the hip hop section, but we also have imagined the car blasting the salsa song whizzing by, and it's that fusing of all the music..." Read below to learn more about just a few of his musical styles.

Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote these lyrics for an audience that would include those unfamiliar with rap and hip-hop, so if you miss anything within those rhythms, you won't be lost in terms of plot – in the same way Gilbert & Sullivan didn't expect their audiences to catch every word of "Modern Major General." As Miranda explains in [this interview with \*Rolling Stone Magazine\*](#):

"When people say [*Hamilton*]'s a hip-hop musical to me, it doesn't bother me, because I know how much hip-hop contains. I feel lucky to have grown up in that. And also, while I was memorizing *Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde* [a 1992 hip-hop album], I was also playing the Pirate King in *The Pirates of Penzance* in ninth grade. Those two things were happening at the same time for me. So it's all a stew in my head. I'm always attracted to storytelling, whether it's Biggie's 'Warning' or Jay Z's 'Friend or Foe' or [Gilbert and Sullivan's] 'I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General.' It's all the same thing."



### III. Welcome to Washington Heights!



## NYC GEOGRAPHY

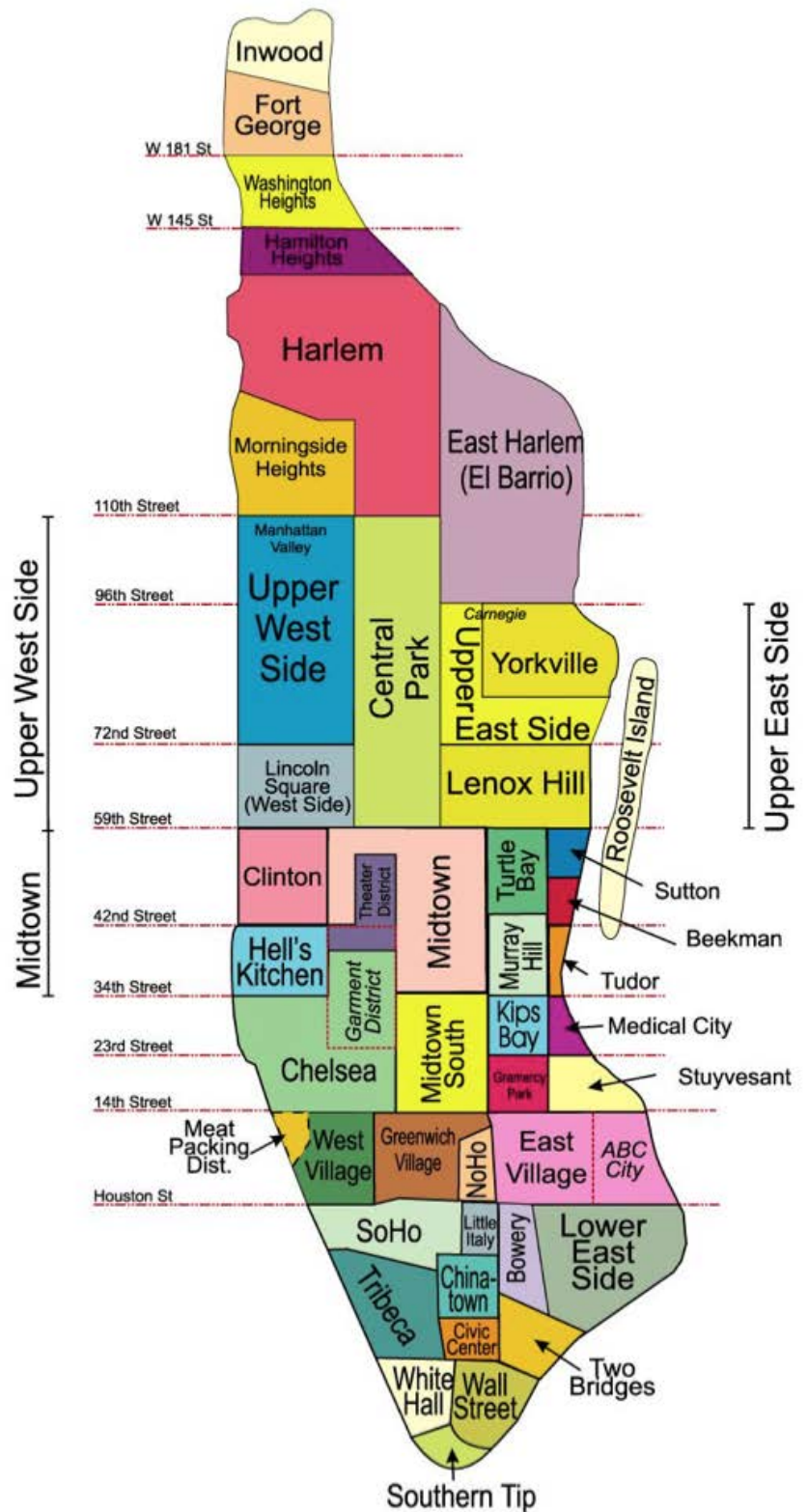
As it is in Boston, urban geography is a huge part of life in New York City. New York City includes five boroughs, and within each borough are different neighborhoods, which function similarly to the neighborhoods within Boston.

Five Boroughs of NYC:

- Brooklyn
- Bronx
- Queens
- Staten Island
- Manhattan (including Washington Heights)

This map shows a breakdown of the different neighborhoods in Manhattan.

Like the T in Boston, the Metro in NYC is a huge part of everyday life. As in Boston, public transportation is widely used by people of all walks of life and all social classes. However, also like Boston, the subway stop you live near says a lot about your class and your culture. On the next page is a map of the entire metro system throughout all five boroughs.







## IMMIGRATION

More than any other city in America, Manhattan and New York's other four boroughs are defined by a varied immigrant population. In fact, thirty-six percent of the city's population is foreign born. The sights, sounds, and smells that draw visitors from all over the world emanate from distinct neighborhood communities created by others who came in waves from around the world and settled here.

Today, the neighborhood is clearly "home" to its Hispanic community but this wasn't always the case. After WWII, it seemed the whole world was on our doorstep, hoping to escape the postwar economic hardships at home and to share in the burgeoning economic opportunities here, the gateway to the land of opportunity and asylum. It was in this mid-century wave that Latinx populations began to arrive in large numbers. Since that time these "new immigrants" have increasingly become a significant part of the textured and colorful fabric of New York City.

**PUERTO RICAN IMMIGRATION:** Technically, most Puerto Ricans migrated rather than immigrated to the US. The Jones Act, passed in 1917, conferred US citizenship on Puerto Ricans and revised their form of government to closely emulate that of a US state. Previously, while under the oppression of Spanish rule, relatively few Puerto Ricans were able to immigrate to the US as the passage by steamship was prohibitively expensive.

It wasn't until the mid-twentieth century "Great Migration" that they began to arrive and settle in New York City in large numbers, particularly in East Harlem, which later became known as Spanish Harlem or El Barrio. Driven initially by the economic hardship of the Great Depression, which was even worse on the island than here on the "mainland," and later by the post World War II search for opportunity known as "the great wave," they were now aided by the advent of more affordable air travel. This influx continued until the 1970's when a reverse-migration occurred in which many Puerto Ricans returned to the island to buy homes and invest in local businesses there. In the interim, the presence of this significant new population in New York City had resulted in the first widespread recognition of a Latinx community in the political and cultural landscape of the city. The first Puerto Rican Day parade was held in 1958. Today, there are roughly one million Puerto Ricans living in New York City.

**CUBAN IMMIGRATION:** Though US troops occupied Cuba as part of the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, Cubans did not begin immigrating to the US in significant numbers until 1959 when Fidel Castro assumed power. The largest part of the Cuban expatriate masses settled in Miami, Florida but many made their way to New York City. As Castro's revolution took hold and his ideologies and alliances moved further and further in the direction of communism, his new government seized private property, nationalized companies, and sent many more Cubans, many of whom were middle class, from the island in exile.

In 1980, unrest due to a suddenly declining economy prompted Castro to announce that anyone who wished to leave could do so. The result came to be known as the Mariel Boatlift, a chaotic, impromptu exodus in which 125,000 people left the island during a six-month period. Since 1994, emigration to the US has been regulated by mutual US-Cuba agreement. Over 1 million Cubans have emigrated from the island since 1959. While many more have made it safely to our shores, it is estimated that 30,000-40,000 may have died in the attempt. Most Cuban residents of New York City can be found in the area just south of Washington Heights.

**DOMINICAN IMMIGRATION:** In 1961, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo was assassinated resulting in a loosening of emigration policy. Fearing political backlash at home and seeing opportunity in America, large numbers of Dominicans began to immigrate to the US from their native Santo Domingo. Another surge came a few years later facilitated by the US military occupation of the Dominican Republic beginning in 1965 and bolstered by favorable employment conditions here in the States. During the 1960's roughly 93,000 Dominicans immigrated to the US compared with fewer than 10,000 in the 1950's.

*Adapted from:*

<http://www.campbroadway.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/InTheHeights7-26-11.pdf>

## GENTRIFICATION

Throughout *In the Heights*, many of the characters are concerned about the rising rents and cost of living in their neighborhood. The reason for this increase is largely due to the phenomenon of gentrification. Gentrification is a complex topic and has no clear-cut definition, but PBS provides this brief explanation:

“Gentrification is a general term for the arrival of wealthier people in an existing urban district, a related increase in rents and property values, and changes in the district's character and culture. The term is often used negatively, suggesting the displacement of poor communities by rich outsiders. But the effects of gentrification are complex and contradictory, and its real impact varies.” (Grant 2003)

Everyone in NYC has an opinion on gentrification and its causes. But what's important in the context of this show is the idea that at any moment the place you call home might change completely. The themes of home and community are central to *In the Heights*, and it is important to keep in mind that despite the strength of the ties between these people, the society in which they live is an inherently fragile one.

*Read more here:* <http://www.governing.com/gov-data/new-york-gentrification-maps-demographic-data.html>



## LATINX CULTURE AND HISTORY

**What is Latinx?:** In this packet, you will see use of the term “Latinx” as a descriptor for Latin American people and cultures. Why not use Latino or Latina? Read on to see why:

“Latinx is the gender-neutral alternative to Latino, Latina and even Latin@. Used by scholars, [activists](#) and an increasing number of journalists, Latinx is quickly gaining popularity among the general public. It’s part of a “[linguistic revolution](#)” that aims to move beyond gender binaries and is inclusive of the intersecting identities of Latin American descendants. In addition to men and women from all racial backgrounds, Latinx also makes room for people who are trans, queer, agender, non-binary, gender non-conforming or gender fluid.” (Huffington Post)

*Read more here:*

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-people-are-using-the-term-latinx\\_us\\_57753328e4b0cc0fa136a159](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-people-are-using-the-term-latinx_us_57753328e4b0cc0fa136a159)

### Additional Useful Terms:

- **Bodega:** in Spanish “store”; generally refers to local independent convenience store that sells necessities at affordable prices; usually family owned, these little shops are all over New York, and many residents prefer them to bigger chains like CVS or Duane Reade.



- **Barrio:** in Spanish “neighborhood”; in America, generally refers to traditionally Latinx neighborhoods in American cities.

- **Piragua:** a Puerto Rican dessert made of shaved ice and fruit-flavored syrup, shaped like a pyramid and served on the street by vendors called piragueros.

- **Carnaval:** Carnaval (in English, Carnival) is a celebratory event that occurs for several days before Mardi Gras/Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday in Christian religion. This event is connected to the Christian religious tradition of having a joyous celebration before a time of fasting and repentance, which is known as Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter. Carnaval celebrations are held around the world in many different countries, and each community celebrates it in unique ways. In Latin America, these celebrations often involve elaborate costumes, masks, parades, and

loud music. Each individual nation has its own traditions, but no matter where it happens the spirit of celebration and fun is the same. In a way, Carnaval is an interesting metaphor for the celebration of connections and distinctions between and among Latin American cultures.





- Latin America:** this term generally refers to the area from the top of Mexico to the bottom tip of South America, including the islands that surround it. Predominantly Spanish and Portuguese are spoken in these countries. Below is a map of the area, including the countries connected to characters in *In the Heights*.



## IV. Exploring the Themes in *In the Heights*: Classroom Activities



TURN UP THE STAGE LIGHTS,  
WE'RE TAKIN' A FLIGHT  
TO A COUPLE OF DAYS  
IN THE LIFE OF WHAT IT'S LIKE  
EN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS!

"... the arts have been an inseparable part of the human journey; indeed, we depend on the arts to carry us toward the fullness of our humanity. We value them for themselves, and because we do, we believe knowing and practicing them is fundamental to the healthy development of our children's minds and spirits. That is why, in any civilization - ours included - the arts are inseparable from the very meaning of the term 'education.' We know from long experience that no one can claim to be truly educated who lacks basic knowledge and skills in the arts."

—*National Standards for Arts Education*

In this section we invite you to let your experience of watching *In the Heights* spark new learning opportunities as you explore the powerful themes in the play of identity, home, and legacy.

Consider this quote:

"The arts are not a frill. The arts are a response to our individuality and our nature, and help to shape our identity. What is there that can transcend deep difference and stubborn divisions? The arts. They have a wonderful universality. Art has the potential to unify. It can speak in many languages without a translator. The arts do not discriminate. The arts can lift us up."

—*Former Texas Congresswoman Barbara Jordan*

After watching ***IN THE HEIGHTS***, reflect, write, discuss, draw, or, in any media of your choice, create a response to this quote as it connects to ***IN THE HEIGHTS***.

# IDENTITY

“You grow up with your parents’ traditions; you go to school with a completely new set of traditions; and you try to find yourself within the margins” - *Lin Manuel Miranda*

Usnavi:

YEAH I’M A STREETLIGHT,  
CHOKING ON THE HEAT.  
THE WORLD SPINS AROUND WHILE I’M FROZEN TO MY SEAT.  
THE PEOPLE THAT I KNOW ALL KEEP ON ROLLING DOWN THE STREET.  
BUT EVERYDAY IS DIFFERENT  
SO I’M SWITCHING UP THE BEAT.

- Usnavi uses a metaphor to describe himself... “I’m a streetlight...” What metaphor would you use to describe yourself? I am a....
- Chalk Talk/Graffiti Board Discussion: What is Identity?
- Journal writing “Who Am I?”
- Identity Sort: On index cards write different features of identity: gender, culture, race, ethnicity, country of origin, language, relationships, aspirations, passions, talents, etc. Order them and discuss: Which are most essential to your personal sense of identity? Which ones do you feel others use most to define your identity?



- Art: Create a self portrait using objects, symbols, in chosen media, to represent key elements of identity.

- For a wonderful selection of lessons/activities on “Identity” and “What Shapes Identity?” such as Identity Charts and Life Road Maps visit [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)

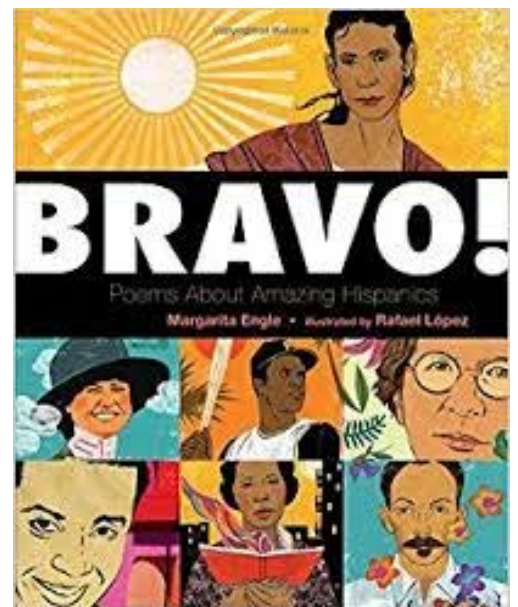
- Read the book: *Bravo!: Poems About Amazing Hispanics* written by Margarita Engle and Illustrated by Rafael Lopez

- Write a bio poem (or essay, song, rap...) about yourself or a classmate or family member

- Let the bio poems inspire students to learn more about the Latinx

people represented in the book, research a Latinx person who has made a contribution in arts, science, sports, etc. whom you admire and write a bio poem or essay to teach others about that person.

- For more about bio poems visit here: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource->



[library/teaching-strategies/biopoem-identity-poetry](https://www.library/teaching-strategies/biopoem-identity-poetry)

- Throughout the musical, there is a mixture of English and Spanish. Consider the role that language plays in identity. Think about Nina talking about “the different kind of English they spoke at Stanford” and Benny working to learn Spanish. Discuss.

Nina:

THIS IS MY STREET.

I SMILE AT THE FACES

I’VE KNOWN ALL MY LIFE. THEY REGARD ME WITH PRIDE.

AND EVERYONE’S SWEET.

THEY SAY YOU’RE GOING PLACES

SO HOW CAN I SAY THAT WHILE I WAS AWAY,

I HAD SO MUCH TO HIDE!...

- Reflect/Write/ Discuss situations where you felt you had to hide a part of yourself. Are there different parts of your identity that are hidden at times or that you feel safe to show only in certain contexts?
- ***I am American.*** What does this mean to you? How is being American a part of your identity? Create a spoken word/visual or other presentation to share different perspectives.
- Our identities are shaped by our life experiences. What are experiences that have shaped who you are?
- One powerful part of theatre is to watch characters grow and change. Reflect, write, discuss, with evidence from the play, how characters grew and changed.
- In the beginning of this section we shared Usnavi’s metaphor “I am a streetlight.” Compare the meaning of this metaphor in the beginning of the play to its meaning at the end:

In the opening song:

YEAH I’M A STREETLIGHT,

CHOKING ON THE HEAT.

THE WORLD SPINS AROUND WHILE I’M FROZEN TO MY SEAT.

In the closing song:

YEAH, I’M A STREETLIGHT.

CHILLIN IN THE HEAT.

ILLUMINATE THE STORIES OF THE PEOPLE IN THE STREET.

SOME HAVE HAPPY ENDINGS,

SOME ARE BITTERSWEET.

BUT I KNOW THEM ALL AND THAT’S WHAT MAKES MY LIFE

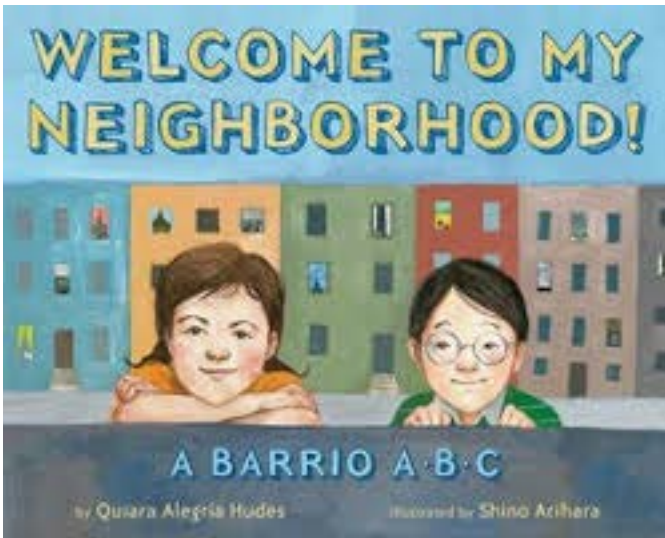
COMPLETE.



# HOME

“The question of finding home is not even a geographical one but really an emotional one...what does it mean to be Puerto Rican if you don’t live in Puerto Rico? Or Dominican if you don’t live in the Dominican Republic?” - *Lin-Manuel Miranda*

GET OFF AT 181ST, AND TAKE THE ESCALATOR.  
I HOPE YOU’RE WRITING THIS DOWN,  
I’M GONNA TEST YOU LATER.  
I’M GETTING TESTED; TIMES ARE TOUGH ON THIS BODEGA.  
TWO MONTHS AGO SOMEBODY BOUGHT ORTEGA’S,  
OUR NEIGHBORS STARTED PACKIN’ UP AND PICKIN’ UP  
AND EVER SINCE THE RENTS WENT UP IT’S GOTTEN MAD EXPENSIVE  
BUT WE LIVE WITH JUST ENOUGH.  
IN THE HEIGHTS.



- Respond through discussion, art, writing to the prompt. “Home is...”
- Read *Welcome to My Neighborhood!; A Barrio A B C* by Quiara Alegria Hudes. “From fire hydrants to ice cream trucks, bodegas to vacant lots, the sights and sounds of the Barrio -- even the less perfect things -- come to life in the poetic words of Quiara Hudes, author of the Tony Award-winning musical *IN THE HEIGHTS*.”
- Create an alphabet book of your community. What images would you select for each letter in order to capture not only the geographical sense of community but the

emotional sense as well? You could create a print alphabet book with drawings or photos or an interactive eBook.

- Think about the set design for *In the Heights*. It is both specific—realistically capturing a sense of the real-life Washington Heights—while also being artistic allowing for the creative use of space on stage. Create a model of a stage set for your neighborhood. What would you include, leave out, highlight?



Photo Credit: Randy H. Goodman All Rights Reserved Randy@RandyGoodmanPhotography.com

I AM USNAVI AND YOU PROB'LY NEVER HEARD MY NAME  
REPORTS OF MY FAME ARE GREATLY EXAGGERATED  
EXACERBATED BY THE FACT THAT MY SYNTAX IS HIGHLY COMPLICATED  
'CUZ I IMMIGRATED  
FROM THE SINGLE GREATEST LITTLE PLACE IN THE CARIBBEAN.  
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC!  
I LOVE IT!

- Immigration plays a large role in *In The Heights*. What do the residents of Washington Heights bring with them from their countries of origins? How do past experiences and new ones intersect to create the feeling of home in Washington Heights?
- Read more immigration stories. Compare and contrast. What stories are uniquely personal? What ones are shared by immigrants? Universal to us all?
- For additional resources and lessons about the immigration experience and issues of identity and home visit: <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/how-does-immigration-shape-the-nations-identity>
- Research the question: How has our home (the United States) been shaped by the contributions of immigrants? Consider how this has played out throughout our nation's history to current day.
- Reflect/Write/Discuss: How does gentrification impact a sense of home? In the play? In your community?
- Consider the character of Benny. "Why learn the language if they still won't hear you?" How does his character search for family, home, and belonging? How do his experiences relate to your life?
- *THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME* is a lyric in the final song. How does this theme play out in *In The Heights*? What other pieces of literature explore this theme? Compare and contrast.

BUT WITH PATIENCE AND FAITH,  
WE REMAIN UNAFRAID,  
I'M HOME!  
YOU HEAR THAT MUSIC IN THE AIR?  
TAKE THE TRAIN TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD,  
AND I'M THERE,  
I'M HOME!

# LEGACY

‘CUZ MY PARENTS CAME WITH NOTHING,  
THEY GOT A LITTLE MORE  
AND SURE, WE’RE POOR, BUT, YO  
AT LEAST WE GOT THE STORE.  
AND THAT’S ALL ABOUT THE LEGACY  
THEY LEFT WITH ME, IT’S DESTINY.

- Abuela is a central figure in the lives of all of the characters in the play. As Nina says, “If it happened on this block, Abuela was there.”
- Reflect/Write/Discuss:
  - Is there an older person in your life who is your “Abuela Claudia”?
  - How do the intergenerational relationships add depth to our understanding of the characters in the play?

## Paciencia y Fe (Patience and Faith)

- This is something that Abuela says throughout the play, her mama said it to her, and it is carried into the future by her grandchildren. What does this mean? How does it help her? Have you had experiences in your life where you needed to draw on *paciencia y fe*?

Abuela sings:  
AND AS I FEED THESE BIRDS  
MY HANDS BEGIN TO SHAKE  
AND AS I SAY THESE WORDS  
MY HEART’S ABOUT TO BREAK  
AND AY MAMA,  
WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN  
YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE?  
I’VE SPENT MY LIFE  
INHERITING  
DREAMS FROM YOU.



- Reflect/write/discuss:
  - How does the idea of *legacy* develop throughout the play?
  - Consider the idea of “inherited dreams” and Abuela’s question “What do you do when your dreams come true?”
  - What does the phrase *The American Dream* mean to you? How does this connect to the stories told in *In The Heights*?
- Nina is the first generation in her family to go to college. Read: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/06/03/guilt-is-one-of-the-biggest-struggles-first-generation-college-students-face/?utm\\_term=.0fe135bcb0bb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/06/03/guilt-is-one-of-the-biggest-struggles-first-generation-college-students-face/?utm_term=.0fe135bcb0bb) to learn more about the feelings and struggles first generation college students face and the impact on those who love them.

Nina:

I AM THE ONE WHO MADE IT OUT!  
THE ONE WHO  
ALWAYS MADE THE GRADE  
BUT MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE JUST  
STAYED HOME...

Reflect/Write/Discuss:

- What courage did it take for Nina to go to college, return home, and be willing to return again?
- How does Nina's experience impact her family and her community?

"*In the Heights* is the universal story of a vibrant multi-generational community in New York's Washington Heights -- where the biggest struggles are deciding which traditions to take with you and what you leave behind."

- Consider this description of the play and Lin-Manuel Miranda's quote: "You grow up with your parents' traditions; you go to school with a completely new set of traditions; and you try to find yourself within the margins."
- How are the characters seeking to "find themselves within the margins?"
- At the end of the play, how does Usnavi carry on Abuela's legacy?

## IN THE NEWS

Director/Choreographer Rachel Bertone writes:

"This is a story with a message that needs to be told right now. The subject matter Lin-Manuel Miranda presented almost 10 years ago is still, if not more, relevant today."

- Consider current events that connect to the themes, characters, and messages conveyed in *IN THE HEIGHTS* such as immigration policy, DACA, and the aftermath of recent hurricanes.
- Watch and listen as *In the Heights* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda explains why and how he made his new benefit song for Puerto Rico:  
<http://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2017/10/05/555855858/lin-manuel-miranda-explains-how-he-made-his-new-benefit-song-for-puerto-rico>

Now, do your part to create some good news.

- Add your voice to the discussion of these important issues.
- Work together to reach out in community service.

If you enjoyed *IN THE HEIGHTS* and it had a positive impact on you, spread the word:

Social media: #WFTHeights, #IntheHeights, #WheelockFamilyTheatre

Snail Mail: Write a letter to the cast, crew, and creative team of IN THE HEIGHTS:  
Wheelock Family Theatre, ATTN: Jeri Hammond, Director of Education  
180 Riverway, Boston, MA 02215



## V. Behind the Scenes

### KIDS TO KIDS: A Q& A with THE TEEN CAST OF *IN THE HEIGHTS*



**Caroline Workman, age 17**  
**Cambridge Rindge and Latin School**

**Q. How did you get into theatre?**

**A.** I began acting and doing theatre through my love of dance. I started taking dance classes at the age of five and fell in love with being on stage, performing for an audience, and telling a story. I had been given opportunities to be in theatre productions because of my dancing and decided to

try acting and singing too.

**Q. What's your favorite part about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** Getting to work with the amazing cast/crew/creative team and being able to tell this beautiful story. Having the ability to impact an audience through the vehicle of art and doing so with talented and kind people is a blessing.

**Q. What's the most challenging part about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** Balancing rehearsals with school. I am a full-time high school senior currently applying to college and it is difficult to keep up with school work when going to school all day and rehearsing/performing long nights.

**Q. What advice would you give other young people interested in theatre?**

**A.** Watch and listen to as much art as you can get your hands on. Observing, interpreting, and just absorbing as much theatre/art you can find is often one of the best ways to grow as an artist.



**Malik Mitchell, age 17**  
**Boston Arts Academy**

**Q. How did you get into theatre?**

**A.** I was in the production *The Wiz* my sophomore year. I really doubted myself auditioning because I had never acted before. So I auditioned and got the part of the Scarecrow. From there I fell in love with theatre. I was in love with the process, the freedom, just everything about it.

**Q. What's your favorite part about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** The process. The process is so fast paced and I love it because even though it's fast paced we are putting together quality work to create an amazing show.

**Q. What's the most challenging part about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** The hours. I'm still in school. So we end at 11:00 p.m. and I don't get home until 11:45. I don't fall asleep until 12:00 and then I have to wake up at 6 a.m. So I don't get much sleep but it's worth it.

**Q. What advice would you give other young people interested in theater?**

**A.** I would say keep an open mind, because you'll never grow in your craft if you don't expand your horizons and be open to everything and anything.



**Ceci Cipullo, age 17  
Brookline High School**

**Q. How did you get into acting/theatre?**

**A.** My mom put me into a dance class when I was three years old doing ballet for little kids, and ever since then I have been performing. I did a few summer camps and small shows when I was between the ages of four and eight and after that started auditioning for theatres around Boston.

**Q. What's your favorite part about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** Almost half of it is performed in Spanish and half is performed in English. In our world right now, it is so important to understand cultures different from our own and to make an effort to connect when we can. This show's focus on unification and joining together to fight for the community exemplifies that, and I love being able to perform that on stage.

**Q. What's the most challenging part about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** Truly getting into the heads of what the members of this community are going through. The people are the community as a whole, and by the end of the show it feels like the community is disintegrating. The hardest (and most important) part is trying to keep that feeling of community even when everything else is going to shreds.

**Q. What advice would you give other young people interested in theatre?**

**A.** Start getting involved wherever you can! Take classes at nearby theatres or theatre schools, start training at your own school, do your school drama to get experience. Anything that introduces you to what it is like to be in a show.



**Marshall Joun, age 17**  
**Arlington High School**

**Q. How did you get into theatre?**

**A.** I've done it since I was a kid at camp and haven't stopped since! The Boston area is such a great place to meet new people and try crazy things.

**Q. What's your favorite part about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** How diverse we are as a cast. Diversity has always been something very important to me and it has been such a blast being part of such a rich group of people. The energy created by this cast is completely wild.

**Q. What's most challenging about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** I've never been a part of a production at such large a scale before. It's one of the most thrilling experiences I've had, but also the scariest. The show has been so rewarding in that way, because every day I find I have to push myself further and further, which is something I don't usually do in my everyday life. I find myself overwhelmed half of the time, but it only makes me want to work harder.

**Q. What advice would you give other young people interested in theatre?**

**A.** I would say something I'm learning right now is how important embarrassment is. I think a huge part of theatre is falling on your face and making mistakes and I'm realizing now how important that is in learning. You're not going to be perfect the first time. You're not going to get something right away. And realizing how totally fine that is may be the best thing ever.



**Alexa Wang, age 15**  
**Boston Latin School**

**Q. How did you get into theatre?**

**A.** I got into theatre because I was a dancer growing up, and I loved performing so I took it a step further!

**Q. What's your favorite part about being in this production?**

**A.** Getting to know all of these different people with such special backgrounds in both their lives and in theatre.

**Q. What's the most challenging part about being in *In the Heights*?**

**A.** Late night rehearsals. I still have to go to school every day after an 11 pm rehearsal!

**Q. What advice would you give other young people interested in theatre?**

**A.** Try out for everything. Even if you don't think you'll fit the show or you won't like it, even the experience of trying is still very valuable.



**BUILDING *THE HEIGHTS*: An Interview with Matthew Lazure,  
Resident Designer and Properties Coordinator**

**Q. How did you become interested in your specialty within theatre?**

**A.** I studied fine arts with a focus on painting at Mass College of Art. After struggling to make a living for several years in the fine arts world I began painting sets and making props for theatre. I draw heavily on my fine arts background to craft props and paint scenery.

**Q. What is your favorite part about doing theatrical design?**

**A.** I find working with other creative people in a collaborative environment, working towards a common goal, to be very satisfying.

**Q. What was your biggest obstacle in pursuing this career?**

**A.** With a background in two-dimensional art, there was a large but gratifying learning curve with working with unfamiliar products and materials to create three-dimensional props and scenery.

**Q. What is your favorite part about working on this show?**

**A.** Transforming a bare stage into a realistic New York City setting, as well as working with a fantastic production team.

**Q. What is one thing people would be surprised to learn about what you do?**

**A.** In addition to my design work and fabrication, I also enjoy acting onstage. I feel this strengthens my work as a designer by providing a better understanding of the relationship between actors and their created environment.

## VI. Educational Standards

### **National Standards of Social Studies: Key Themes of Social Studies addressed:**

#### CULTURE

Human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture.

Cultures are dynamic and change over time.

Through experience, observation, and reflection, students will identify elements of culture as well as similarities and differences among cultural groups across time and place.

#### TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE

Studying the past makes it possible for us to understand the human story across time.

#### PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS

Today's social, cultural, economic and civic issues demand that students apply knowledge, skills, and understandings as they address questions such as: Why do people decide to live where they do or move to other places? Why is location important? How do people interact with the environment and what are some of the consequences of those interactions?

#### INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

Personal identity is shaped by an individual's culture, by groups, by institutional influences, and by lived experiences shared with people inside and outside the individual's own culture throughout her or his development. The examination of various forms of human behavior enhances an understanding of the relationships between social norms and emerging personal identities, the social processes that influence identity formation, and the ethical principles underlying individual action.

### **Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening addressed:**

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences.
- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

## VII. Additional Resources

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/how-does-immigration-shape-the-nations-identity>

<https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/2012/08/25/ten-middle-grade-books-that-reflect-the-us-immigration-experience-by-natalie-dias-lorenzi/>

<https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/2012/10/20/ten-young-adult-books-that-reflect-the-us-immigration-experience-by-natalie-dias-lorenzi/>

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<http://www.slj.com/2017/03/diversity/immigrant-voices-focus-on/>

<http://www.campbroadway.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/InTheHeights7-26-11.pdf>

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