



DENVER CENTER FOR THE
PERFORMING ARTS
Theatre Company

INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



QUIXOTE NUEVO

INSIDE OUT

Use of study guide materials for publication requires permission from the Marketing Department of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

Material in this study guide was generously provided by Hartford Stage.

DENVERCENTER.ORG

Administration 303.893.4000

Box Office 303.893.4100

Quixote Nuevo

By **Octavio Solís**

Directed by **Lisa Portes**

MAY 13 - JUN 12
WOLF THEATRE

PREMIERE SPONSOR



STUDENT MATINEE SEASON SPONSOR



SEASON SPONSORS



OCTAVIO SOLÍS: PLAYWRIGHT

Author of over 20 plays, Octavio Solís is considered by many to be one of the most prominent Latino playwrights in America. With works that both draw on and transcend the Mexican-American experience, he is a writer and director whose style defies formula, examining the darkness, magic and humor of humanity with brutal honesty and characteristic intensity. His works have been mounted at theatres across the country such as the California Shakespeare Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, Yale Repertory Theatre, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, the Dallas Theater Center, the Magic Theatre, Intersection for the Arts, South Coast Repertory Theatre, the San Diego Repertory Theatre, the San Jose Repertory Theatre, Shadowlight Productions, the Venture Theatre in Philadelphia, Latino Chicago Theatre Company, Boston Court and Kitchen Dog Theatre, the New York Summer Play Festival, Teatro Vista in Chicago, El Teatro Campesino, the Undermain Theatre in Dallas, Thick Description, Campo Santo, the Imua Theatre Company in New York, and Cornerstone Theatre. His imaginative and ever-evolving work continues to cross cultural and aesthetic boundaries, solidifying him as one of the great playwrights of our time. When he is not bringing his works around the country, Solís lives on a small farm in Southern Oregon.

AN OLD STORY MADE NEW

What to know about *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605) to understand *Quixote Nuevo* (2019)

By Nina Pinchin

Octavio Solís' play *Quixote Nuevo* is inspired by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's book *Don Quixote de la Mancha* written in 1605: perhaps the most famous novel ever written in the Spanish language. To understand the play, it is useful to know a little about the original story. *Don Quixote de la Mancha* is an episodic journey of an old man stuck between reality and the romantic ideals he has read about in literature all of his life. The man, Alonso Quixano, goes mad and in his senility imagines he has truly become a knight-errant or wandering knight named Don Quixote. He enlists the service of a squire in his neighbor Sancho Panza, and, believing every knight should have a lady fair, creates a fictitious lover modeled after a farm girl he once knew. He aims to devote his life to protecting the honor of his lady, Dulcinea. When reality does not match with the world of his imagination, the old knight insists that evil enchanters have bewitched the viewers' eyes so they cannot see the truth. Below are some important characters, objects, and terms that appear in both the 1605 and the 2019 tellings of this epic story.

DON QUIXOTE The name the old man chooses for himself as a knight-errant.

- 1605 In Cervantes' original story, he was born Alonso Quixano and lives in La Mancha, Spain with his housekeeper and niece.
- 2019 In Octavio Solís' adaptation, the old man is called Jose Quijano, or Joe. He is a retired college professor, living along the Texas-Mexico border with his sister, Magdalena, and niece, Antonia. For this Quixote, the threat of assisted living and dementia drives the onset of his madness. Quixote is dubbed a knight in a bar called Rosario's Lounge and Karaoke Bar he believes to be a castle. The barkeepers, Bruno and Rosario, dub Quixote a knight using the closest thing they have to a religious relic: the petrified trigger finger of Pancho Villa purchased in a pawn shop in El Paso.

SANCHO PANZA Quixote's neighbor and sidekick who he convinces to become his squire (or knight's servant) by promising to make him governor of the first island kingdom he conquers.

- 1605 Sancho leaves his wife and many children with the hopes of returning a wealthy man; he often ends up beaten and bruised for Quixote's fantasies and mistakes.
- 2019 Manny Diaz is very much in love with his wife and childhood sweetheart, Juana.

DAPPLE

- 1605 Sancho Panza's donkey. Since the short and portly Sancho is not accustomed to walking, he brings his donkey "Dapple" along on the journey.
- 2019 Manny sells ice cream out of a small cart with a donkey sticker on its side.

ROCINANTE

- 1605 Cervantes has Quixote name his horse, a boney fly-bitten old nag, “Rocinante” and imagines him a valiant charger.
- 2019 Joe Quijano also had a horse of that name — it had been his mother’s before her death — but now, as an old man, he has attached the dead horse’s painted skull to the handle bars of his bicycle.

DULCINEA

- 1605 In Cervantes’ story, Quixote’s heart belongs to a woman he calls Dulcinea. Since he has no great love, he creates his idol based on a young farm woman named Aldonza Lorenzo, on whom he may once have had a crush, though she was never aware of it.
- 2019 For Joe Quijano, Dulcinea is a migrant worker he met and fell in love with as a child. She was deported back to Mexico but he exchanged letters with her and remains devoted to the idea of one day finding her and bringing her to the United States.

MAMBRINO’S HELMET

- 1605 A legendary magical golden helmet that would make the wearer invincible. Quixote and Sancho come across a barber who is using his brass shaving bowl to cover his head in the rain and, believing the shiny object is Mambrino’s Helmet, Quixote steals it from him and wears it in battle.
- 2019 In a yard sale, Joe and Manny find a hospital bedpan used by a sick woman who could not get out of bed to go to the bathroom. Convinced it is the magical helmet he has been looking for, Joe takes it, and, wearing the potty on his head like a hat, runs off without paying.

WINDMILLS

- 1605 Thinking he is slaying a giant, Quixote plows his lance into the sail of an enormous windmill and is spun up into the air crashing down with his horse on top of him.
- 2019 For Joe Quijano, the giant he sees is the oppression of a border separating him from his Dulcinea in Mexico. He uses his lance to attack a U.S. government border surveillance balloon.

BALM OF FIERBAS

- 1605 An elixir said to be used by medieval knights to cure wounds. When injured, Don Quixote mixes together a home remedy and it makes him vomit and pass out.
- 2019 Without knowing what it is, Joe and Manny take swigs of a strong detox/intestinal cleansing laxative belonging to one of the women they meet in Rosario’s Lounge and Karaoke Bar, resulting in a lot of vomit and diarrhea.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think the playwright titled the play *Quixote Nuevo*?
2. Have you ever heard of Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote* before attending this production? If so, what are the similarities or differences between both versions of the character Don Quixote? If not, how would you describe Quixote’s personality in the play? What are the most significant characteristics that represent him?
3. What do you think the characters Padre Perez and Dr. Campos represent? Do they represent the same ideas or different ideas?
4. The character of Padre Perez calls Joe Quijano “a sad and lonely man.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

BORDER GLOSARIO: FRONTERA GLOSSARY

Quixote Nuevo is a play that welcomes both English and Spanish speakers into its audience. There are phrases in Spanish; however, most are usually translated into English phrases immediately following or before the phrase is spoken in Spanish.

“It was important for me to douse the language of *Quixote Nuevo* with the idioma of my borderland. The characters glide easily from English to Spanish to colloquial Spanglish because that is how we speak in my house. Additionally, this is how I was interested in wresting Cervantes’ novel from the vise of Spain and making it New World, making it Nuevo. Therefore, the characters express themselves through high-flown lyricism like the original novel, but also in language that’s profane and kooky, codeswitching from English to Spanish and vice versa at will and inventing their own neologisms. But it’s also an expression of how languages can so easily defy borders and nationalities, in art and in life.” —Octavio Solís, playwright

Below are a few words your ear might encounter as you follow Don Quixote on his journey throughout La Plancha, Texas.

CALACA colloquial Mexican Spanish word for skeleton

CABALLERO a knight, or horseman, lately a term meaning “gentleman”

MUERTE death

GÜEY the Mexican slang equivalent of dude; or sometimes idiot

MITOTE commotion, uproar, ruckus

INFANTA a Spanish or Portuguese royal princess

PALETAS ice lollies, sometimes sold by a paletero

YONQUE junk

LOCURA madness, craziness

DALE GAS go for it (literally “give it gas!”)

CHANTE home (corruption of “shanty”)

COLLIGE VIRGO ROSAS Latin term generally meaning “gather ye rosebuds while ye may”

MOLE a slang term for blood (also a type of dark Mexican sauce)

CUCUY boogeyman

ATORMENTAS torture

CENIZAS ashes (also a small town in the state of Querétaro Arteaga, Mexico)

CHUCO filthy

MIGRA border patrol

OLIVIDADO forgotten

A PICTURE OF LIFE ON THE BORDER

By Sally Lobel

Much of *Quixote Nuevo* takes place in aging professor Joe Quijano’s “fever dream” as he struggles with encroaching dementia. Throughout the play, we’re provided a window into Quijano’s imagination—a karaoke bar becomes a castle, a herd of sheep sounds like a dragon. While these fantastical elements are important, the play is ultimately grounded in a much more realistic setting: a tiny desert town in Texas, on the border between the United States and Mexico. Themes of migration, fear and belonging run deeply through the play, and influence all of Quijano’s actions.

It can be difficult to get a sense of what border towns are actually like, especially for people living thousands of miles away from the border, which stretches from the tip of South Texas to the Pacific Ocean (Almond, CNN). It is a particular challenge because the border has increasingly become a symbolic place

representing a contentious political divide. Those in favor of a border wall often refer to “the crisis” along the border, invoking the dangers of drugs and crime. However, those with more personal experience of border towns paint a different picture. Ron Nixon, the homeland security correspondent for the *New York Times*, notes that “in many ways, border cities and towns and the people who live there are no different from those who live in the rest of the United States.” Nixon notes that while drug smuggling and other crime does occur, most of the border crossings between the U.S. and Mexico are much more mundane. Almost one million people per day cross for their commute to work, or for recreational activities like shopping.

To be sure, living in a border town does pose unique challenges. The intense heat and vastness of the desert can quickly become dangerous. According to a guide on desert survival, desert air temperatures often reach 100°F or more, while ground temperatures can hit a scorching 150°F. Many desert plants grow low to the ground and don’t provide cover from the intense heat of the sun. Many border towns are tiny communities separated by vast areas of uninhabited desert. An article on West Texas towns notes that these “small cities and towns...are slowly turning into...ghost towns....in many places the...residents must drive hundreds of miles to get medical care” (Reinhold, 1985). This ghost-town transformation can be explained by the shifting needs of the population. With a growing shift away from agriculture, younger residents often leave their small communities in order to find jobs in larger Texas cities.

Despite these challenges, or perhaps because of them, residents of border towns are fiercely proud of where they live, and ultimately push back against how they are often portrayed in the media. The mayor of Laredo, Texas, Pete Saenz, was quoted by the *New York Times*: “We don’t see people across the river as living in another country. We see them as our family, as part of the same community.” The mayor of McAllen, Texas, Jim Darling, when interviewed by *TIME* magazine, said, “...just saying there’s a crisis on the border: it affects border towns. We’re a vibrant area.” Darling continued by cautioning against fear-mongering and frightening rhetoric about the border, noting that while it may create a dramatic story for the media to sell, it hurts border towns and their residents (Martinez).

THE ROLE OF DEMENTIA IN *QUIXOTE NUEVO*

By Grace Clark

In *Quixote Nuevo*, the main character Joe Quijano suffers from dementia in which he loses touch with reality, and believes he is Don Quixote, a knight character from a 17th century novel. We talked with Esther Corcoran, North Central Program Director from the Connecticut Alzheimer’s Association to get more insight on this illness and how it would have affected the character in *Quixote Nuevo*.

Dementia is an overarching mental condition that can include Alzheimer’s disease. Dementia itself is not a disease or diagnoses, but rather a group of symptoms, said Corcoran. It refers to a group of symptoms that result in “the loss of behavioral abilities and cognitive functioning—thinking, remembering, and reasoning—to such an extent that it interferes with a person’s daily life and activities.” Corcoran added that “dementia has many causes, such as dehydration, vitamin deficiency, thyroid issues, brain injury, medication, stress, depression or anxiety.”

In *Quixote Nuevo*, Don Quixote blends elements from his past with events from the novel *Don Quixote*, experiencing both in such a way that he can’t tell what is real and what is not. Wearing a homemade costume reminiscent of the fictional Don Quixote, our protagonist embarks on chivalrous adventures to find his long lost love, Dulcinea, a girl from his childhood in La Plancha, Texas. On this journey, he is not sure if a young woman found clutching a rosary made of bones is the same girl he remembers working in his father’s field, but continues his pursuit to find her. With his dementia, “this could be indicative of impaired reasoning and judgment,” said Corcoran. “Individuals may experience changes in judgment or decision-making.” Meanwhile, Don Quixote’s family is worried about his competence and makes plans to move him to a senior center. For the families of patients affected by dementia, this action is commonly taken with the goal of helping their loved one cope with their challenges in a safe, understanding, nurturing environment and with supervision.

Corcoran said other warning signs of dementia in real life include memory loss that disrupts daily life; challenges in planning or solving problems; confusion with time or place; trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships; misplacing things; decreased or poor judgment; withdrawal from work or social activities; and changes in mood or personality. At least two of these core mental functions must be significantly impaired for symptoms to be considered as dementia: memory, communication and language, ability to focus and pay attention, reasoning and judgment, and visual perception. People with dementia

may have problems with short-term memory, keeping track of a purse or wallet, paying bills, planning and preparing meals, remembering appointments, or traveling out of the neighborhood. Symptoms of dementia gradually worsen over time. There is no known cure.

Alzheimer's disease is the most prevalent form of dementia, both of which are more often seen in people who are older in age. A person may have dementia without having Alzheimer's Disease, which also impacts each person differently. According to the National Institute on Aging, dementia cases are projected to increase globally to 75 million by 2030 and "the number of sufferers is estimated to triple by 2050." Dementia reportedly affects about 47 million people worldwide.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This play focuses on themes of reality and truth. What are the differences, if any, between these two themes? Was Quixote's reality based in truth?
2. How does our society view our elders? How does our society view elders with memory loss?
3. Why do you think Sancho/Manny is going along with Quixote's fantasy? Are Quixote's memories just part of his imagination? Do you believe any of his stories to be real events? Explain.
4. Do you think the use of Spanglish is important to conveying the story of the play? Why or why not?

MAKING IT NUEVO: A CONVERSATION WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT

Considered one of the most prominent Latino playwrights in North America, Octavio Solís has been produced from New York to California and everywhere in between. As rehearsals began, he spoke with the production's dramaturg, J. Sebastián Alberdi, about his play, the characteristic humor of the play, and what keeps him writing.

How did you become a writer?

I've been interested in literature since childhood and I dreamed of becoming a writer, but when I could find no other living writers in the phone book, I abandoned that dream. Then I was stage-bit in high school and actively pursued training for a career as an actor, from my sophomore year all the way through grad school. I occasionally wrote some poetry and got it published in college literary journals, but nothing ever took hold with me until I devised some punk one-acts that I wrote and directed to feature my acting talent. My theatre folks all loved the writing, but my acting not so much. So that's where I made a complete shift to playwriting.

The title of the play, *Quixote Nuevo*, suggests a new re-imagining of Cervantes' novel. How do you see this play in relationship to its 17th century source material?

The title does suggest a rethinking of the Quixote saga, but note that I chose the word "nuevo" as opposed to "new." I wanted to claim the saga as a Latino story, not as a European one. The play adheres to the spirit of the original in its depiction of a comical hero who doesn't really cope with the harsh world as it is but as it used to be. My Quixote goes out into the desert of West Texas to right the wrongs of his past; and like Cervantes' knight, conflates his readings of chivalric exploits with his own sad, pathetic life. So, just as in the classic novel, my Quixote explores a world of the lower-income denizens of La Plancha, Texas for the first time in his life and wreaks havoc on the rules that everyone lives by.

Your play engages with topics society associates with "difficult" conversations—aging, cultural identity, racism—yet your play is also deeply funny. In a way, that seems to be one of the strongest through lines between the original novel and your reimagining of it for the stage.

To my thinking, Cervantes' novel represents the first instance of a comic epic in the canon. Back then, he was

dismayed at how everyone had immersed themselves in the cheap novellas of the time, stories and poems detailing the adventures of knight-errants and dragons and damsels in distress, to the same degree that people are immersed in sword and sorcery books, films and video games today. So he determined to give his readers a story of a pretend knight in order to have them cope with the harsh realities of 16th century Spain, peopled with merchants, shepherds, milkmaids, convicts and obsequious clerics who live in a bankrupt country ravaged by years of war. The juxtaposition of fantasy with reality can result in either a tragic collision or a comical discordance. This is one among the chief lessons I learned from this novel.

In this current moment, “The Wall” immediately conjures the physical border between Mexico and the United States. But the number of walls in this play seems endless: walls between regret and acceptance, youth and old age, memory and myth.

The Wall, as the former administration’s monument to xenophobia, dominates our consciousness, and there are as many varied and disparate attitudes toward it as there are people in this country, but in the final analysis, it is only as real as we wish it to be. In this play, it’s the barrier between reality and fantasy; Quixote rides along one side and Sancho along the other, each seeing the world that is exclusively familiar to them, denying the other’s assertions...until one of them (Sancho, usually) dares to peek over the wall into the other’s way of seeing, or until reality smashes them both over the head with brutal, unyielding bluntness. But it’s also a metaphor for the invisible wall that the Rio Grande already represents, a line on a map that defines otherness and creates a schism in Quixote’s mind, which is riven in two by his love and his fear, thereby erecting yet another wall inside him, each brick forged in denial. Then there is the wall between life and death, the last barricade of our existence, one which Quixote must bravely confront in order to complete his mission, if he is to feel like he’s atoned for all the mistakes of his life. Walls are everywhere in this work, but none of them are insurmountable.

Anyone familiar with your plays or your book of autobiographical stories *Retablos*, would know that your work is oftentimes set in the Texas Borderlands, like *Quixote Nuevo* is. Apart from being from El Paso, what is it about this landscape that captures your imagination?

For me, this part of the country is a story mill. There are so many struggles and tensions that are wrought in this desert town of El Paso, and almost all of them come as a result of the friction between the two worlds at once separated and united by the Rio Grande border. The hopes and dreams of people swirl in the eddies of this river, and in the hard-scrabble earth baked by the unrelenting sun, lives are lived and lost with casual aplomb. Every time I go home, I can almost hear the ghosts whispering their stories to me through the soles of my feet. What alternative do I have except to write them down?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think it is important that the playwright, Octavio Solís, chose to tell a story that deals with today’s issues? What do you think he is trying to accomplish? Why is it important for us as an audience to be aware of such stories?
2. How does the modern setting of the play affect the story? How would it be different if it was set in another time period?
3. Why do you think Young Quixote chooses to leave Dulcinea behind? What are his reasons?
4. Quixote’s love was divided by a physical border. Are there any other borders, physical or not, surrounding love in today’s world?



UNLOCK YOUR POWER

REACH YOUR POTENTIAL WITH
PROFESSIONAL THEATRE TRAINING

ALL SKILL LEVELS. ALL AGES. ALL YEAR LONG.

ACTING • IMPROV • MUSICAL THEATRE

AUDITIONING • COLLEGE PREP • PRIVATE COACHING

REGISTER TODAY



DENVER CENTER FOR
THE
PERFORMING ARTS
Education & Community Engagement



We Fund
Culture.
SCFD

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE
[DENVERCENTER.ORG/EDUCATION](https://denvercenter.org/education)