

# INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

WORLD PREMIERE

# CEBOLLAS

se·bo·yas | onions



Illustration by Kyle Malone

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# INSIDE OUT

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Contributing Writer Xiomara Cornejo  
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## **Cebollas**

World Premiere

By **Leonard Madrid**

Directed by **Jerry Ruiz**

**JAN 26 – MAR 10**

SINGLETON THEATRE

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# PLAY SYNOPSIS

Three Latinas are forced to take an unexpected road trip from Albuquerque to Denver. Making their way north on I-25, they don't travel for business or for pleasure. They just need to transport a dead body across state lines. But, then again, what are sisters for?

Speeding past the familiar locales of Bernalillo, Santa Fe, Huerfano, Colorado Springs, and Castle Rock, they reflect on shared family history and muse about the lives their daughters might live. On this seemingly endless stretch of highway, their bickering, laughter, singing, and discoveries will fundamentally change – and strengthen – their relationship.

# CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

**YOLIE:** The youngest. If unfulfilled potential had posters, she'd be on them. Very pregnant throughout this play. Like...super pregnant.

**CELIA:** The middle child. Older than Yolie by at least six years. A nurse...but like in her heart not just her job.

**TERE:** The eldest. When she was born, the doctor spanked her and she punched him in the face.

# PLAY SETTING

A house in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A house in Denver, CO, but mostly the road between the two.

# OUR PLAYWRIGHT PLAYWRIGHT BIOGRAPHY



Leonard Madrid (He/Him) is a New Mexican theatre playwright, director, actor, designer, and educator. He has an MFA in Dramatic Writing from the University of New Mexico, a BFA in theatre, and a BA in lighting and scenic design. He is currently the Artistic Director at Blackout Theatre, which features and celebrates work produced for and by New Mexican artists. Leonard also teaches playwriting, improv, design, screen writing, and Chicano/Latino theatre, among other courses, at Central New Mexico Community College, University of New Mexico, and Eastern New Mexico University. He is also an Ensemble member at Cutthroat Improv and a writer and actor for the PRET 101 podcast on Spotify.

Leonard's plays have gained wide recognition with performances and readings in national and international theatres, residencies, and festivals. Leonard is a three-time recipient of the Kennedy Center's Latino Playwriting Award for his plays *Tecolotito*, *Perla*, and *Aurora*. Leonard's *Perla* was a finalist for The John Cauble Short Play Award. *Aurora* was featured at the Ignition Festival at Victory Gardens Theatre in Chicago and the Festival Internacional

de Teatro Universitario in Mexico City. Leonard's play *Arañas* was performed as part of The Ground Floor Residency at Berkeley Rep, and *Volver Volver Volver* was the ATHE playworks play of 2008.

Leonard's work centers the rich Burqueño and New Mexican experience and is deeply rooted in community, culture, and consciousness-raising. Leonard coins his specific playwriting genre as Folkloric Realism. In addition, his plays engage young audiences with traditional folklore and social justice themes like *Juanito: a Cuento* and *Dogboy and Boydog*, which toured throughout New Mexican schools and were performed for thousands of children and educators.

Source: <https://www.blackouttheatre.com/company-members>  
<https://leonardmadrid.org/>

Image Source: <https://newplayexchange.org/users/219/leonard-madrid>

## INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT LEONARD MADRID

Edited by Dramaturg Xiomara Cornejo

The following conversation is an insight into Leonard's creative genius, his multi-faceted theatre practice, his approach to writing a Latino comedy, and his profound love for New Mexico, among other things.



**XC:** *Where did the concept for Cebollas stem from?*

**LM:** It's almost like several things were brewing in my brain at the same time: one was that road trip (that I have taken a million times) and another was that people kept asking me, "Where are the Latino comedies?" I kept saying, "Well, there is Karen Zacarías and there is *Real Women Have Curves*," and then I would say, "Does Lisa Loomer have one?" And after three plays, I would stop, and it occurred to me, "Wait! I do comedy, and I do improv all the time. Maybe I should be writing a comedy?" I tend to write what I like to call neo-folklore—I create folklore for the new world. And this was the first time I said, "I'm just gonna write a comedy, let's see what happens." I also always want to write plays for actors and actresses, for people I love. So, I'm gonna write a comedy using my *tias* as inspiration. And I thought, "I should write a road trip play, I should write a comedy, I should..." and then I realized all these are the same play! You know, it all started when I was at Berkeley Rep trying to write a horror piece. The horror piece still wasn't what it needed to be and I was trying to get inspired like listening to very scary music. Then, whenever I would get overwhelmed, I would turn to [*Cebollas*] and write this play, and the idea was just flowing out. Whereas, with the horror piece, I was like, "Welp, three lines. I'm done." And then, I would write three pages of *Cebollas*!

**XC:** *What can you tell us about the title, Cebollas?*

**LM:** I was thinking about things that make you cry. You see, I saw a comic strip of a little kid peeking through the windows and the kid sees all these women slicing onions and crying. And it was this image and this thought of what makes you cry that made me want to spin that idea and make it a comedy! Later on, it was also posing the play and the characters as this onion of comedy and the layers of *pape!* get peeled off and we start to see that there is more heart there than we thought. It's really a discovery of these people and thinking of things that make you cry.

**XC:** *It's so interesting, thinking of approaching emotion, depth of emotion, through humor. You know? I feel those things are so deeply connected; the comedic actors tend to be the great dramatic actors because they are so in tune with tragedy and pain.*

**LM:** Yeah. I can talk forever about the importance of comedy, especially of comedy and expressions of love and joy amongst BIPOC theatre. And I agree, I just think that we tend to put drama and tragedy up on a pedestal but its comedy that can carry so much more water. And that's why I said, "Alright, I'm gonna write some comedies because I'm tired of people saying, 'Where are the comedies?'"

**XC:** Here it is!

**XC:** *Going back to the notion of layering—which is something we think instinctively, when we think of a cebolla—I wondered about these three characters and how as the delayering occurs, we see the complexity of each character. How do you think of them as similar or different from each other?*

**LM:** The one thing about this play is that I wanted it to be so insular that we see their differences, and you don't see the similarities of *familia* until it's in contrast to something else or until an outside force comes in. We don't see a lot of their similarities; it just tends to be an exploration of how they are different. A lot of it is that they are similar people at *different* stages in life. And I think Yolie is (very easily could have been) Tere, but she had the protection of Tere and Celia, so she became this like hot house flower of a human being but is sort of figuring herself out much later than other people do. When I started writing this, I was gonna really focus on the hybridity of culture and how older generations; the older sibling might know more Spanish, the middle sibling might do this, and the younger sibling might do that. And I think I have held onto some of it, but I thought I would hold on to a lot more. I think Tere, to me, is a traditional *Nueva Mexicana* in the sense that she is like rigidly wanting to be a good person to the point of being kind of brittle or blunt or pugilistic. Whereas I feel that Celia is an answer to Tere, like where Tere tries to make the world a better place by sort of hammering it in and punching it into place, *Celia* tries to nurture it into place, and Yolie is the fruit of both of them.

**XC:** I love that!

**XC:** *You mentioned wanting to write something for BIPOC actors, Latinx/Latina women, specifically comedy. How did this sisterhood, the hermandad celebrated in the play, like how did that dynamic develop?*

**LM:** I feel like that came easily to me. I grew up in a house of three. I have twenty-five aunts and uncles, so I

just had so much *familia* to pull from. I felt like in *Cebollas* I just talked the way family does. And I didn't (and this might be bad playwriting) just let the tangents go. Usually, I pull it back and say, "No, it has to be about this scene..." I try to just let the people talk the way people talk and let people step on each other. So, I think I just wanted to let it flow. I tend to write poetic, and structured, and this approach just felt like the way people talk, which I think is different than what I normally do.

**XC: *Speaking of this map, this road trip, and New Mexico as a central character in the play: its spirit, its history, its culture, and its food. What role does New Mexico play, and how does it live and breathe in Cebollas for you?***

**LM:** That is sort of my thing. I want New Mexico to live in everything I write and in *all* my art. My theatre company, Blackout Theatre, focuses on regional works. My plays are all set in New Mexico. I don't write the dominant culture into my plays because I don't want it to be about them, to ever center on someone other than *our* stories. Most of this play is set in a cultural New Mexico, and in that way, the greater Mexico that it's still a part of. To me, it's so important. And then when I hand this play to a *Cubana* or a *Tejana*, they're like, "Oh my God, oh my God!" That's what I love about *Cebollas*! I thought I wrote something so New Mexican that no one was gonna get it. And then this lady who I'd just met (who had sisters) said to me, "I'm not New Mexican, never been there, but this resonated with me so much." And I was like, "Holy crap!"

**XC: *I'm fascinated by your work; in addition to playwriting, you are also a performer, you do improv, you're a director, you're a designer, you're an educator, and you are bringing to the table all these ways of doing theatre. And I started thinking what makes a Latino comedy. And what has inspired you, whether it be tv, plays, literature, Latino culture, or history. What have you borrowed from (or built upon) in your writing for Cebollas. Specifically, when we think of Latino comedy.***

**LM:** Oh my God, I love this question! So, I grew up with sick days spent in my grandma's house watching *Rosa Salvaje*, *Siempre en Domingo*, *Sabado Gigante*. I think there is a real gift of comedy from Mexico that comes through the tv. It was the physical comedy that came from that. I think the comedy I grew up with was everybody playing a little Latina with a little voice and that is not this play. The wrestling of a dead body around, that sort of stuff is what I gained from that realm of comedy and from watching tv at my grandmother's house. I think the *familia* of it, the comedy of family, is the other part which is just inherent. I come from a family of wonderful human beings, but nobody is funny—except for my brother who is secretly funny, which makes it funnier! But my mom doesn't think anything is funny unless someone gets kicked in the crotch, so the interplay of the language and the triangulation of the building off that is the other thing. I think that language is a big part of it.

**XC: *You talked a little bit about your aesthetic and your style as a playwright. Can you talk a bit more about this neo-folklore, magic realism, poetic writing that you most enjoy or that defines who you are?***

**LM:** I had to give myself permission to write comedy and I don't know why I feel that one of my main goals in playwriting was to tell stories about our people without the constant conflict of dominant culture. We have stories without the dominant culture. To me, part of that is telling the story in a way that is cultural. Like, I wanted to write plays like *cuentos*, which I think have their own format. A couple of my plays follow the format of a *cuento* pretty well. I wanted my work to be an expansion of something I might hear from my grandpo. When he was drunk and smoking cigarettes, he would say, "Ay, que Leenurhd!" and he would tell me a story, and that was what I also wanted to see on stage. I feel like magic is *cultura*. You know, that is a common thread in my life; my grandma used to scrawl poetry in little pieces of paper and my brother carries a little notebook and writes poetry. He's like Emily Dickenson. No one is reading his poems. He writes them for himself. To me, language is part of that, and Spanglish is part of that, so those are the stories I write. What happened if we lived in a world where magic had not been bleached out of our souls? Those are the plays that I write! I feel like Celia is the one who has the magic inside her. She is the one who has the poetry inside her. She is the one who lets that come out more than anybody else.

**XC: *What are your hopes for this premiere, and what would you hope the audiences, the production team, the actors, anyone who experiences this play can take away from this production?***

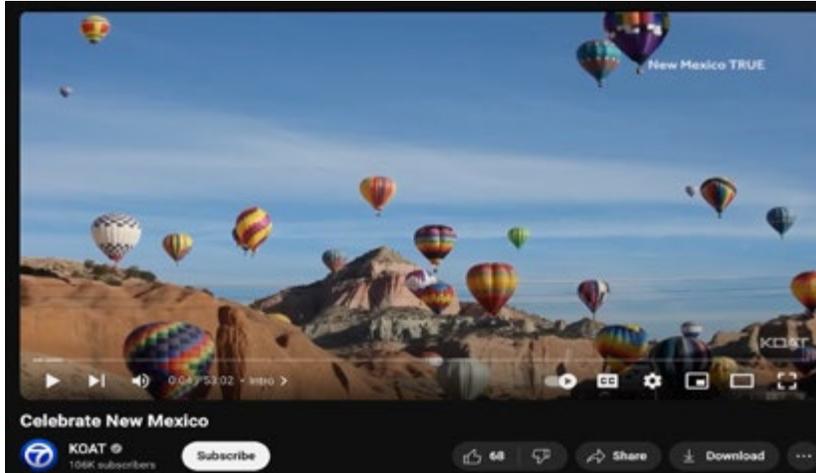
**LM:** I want laughter! I want the audience to leave buoyant. I want this especially for the young audiences, the brown audiences, the older people that never get represented on stage. I used to get this concept from church, the 'Whatever keeps the submarine afloat' idea. I want that feeling in them for at least a while, and I want that for *us*. In Texas, the rehearsal process got a little serious, but in the last experience in Denver, it was—and part of it was because Jerry (our director) is a nurturing, kind soul—and we made each other laugh, we were happy to see each other in the morning for rehearsal, and I want all of that. I want the love and humor of the play to be the overlapping theme.

**XC:** Such a beautiful response! I think we are all equally excited to support you and this beautiful play in any way that we can to make that vision come true.

# CELEBRATING NEW MEXICO

*Cebollas* celebrates the infinite beauty that New Mexico has to offer. The Southwest state, with its friendly people, rich Native American culture, fascinating history, and breathtaking landscapes, is present throughout the play. Undoubtedly, “The Land of Enchantment” has played a significant role in the lives of Celia, Tere, Yolie, and Leonard.

In 2022, New Mexican broadcast channel KOAT 7 premiered its yearlong *Celebrate New Mexico* series as part of New Mexico’s 110th birthday celebration.<sup>1</sup> The news special features several New Mexican cities (and stops) mentioned in *Cebollas*, including Alamogordo, Gallup, and Carlsbad Caverns. Also featured in the series are interviews with long-time New Mexican residents and visits to popular sites, including White Sands National Park and the New Mexico Museum of Space History. The KOAT website includes countless video segments from the series including: 50 years of Balloon Fiesta, Mushroom Hunting, and Inn of the Mountain Gods Ziplining. The Celebrate New Mexico special, like *Cebollas*, highlights all the unique qualities that make New Mexico a magical place and a critical element within the play.

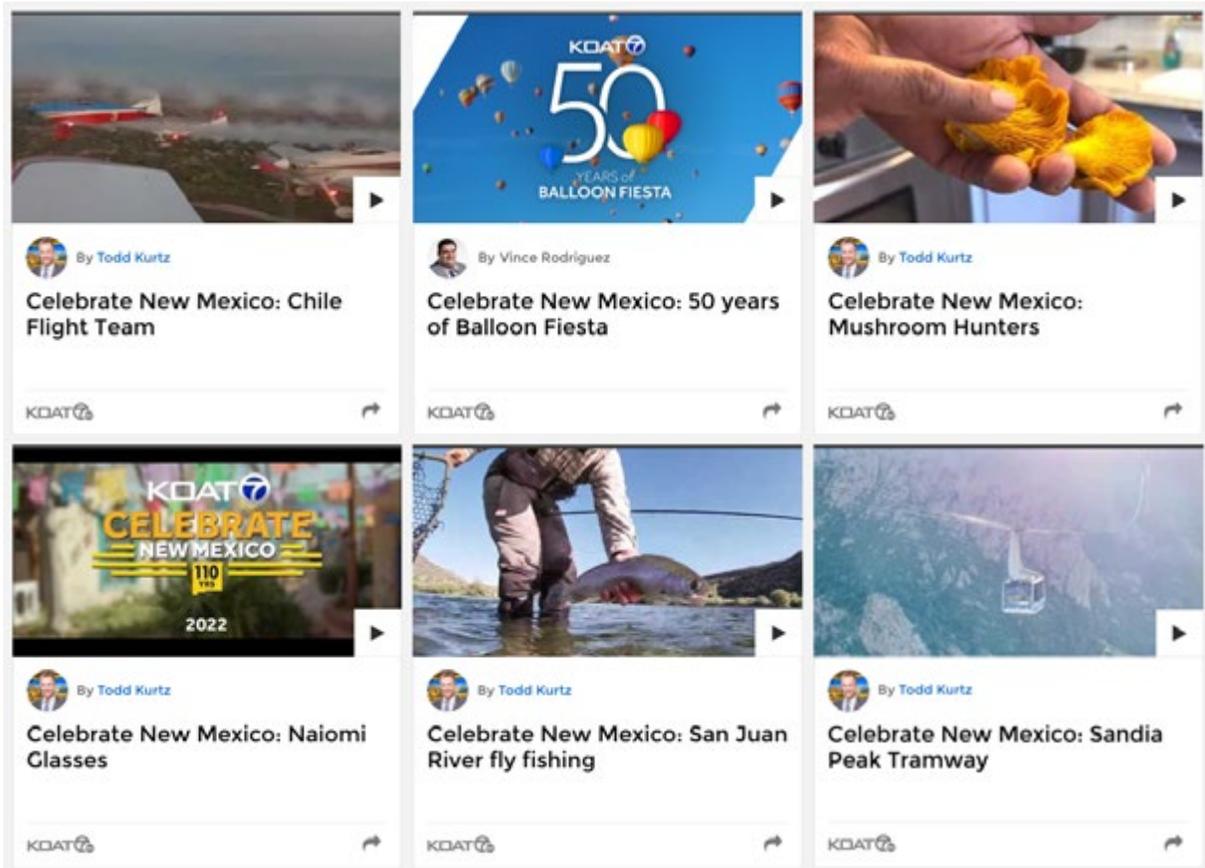


If you are reading this digitally, you can click on the image to view a portion of the *Celebrate New Mexico* special on YouTube:

Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH00Da1\\_9Ok](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH00Da1_9Ok)  
<https://www.koat.com/celebrate-nm>

Click on the image to view more video segments:

Image Source: <https://www.koat.com/celebrate-nm>



Established in 1958, NM PBS remains a trusted source in public programming and “a community service of *The University of New Mexico and Albuquerque Public Schools*.”<sup>2</sup> The NM PBS website features original and local programming, digital media, and special events featuring New Mexico’s people, places, and history. Like *Cebollas*, NM PBS centers stories of the New Mexican experience.

Click on the image below to visit the website and stream local shows:

### NMPBS Originals



Source: <https://www.newmexicopbs.org/>

## SIGHTS OF NEW MEXICO

In *Cebollas*, Tere, Celia, and Yolie embark on a wild adventure drive from New Mexico to Colorado. Below is a collection of stunning photographs commissioned for dramaturgy research, including terrestrial and drone images of locations mentioned in the play. The collection includes popular sites the sisters visit during their trip, like the famous Charlie’s Spic & Span Cafe, their hometown of Barelmas, as well as locations they associate with hilarious and heartwarming childhood memories like the Sandia Mountains, Bernalillo, and Budaghers. These photographs demonstrate why New Mexico is known for its beautifully diverse landscapes. All pictures were taken by LA-born/New Mexico-based Chicano filmmaker Manuel Huerta at Cielo Imaging: Aerial Cinematics and 3D pros.

Budaghers iTraditions! Plaza (formerly the New Mexico Outlet Center Mall) is a shopping mall outlet built in 1993 and closed in 1997, which now stands abandoned along Interstate 25. With New Mexico’s booming film industry, its owner Jim Long believes iTraditions! Plaza is an ideal site for a film and sound studio.<sup>3</sup> The property was to be purchased by a film company in 2008, but due to the economic crash, the deal fell through.



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A stunning view of the Sandias Mountains considered one of “the most visited mountains” in New Mexico, from the sister’s hometown of Barelmas, NM. Several theories suggest the name Sandias Mountains stems from the word Sandias because Sandia is Spanish for “watermelon” and its mountain’s peaks radiates a pinkish color.<sup>4</sup>

Sources: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/cibola/recarea/?recid=71051>  
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Sandia-Mountains>

El Campo Santo Cemetery in Bernalillo county is one of the three Atrisco Cemeteries in New Mexico owned by El Campo Santo Inc.<sup>5</sup> The three cemeteries are located in San Jose de Armijo, Santa Clara and Evangelico, NM.

Source: <https://elcamposanto.org/>

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The Castañeda Hotel in Las Vegas, NM, is a historic Fred Harvey Hotel built in 1898. The building stands in front of the Santa Fe Railway which connected New Mexico to cities like Chicago and Los Angeles, and its surrounding area is a registered historic district.<sup>6</sup> The historic hotel remained closed for over seventy years but reopened in 2019.

Source: <https://castanedahotel.org/>

Check out the virtual gallery to view more stunning images of NM sites mentioned in the play:  
<https://www.cieloimaging.tech/gallery>

# SPANISH WORD TRANSLATION GLOSSARY

SPANISH WORD	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Ahorita	Right now
Averguenzada	Embarrassed
Bomba	A bomb
Bosque	Forest
Burque	New Mexican term for Albuquerque
Claro	Of course
Como que?	What do you mean?
Curandera	Healer
Hermanitas	Little sisters
Huerfano	Orphan
I swear que si!	I swear it's true
Jita	Short for "Mijita," which translates to "Little one," a common term of endearment
Manita	Short for "Hermanita," which translates to "Little sister."
Maquinitas	Slot machines
Mi Novia	My girlfriend
Porque? No me digas!	Why? Don't tell me!
Primas	Female cousins
Que Suave	How smooth
Que tienes, corazon?	What's wrong, sweetheart?
Quitate	Outta my way
Rata	Rat
Raton	Mouse
Serio?	Are you serious?
Te recuerdas?	Do you remember?
Te watcho	I'll be keeping my eye on you
Trompuda	Pouty
Tu abuelita	Your grandmother
Verdad?	For real?
Viejita en el barrio	Old lady in the neighborhood

## FOOTNOTES

1. "Celebrate New Mexico." *KOAT 7 Action News*, 2023. [www.koat.com/celebrate-nm](http://www.koat.com/celebrate-nm). Accessed 13 Nov. 2023.
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3. Hamway, Stephen. "Vacant Traditions Mall to Be Sold, Revitalized as Film Studio." *Internet Archive Way Back Machine*, Albuquerque Journal, 13 Nov. 2019, [web.archive.org/web/20191113232010/https://www.abqjournal.com/1391146/vacant-traditions-mall-to-be-sold-revitalized-as-film-studio.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20191113232010/https://www.abqjournal.com/1391146/vacant-traditions-mall-to-be-sold-revitalized-as-film-studio.html). Accessed 03 Dec. 2024.
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5. "El Campo Santo Inc." El Campo Santo Home, 1 Jan. 2024, [elcamposanto.org/](http://elcamposanto.org/). Accessed 2 Jan. 2024.
6. "The Castañeda." *Castaneda Hotel*, 1 July. 2019, [castanedahotel.org/](http://castanedahotel.org/). Accessed 2 Jan. 2024.

# QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

## Pre-Performance Questions

1. Why are there specific actions that we will do for family members that we would not do for other people? Why is this bond so strong and what can bend that bond?
2. What is the difference between what we think we know about our family member's lives and what we know about our family member's lives? How does reality change when truths are revealed?
3. What is the allure of a road trip in United States culture? What stops will be highlighted between Albuquerque and Denver?

## Post-Performance Questions

1. How do the scenic elements of set design, costuming, lighting, and sound help tell the story? Which did you find the most effective and why?
2. How do the different places that the sisters visit on their road trip inform the scenes? How are the changes in the play's settings reflected in the technical theatre design?
3. Compare and contrast the three sisters. What do we know about them and what do we learn about them?
4. How does this play comment on sisterhood and family?
5. How do the realities of the sisters change when truth is said out loud?
6. How do the characters not in the play, Mom and Dad, help to progress the story? How does the character that says nothing progress the story?
7. Why do the sisters talk to Mitchell? Why are they not able to talk to each other directly?
8. Why does the mother cut onions and what does that imagery add to the play? How are onions like life?
9. What do you think the car ride back to Albuquerque will be like?

# ACTIVITIES

## Scrapbook- A Day in the Life in a Place

Materials: Digital Camera, Computer, Printer

1. Create a visual scrapbook of your day in a specific place. Using a digital camera, document your day by taking pictures. Take pictures of things that you are doing, people that you meet, images that you see and anything else that may describe what you see and do in a given day.
2. From your library of pictures, select between 10 to 15 images and print them. Assemble the pictures in either a slideshow format or as part of a collage. Select a few of the pictures that illuminate the specific place that you are highlighting.
3. Add some other pictures of memory objects, drawings or writings that heighten where you are.
4. Share your scrapbook with others.
5. Discuss which images evoke mood and story. How does it capture your day? Were there any images that you had to discard? Were there any images that you were not able to capture that you wanted to add?

**Colorado PG Visual Art:** Recognize, articulate, and debate that the visual arts are a means for expression.

**Colorado PG Visual Art:** Explain, demonstrate, and interpret a range of purposes of art and design, recognizing that the making and study of art and design can be approached from a variety of viewpoints, intelligences, and perspectives.

## Perspective Writing | Monologue: Personal Narratives for Characters

1. Select an important moment or your favorite moment from the play. For example, when Celia is speaking to Mitchell or when the Celia and Yolie are waiting for Tere in San Felipe.
2. From this moment, the students are to pick a character from the story and to give the character's perspective and attitude of what transpired. Explanations of how they felt about this moment and what affects them should be explored.
3. Each student will write a short monologue describing the moment from the character's perspective of what they experienced.
4. Compare the monologues about the event from other characters that were involved. Discuss the similarities and differences that arose during the writing process. Was there general agreement of what happened or marked differences? Why were the moments similar or different? Were the variations subtle or obvious? Did the class agree on what was important to include and why? If not how would the elimination of some elements change the way the story would be understood when read?

**Colorado Model Content Standards**

**Writing PG:** Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.

**Writing PG:** Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

# SEE YOURSELF ON STAGE

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Photo by McLeod9 Creative