

The American Place Theatre

Literature to Life

A Workshop Based on the Book

Dreaming in Cuban

By Cristina Garcia

Teacher Resource Guide



A Teacher Resource Guide
1999

Resource Guide Objectives

This Resource Guide a project of **The American Place Theatre**. It has been designed for teachers of grades seven through twelve. The objective is to introduce drama-in-education strategies and drama-based activities that can be implemented in the classroom by the classroom teacher. It is designed as a pre- and post-workshop guide in hopes of furthering the **Literature to Life** experience for all who attend.

The American Place Theatre offers free workshops for teachers in drama-based techniques in the **Teacher's Place** program. Call the Education Department for details, 212-840-2960, ext. 20.

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Additional Information

Paul Michael Fontana
Director of Education

Aimee Gallin
Education Associate

The American Place Theatre
111 West 46th Street
New York, New York 10036
(212) 840-2960 ext. 20
Fax (212) 391-4019

Cristina Garcia (author) was born in Havana, Cuba in 1958, and grew up in New York City. She attended Barnard College and the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. Ms. Garcia has worked as a correspondent for *Time* magazine in San Francisco and Los Angeles, where she currently lives with her husband, Scott Brown, and their English bulldog. **Dreaming in Cuban** was her first novel. Ms. Garcia most recently published *The Aguero Sisters*.

Eileen Galindo, (artist/educator) is a native New Yorker who started studying and performing community theatre, in Miami, FL., at the age of 14. Ms. Galindo attended the University of Miami School of Music, majoring in Musical Theatre and got her first professional job in Summer stock at age 19, playing the roles of Anita in *West Side Story* and Diana in *A Chorus Line*.

Ms. Galindo has worked extensively Off-Broadway and in the regions. Theatre credits include: *Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Coconut Grove Playhouse), *Real Women Have Curves* (Asolo), *Chinese Charade*, *Ariano*. In Miami As *It Is In Heaven*, *Sabrina & Lucrecia* (Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre), and her One-Woman show *Multicultural Disorder* (Next Stage Company). Most recently, she was featured in the world premiere of Lisa Loomer's play *Expecting Isabel* at Washington's Arena Stage.

Film and TV credits include: "*The Super*" with Joe Pesci, "*Law and Order*," "*One Life To Live*," and the NBC TV movie, "*Seventh Avenue*." Eileen recently completed two Independent films, "*Row Your Boat*" starring Jon Bon Jovi and "*Exiles In New York*." Eileen is the co-host of the Emmy Award-winning, PBS family science show, "*Newton's Apple*" currently airing in reruns on PBS.

**"If you can imagine it, you can achieve it.
If you can dream it, you can become it."
--William Arthur Ward**

Please Note:

The entire text for the performance portion of the **Literature to Life** workshop based on **Dreaming in Cuban** is taken directly from the book.

Introductory Discussion

The following is an excerpt from **Dreaming in Cuban**. It is intended to be read by the students before they attend the performance at **The American Place Theatre**.

My grandmother is the one who encouraged me to go to painting classes at Mitzi Kellner's. She's a lady down the block who used to hang out in Greenwich Village with the beatniks. Her house stinks of turpentine and urine from all her cats. She gave an art class Friday afternoons for the neighborhood kids. We started off doing blind contour drawings of our hands, then of lettuce leaves, gourds, anything wrinkly. Mitzi told us not to worry about copying objects exactly, that it was the strength of our lines that counted.

My painting have been getting more abstract lately, violent-looking with clotted swirls of red. Mom thinks they're morbid. Last year, she refused to let me accept the scholarship I won to an art school in Manhattan. She said that artists were a bad element, a wild bunch who shoot heroin. "I won't allow it Rufino! She'll have to kill me first!" Not that the thought hasn't crossed my mind. But Dad, in his unobtrusive way, finally persuaded her to let me go.

I wonder how different my life will be if I stay with my Grandmother. I think about how I'm probably the only ex-punk on the island, how no one else has their ears pierced in three places. It's hard to imaging existing without Lou Reed. I ask Abuela if I can paint whatever I want in Cuba and she says yes, as long as I don't attack the state. Cuba is still developing, she tells me, and can't afford the luxury of dissent. Then she quotes me something El Lider said in the early years, before they started arresting poets. "*Con la revolucion, todo. Sin la revolution, nada.* Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing." I wonder what El Lider would think of my paintings. Art, I'd tell him, is the ultimate revolution.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How has Pilar's grandmother influenced her to achieve her goals?
2. How have your grandparents influenced you in life?
3. What does "revolution" mean to Pilar?
4. What does "revolution" mean to you?

Follow-up Activities

🔙 PLEASSED TO MEET YOU

Objective:

- ❖ The students will develop better understanding of their classmates.
- ❖ The students will reflect on issues of heritage.

Activity:

Clear the desks and have the students make eye contact with one another as they walk around the classroom. Have the students find a partner when they hear you call “partner” and question their partner according to the following guidelines:

Question #1:

“Share with your partner if you were born in another country.”

Question #2:

“Share with your partner if you have ever traveled out of the United States.”

Question #3:

“Share with your partner if you have relatives in another country.”

Ask the partners to report the gathered information to the whole class. Information may be recorded on the board or with pins on a world map.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Was this activity interesting? Why or why not?
2. Did you gain any knowledge about your classmates? How might knowing about someone’s background help you in understanding them?
3. How important is it to acknowledge our family history, or “roots?” Why?
4. How important is it to visit your “homeland” or the homelands of your ancestors? Why might this be especially important for people from America?

🔙 HOTSEATING

Objective:

- ❖ The students will explore awareness of human behavior based on an exploration of a fictional character.

Activity:

- ❖ The teacher asks for a volunteer (of either gender) to play Pilar.
- ❖ The volunteer is seated in a chair facing the group and is asked to respond to questions as he/she feels Pilar would. (Dramatic license may be taken in the response. The class is reminded that the volunteer is portraying his/her version of Pilar and that they must accept whatever “Pilar” says.)
- ❖ The teacher facilitates the question and answer.
- ❖ After a while another volunteer may take the “hotseat” as Pilar or as other characters from the novel.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How did this activity broaden your understanding of the character(s)?

2. How can sitting in the “hotseat” help you understand human behavior? How does playing a role help you to understand the person you’re playing?

🔙 TABLEAUX (Frozen Picture, Still Image)

Objective:

- ❖ The students will explore issues and themes in the literature.

Activity:

- ❖ Brainstorm with the class themes in **Dreaming in Cuban**, writing them on the board or on newsprint sheets.
- ❖ The teacher defines “tableau” for the students as a still silent picture created using only the actor’s physical body.
- ❖ Divide the students into several small groups (4-5 people).
- ❖ Each group collectively chooses one theme from the brainstorm list for which they are going to create a tableau. They decide what characters will be in their tableau. The tableaux can be as abstract or realistic as the group wishes. The characters do not have to be those from the text but should serve to illustrate the theme. All members of each group should be part of their group’s tableau.
- ❖ The groups practice their tableaux for 5-7 minutes with a warning given by the teacher for the last 60 seconds. During the preparation time, the teacher should circulate, side-coaching if needed but not intruding on their work. Each student should determine how his character feels and, using his body, present the essence of those feelings.
- ❖ Each group shares their tableau with the class in turn. When the rest of the class yells “1-2-3-Picture,” each group freezes into their tableau.
- ❖ The teacher asks the group presenting their tableau to hold their positions and asks the class to reflect on it. The teacher helps the class to speculate on the possible meaning or meanings that this frozen moment has in the lives of each of the characters.
- ❖ Allow each group to unfreeze after brief class reflection.

Questions for Discussion: When all groups have presented their tableaux, the teacher should moderate a discussion of the themes. The following are suggested questions:

1. What new discoveries about the book and its themes did you make by participation in the tableaux?
2. What do people mean when they say, “a picture is worth a thousand words?”
3. Were some images stronger than others were? Why?

Variation A: Thought-tracking characters in Tableaux

As students are frozen, the teacher or individual students may gently place a hand on the shoulder of one character at a time and ask him questions, which are answered in character. (Ex. “What are you feeling right now?”)

Similarly, characters may be asked to prepare one line of dialogue that their character might be thinking at the frozen moment. They can speak them, in turn, at a signal from the teacher.

🔙 COOPERATIVE WRITING (an extension of the TABLEAUX exercise)

Objectives:

- ❖ The students will begin to explore playwrighting and write dramatic scenes cooperatively in pairs.
- ❖ The students will further explore themes in the literature.
- ❖ The students will enhance their use of written expressive language.

Activity:

- ❖ Ask students to work in pairs to write a conversation between two characters.
- ❖ Each pair will choose a single line from the book or with a line from the thought-tracked Tableaux, which will serve as the beginning line for some dialogue. The pair must determine what characters are speaking and each will only write the dialogue for his or her character.
- ❖ They pass the paper back and forth between themselves, each writing only for his or her character. The writing is done in silence.
- ❖ After 10 or 15 minutes the teacher will ask the groups to wrap up. The scenes are read in front of the class by the students who write them.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What worked well in this exercise? Why?
2. In the scenes as they were presented in class, what dialogue do you remember most? Why?
3. Why did we do the exercise in silence? What challenges did it present to you? Did it help or hinder the writing?

↩ ABC CONVERSATION**Objectives:**

- ❖ The students' ability to create a story based on theme will increase.
- ❖ The students will increase their vocabulary.
- ❖ The students will explore storytelling and structure.
- ❖ The students will have fun with language and use it in clever and surprising ways.

Activity:

- ❖ Have the students stand in a circle in the classroom, facing in to the center.
- ❖ Choose a theme or issue from the brainstormed list.
- ❖ The first student must begin a story, starting his/her first sentence with the letter "A." The story continues around the circle, the next person starting with "B," and each person beginning with a subsequent letter of the alphabet.
- ❖ By the letter "Z," the story must come to a logical conclusion.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did the story make sense? Did it ever stop making sense? When? Why?
2. How could we, as a group, improve the story? How might it be edited if it were being written down?
3. What other topics might make good ABC Stories?
4. How did the structure help or limit the storytelling? Why do some writers use strict structures (Like a sonnet or haiku) to write?

Drama-in-Education Resources

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