

LA RUTA



DEEP DIVE

by **Isaac Gomez**

directed by

Dámaso Rodríguez



STUDY GUIDE TABLE OF CONTENTS

3.....	About Artists Rep
4.....	Letter to Educators
5.....	The Playwright
6.....	Play Setting/Synopsis
7.....	Character Breakdown
8.....	Detailed Narrative
10	Themes/Elements of Drama
11	Discussion Topics
12	Classroom Activities
13	Discussion Questions
14	Theatre Etiquette/ Guidelines
15	Sources
17.....	Notes



ABOUT ARTISTS REP



Artists Repertory Theatre's mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for artists and audiences of varied backgrounds to take creative risks. Artists Rep is Portland's premiere mid-size regional theatre company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artist Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).

Artists Rep has become a significant presence in American regional theatre with a legacy of world, national, and regional premieres of provocative new work with the highest standards of stagecraft. The organization is committed to local artists and features a company of Resident Artists, professionals of varied theatre disciplines, who are a driving force behind Artists Rep's creative output and identity.

A LETTER TO EDUCATORS

Dear Educators,

We are looking forward to seeing you at our production of *La Ruta* by Isaac Gomez.

This study guide is provided to enhance your students' theatre experience. There is material for your students to utilize before and after the performance. Our goal is to increase theatre exposure and understanding, as well as to encourage meaningful conversation and provoke thoughtful discussion about the play you will attend. Within this guide there is information about the play's themes, setting, characters, pertinent articles, basic theatre etiquette and more. We hope this information will enhance your class's theatre experience.

Artists Rep provides many opportunities for young people to get involved! Students can shadow professional theatre artists in a variety of disciplines, observe tech rehearsals, and become members of our Student Ambassador Program. Please feel free to contact us or give your students our contact information.

Enjoy the show!

Karen Rathje
Education Director
Artists Repertory Theatre
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THE PLAYWRIGHT



Isaac Gomez

ABOUT ISAAC GOMEZ

Isaac Gomez is a Chicago-based playwright, dramaturg and educator, originally from El Paso, Texas/Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. He studied at the University of Texas and moved to Chicago after graduation to be an intern at the Goodman Theatre. He was hired as the literary manager at the Victory Gardens Theatre, where he began writing plays. He is the co-creative director at the Alliance of Latinx Theatre Artists in Chicago where he runs and is a participant of El Semillero: ALTA Chicago's Latino Playwrights Circle, a resident playwright at Chicago Dramatists, an artistic associate with Victory Gardens Theater, an ensemble member with Teatro Vista, an artistic associate with Pivot Arts, the artistic curator for Theater on the Lake 2017/2018, a steering committee member of the Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC) and an artistic community member at The Hypocrites. He is a professional lecturer at The Theatre School at DePaul University.

Awards

2017 Jeffry Melnick New Playwright Award at Primary Stages

2018 Dramatists Guild Lanford Wilson Award

Plays

La Ruta

Wally World (Sideshow Theater Company commission)

PerKup Elkhorn

The Way She Spoke: A docu-mythologia

The Displaced

Throwaway Kids

The Alchemist

SETTING

Ciudad Juárez, Mexico
The late 1990s

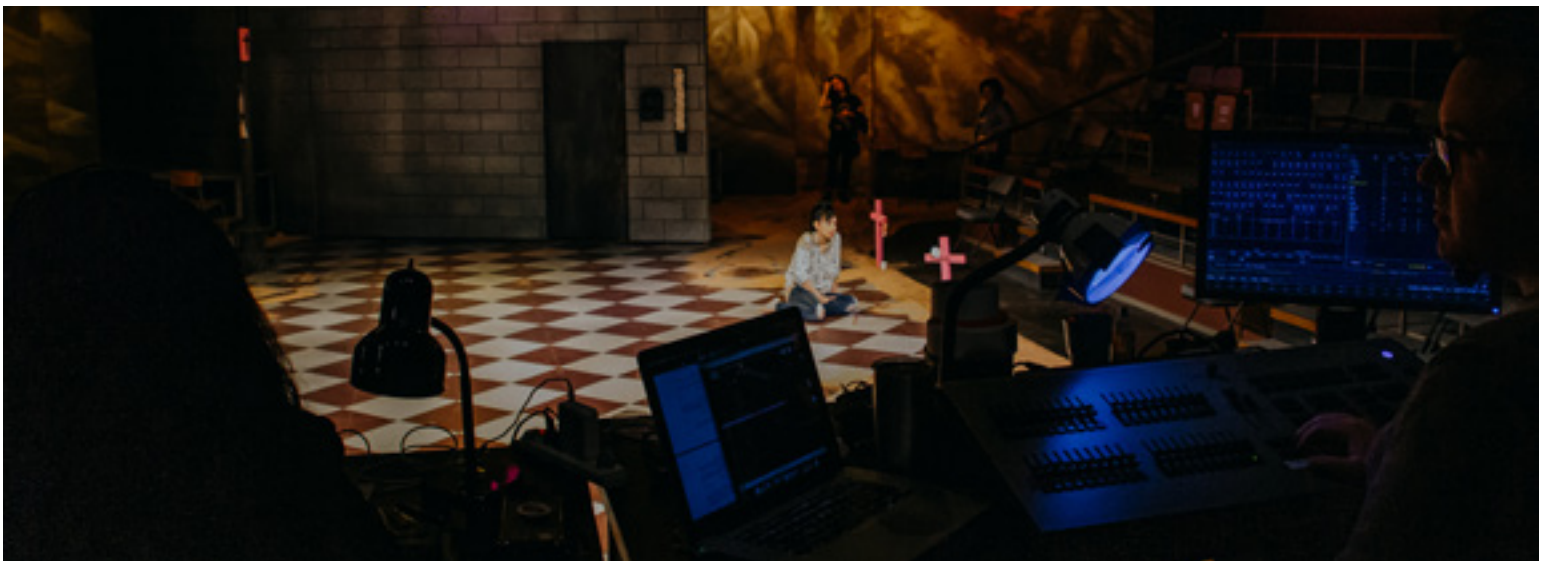
SYNOPSIS

Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, is located directly across from El Paso, Texas, on the other side of the Mexican border. After the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, American companies built factories, called maquiladoras, along the border to take advantage of inexpensive Mexican labor. *La Ruta* tells the true stories of some of the women who worked in these factories. Between 1993 and 2003, hundreds of women and girls were murdered or went missing from Ciudad Juárez. Many of them disappeared as they traveled by bus (la ruta) or walked from bus stops across fields and through gang-controlled territories to reach their homes. This is the story of some of them.

Yolanda and Marisela are friends. They are both mothers: Yolanda is the mother of Brenda; Marisela is the mother of Rubi, who has been missing for six months when the play begins. Brenda, who is 16, goes to work in the factory where she meets and becomes friends with Ivonne, who is 26. Brenda goes missing on July 7, 1998.

In the words of playwright Isaac Gomez, “Every single woman in this play is based on a real person. And although some names have been changed for their protection, the violence they face and their resilience have not. **I made a promise to these women that their stories would be heard by as many people as humanly possible, and through this [play], we are one step closer to keeping that promise -- to bear witness and carry their stories forward.** As a queer Mexicano from the border, I owe my entire existence to Mexican women. This play is for them. Para todas. Para siempre.”

<http://www.thehawkchicago.com/articles/steppenwolf-theatre-company-presents-the-world-premiere-of-la-ruta> (emphasis in original)



CHARACTER BREAKDOWN



Christi Miles
YOLANDA (YOLI), a mother



Diana Burbano
MARISELA, a mother



Naiya Amilcar
IVONNE, a friend



Marissa Sanchez
BRENDA, a daughter



Patricia Alvitez
ZAIDE, a maquila worker



Fabi Reyna
DESAMAYA, a singer/musician

DETAILED NARRATIVE

Prologue - Wednesday, August 23, 2000, 10:01 am

A cotton field on the outskirts of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

Yolanda stands in the middle of the desert, alone. She makes her way through the desert until she finds herself by pink crosses. She grabs a handful of sand and looks at it for a moment. Then, whoosh, time rewinds itself to where it all began.

One - Tuesday, July 7, 1998, 1:20 am - the day Brenda disappears

A bus stop somewhere in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

Marisela and Yolanda are talking as they wait for the bus. When the bus arrives, Marisela hands out flyers with a picture of her missing daughter, Rubi, to women getting off the bus. Yolanda looks for her daughter, Brenda, who should be on the bus. When Brenda does not get off, they wait for the next bus. While they wait, they talk about whether the US factories - maquilas - are good for them or not and about what might have happened to Rubi. Marisela speculates that Brenda may have gotten off the bus with Ivonne at Ivonne's stop. Yolanda says Brenda would not do that because she knows where Yolanda waits for her. The next bus arrives, but Brenda is not on it.

Two - Monday, May 4, 1998 - two months before Brenda's disappearance

Inside a maquiladora - a US owned factory

Zaide is showing Brenda around the factory. Ivonne makes a comment that Zaide criticizes her for and says, "If you don't watch that mouth, you're gonna end up like Azucena." Brenda asks who Azucena is. Zaide says she was kidnapped, and Brenda says it's not going to happen to her. Zaide says every time a girl goes missing, Ivonne happens to be around. Ivonne shows Brenda how to work her machine, and where her mother, Yolanda, used to work. Ivonne tells her that she stopped briefly at Brenda's quince (her 15th birthday) and gave Yolanda the ring that Brenda is wearing. Throughout the workday, they talk about other factory workers and going to America. At the end of the day, some of the workers approach the factory owner, and Zaide asks him to arrange for la ruta to drop them off a little closer to their houses because some of them have to walk at least five blocks from their bus stop and the streets are owned by rival gangs. The factory owner asks her name but says nothing else. The women get on their bus. All the women, exit the bus, except for Zaide, who has fallen asleep. The bus stops suddenly, and Zaide who does not recognize the location, exits the bus and asks, "Where are we?" There is no response.

Three - Friday, July 10, 1998 - three days after Brenda's disappearance

Yolanda's home

Ivonne bursts through the front door. Her clothes are ripped and dirty and there are blood stains on her knees and elbows. Ivonne says she tripped. Yolanda has a flashback and panics because she has a vision of Ivonne and Brenda leaving work together three days earlier. A car stops in front of the house. Ivonne ask Yolanda what color the van is that is parked outside. Yolanda says it is blue. The car drives off. Ivonne tells Yolanda she is leaving Juárez and she wants Yolanda to leave with her. Yolanda says she can't leave because of Brenda, but Ivonne says Brenda is not coming back. Ivonne says she knows she was supposed to look out for Brenda. Yolanda wants to know why she was not riding on the bus with Brenda the night Brenda disappeared. Ivonne answers she doesn't know why. Yolanda tells Ivonne to get out of her house.

Four - Saturday, July 4, 1998 - three days before Brenda's disappearance

Yolanda's home

Brenda and Marisela are talking. Brenda tells her that Ivonne invited her to pop fireworks for Independence Day. Marisela tells Brenda if she wants to hang out with Ivonne, she needs to hang out with her at the house while Yolanda is home. Brenda asks Marisela if she has heard anything about Rubi who has been missing for six months. Brenda leaves to tell Ivonne she can't go to fireworks. Yolanda arrives and she and Marisela discuss whether Brenda should be hanging out with Ivonne. Brenda and Ivonne come in, and Brenda and Ivonne and Marisela go outside to watch the fireworks.

Five - Monday, August 17, 1998 - one month and ten days after Brenda's disappearance

Yolanda home

Yolanda and Marisela are talking about Rubi's funeral and what happened to her. Marisela wants Yolanda to go to a meeting of women whose daughters are missing. Yolanda has been getting phone calls that Brenda is being kept alive as a sex slave and that she will be allowed to return home after three years.

Six - Thursday, July 2, 1998 - five days before Brenda's disappearance

A washroom inside the maquiladora

Ivonne is on the phone telling someone that they had a deal, and that they promised after three years something would happen, and then she is telling her sister, Erika, to be strong. She breaks the mirror in the washroom. Brenda comes in and tries to comfort her. Ivonne and Brenda talk about how Ivonne keeps things from Brenda and about taking a road trip to visit Ivonne's sister in Durango.

Seven - Wednesday, August 23, 2000 - two years and sixteen days after Brenda's disappearance

A cotton field on the outskirts of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

Ivonne is kneeling by several pink crosses in the desert sand. She is praying. Yolanda enters carrying fliers. Yolanda slaps Ivonne across the face. She accuses Ivonne of being the last person to see Brenda. Yolanda demands that Ivonne tell her where Brenda is. Ivonne says she does not know what happened to Brenda. Then she says she watched as three men grabbed and assaulted Erika because she did not return the men's calls. They put Brenda and Erika in the back of a blue van. They dropped Brenda off and she went to Yolanda's house. And she tells Yolanda, "It was my family or yours." Yolanda asks her where Brenda is and Ivonne answers, "I wish I knew."

Eight - Monday, July 6, 1998 - one day before Brenda's disappearance

Brenda's home

Brenda and Ivonne are talking about a boy Brenda likes, and about how a singer they both like just died when her tour bus was shot up. Ivonne gets a phone call. After the call, she invites Brenda for a night out and tells her not to tell her mom.

Nine - Wednesday, August 23, 2000 - two years and sixteen days after Brenda's disappearance

El Centro, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

Marisela is holding a poster of a young woman. She is rallying group of women to march to the state capital to do something about the hundreds of young girls in Juárez who are dead. Yolanda tells her if she goes forward with her march, she will be killed. Marisela tells Yolanda to keep putting up her fliers. Yolanda replies that the difference between Marisela and her is that Marisela's daughter is dead and her daughter is not dead. The women march off and Yolanda is left standing in the middle of the desert.

THEMES OF LA RUTA

Violence Against Women - the reality of violence against women

Societal Response to Violence - the apathetic response of society to violence

Confronting inhumanity through art - theatre as a way of informing and exposing barbarity

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

PLOT

The sequence of events in a play revealed through the action and/or dialogue

TONE

The manner the play is written (e.g., casual, comic, serious, somber, etc.)

THEME

The central topic the play investigates

OBJECTIVE

The goal a character has within a play

CONFLICT

The clash between opposing forces, ideas, or interests that creates tension

STAGING

Patterns of movement in a play, including entrances, exits, and movement on the stage

THE FOURTH WALL

The conceptual barrier between actors onstage and the audience

[When the actors directly interact with the audience, it is referred to as "breaking the fourth wall"]

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

Elements such as sets, costumes, lights, music, props, and makeup used to create a unified and meaningful design for a theatrical production

DISCUSSION TOPICS

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The Common Core Standards for English, Social Studies and Theatre are set forth verbatim at the end of this study guide. The following possible discussion topics are relevant to the following Standards:

English: Literature - *Craft and Structure*: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g.; parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. (9-10.RL.5)

Social Studies: Reading - *Key Ideas and Details*: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain. (11-12.RH.3)

Theatre: Responding - *Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work*: Consider the aesthetics of the production elements in a drama/theatre work. (TH.9.RE3.HS1)

How Does The Playwright Order Events And Manipulate Time To Create Mystery And Tension?

The play is partly a mystery: a girl has gone missing and so have others? What has happened to them? Part of the play is an unraveling of the mystery. At the same time, the play is also a character study of a number of women who both bond and respond differently in the face of their personal tragedies and society's failure to do something about the horror of what is happening to them and their children. Playwright Isaac Gomez manages to create tension and suspense while telling the women's stories by ordering events in parallel stories and manipulating time with flashbacks. The women's stories are true, but it's not simply a series of narratives about what happened to their children. It's both a mystery and a study of tragic characters because of the structure of the play. One of the ways to think about the order of events is to take each of the numbered acts and put them in chronological order rather than in the order in which they appear in the play. Telling the story in a nonlinear progression reveals the stages of grief in individual moments rather than an arc.

What Is The Explanation For What Happened To Brenda?

What are the explanations for what happened to Brenda? Was Ivonne the last person to see Brenda? Ivonne says, "I don't think I was, actually." Yolanda says, "You took her to El Centro and she didn't come back." Ivonne replies, "I didn't take her, she left, herself." Yolanda says, "You were the last person she was with." Ivonne, says, "You don't know that for sure." Yolanda answers, "I am her mother. I know everything." We also know that Ivonne got a phone call that seems to have caused her to become violently ill, and that shortly after that she invited Brenda to a girl's night out, and she told Brenda not to tell her mother. Finally, we know that Ivonne's sister was raped and killed by three men, and that she says she would do anything to save her family. Does this mean that Ivonne set Brenda up to be kidnapped? Yolanda receives phone calls saying that Brenda is still alive and working as a sex slave and that she will be returned in three years, and Yolanda continues to believe that Brenda is alive. There are explanations, and you can form your own conclusions and support them, but the playwright leaves the important question of what happened to Brenda unanswered.

What Are The Aesthetics Of The Production Elements In The Play?

There is no mystery about what this play is about. The women in this play are real; their stories are real; and the playwright states that he wrote this play to bear witness and carry their stories forward. In his notes, Isaac Gomez tells us, "All the characters are Mexican and should be cast accordingly." There is Mexican music throughout the play, but the songs are traditional Mexican folk songs that are not translated into English. There are lengthy stage directions throughout the play including this one: "The wind against the desert sand turns into a tune of some kind. The breathiness of the wind turns into the breath of a woman. The faint sound of percussion and the strum of a guitar that can only be heard in the depths of the desert find its way to this breath. A sound both painfully unreal, and hauntingly familiar all at once. * * * Is it music? Is it the sun? Is it the wind? Perhaps it is neither. Perhaps it is all of the above." While many of the traditional elements of theatre are present, the play is intended as an indictment of a political situation that took place, and may be continuing to take place, in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. In this regard, the play falls under the heading of political theatre, known as instrumentalism.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Compare and contrast the respective responses of Marisela and Yolanda to their daughters' disappearances.

Debate: Do US corporations have any responsibility to the people who work in their plants in Mexico?

Discuss the role of music in the play. If you read the play and then you see it, does the music make a difference to how you feel about the play. Does it make a difference to you that the songs are all in Spanish?

Discuss the symbolism of Yolanda eating handful after handful of sand at the end of the play.

Write a poem in honor of the women who have lost their lives in Juárez, Mexico.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS?

Throughout the play, Desamaya sings traditional Mexican folk songs, but the play is not a musical. What role does music play in the performance?

Isaac Gomez jumps forward and backward in time to tell his characters' stories, rather than following a chronological recitation of events. What purpose does this serve? How does it affect the way the viewer processes it?

Do you think that the play does anything to protest the violence against women that has taken place in Juárez or anywhere else in the world?

The playwright says that the play "lives in a space where emotion comes crashing and then becomes immediately still." Do you agree?

Do you think that art, and particularly theatre, is an effective way of helping us understand barbarity and inhumanity?

The play raises questions about blame and who is culpable for what. What do we owe each other in times of turmoil?

THEATER ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

We are so excited you are here! The audience is one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the play is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make your theatre experience enjoyable for everyone.

BE PROMPT

Arrive in plenty of time to settle, find your seats, and get situated. Please visit the restrooms before the show begins.

BE RESPECTFUL

Your behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. The performers can see and hear you, just as the audience can see and hear you.

TURN OFF CELL PHONES

You may think texting is private, but the light and motion can be seen by actors and audience members and texting is distracting to those around you. Please do not check your phones, text or take photos during the performance.

HAVE FUN AND PARTICIPATE

Rather than remaining totally silent, please note the difference between appropriate and inappropriate responses.

APPROPRIATE

- Laughter
- Applause
- Participation (when requested)

INAPPROPRIATE

- Talking (including whispering)
- Groaning / Booing
- Using Cell Phones / Devices

STAY WITH US!

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

APPENDIX: OREGON COMMON CORE STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS - HIGH SCHOOL

LITERATURE

Key Ideas and Details

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. (9-10.RL.2)

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. (9-10.RL.3)

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed). (11-12.RL.3)

Craft and Structure

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g.; parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. (9-10.RL.5)

Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement.) (11-12.RL.6)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare). (9-10.RL.9)

SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS - HIGH SCHOOL

READING

Key Ideas and Details

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text. (9-10.RH.2)

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them. (9-10.RH.3)

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain. (11-12.RH.3)

Craft and Structure

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No.10). (11-12.RH.4)

Analyze how a text uses a structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis. (9-10.RH.5)

THEATRE STANDARDS - HIGH SCHOOL

RESPONDING

Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work

Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices. (TH.7.RE1.HS1)

Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work

Analyze and compare artistic choices developed from personal experiences in multiple drama/theatre works. (TH.8.RE2.HS1)

Identify and compare cultural perspectives and contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work. (TH.8.RE2.HS1)

Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of drama/theatre work. (TH.8.RE2.HS1)

Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work

Examine a drama/theatre work using supporting evidence and criteria, while considering art forms, history, culture, and other disciplines. (TH.9.RE3.HS1)

Consider the aesthetics of the production elements in a drama/theatre work. (TH.9.RE3.HS1)

Formulate a deeper understanding and appreciation of drama/theatre work by considering its specific purpose or intended audience. (TH.9.RE3.HS1)

CONNECTING

Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art

Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work, using theatre research methods. (TH.11.CO2.HS1)



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Visit our website **artistsrep.org** for opportunities to get involved, such as:

- 17

UP NEXT



THE STRANGE UNDOING OF PRUDENCIA HART



by **David Greig**

directed by

Luan Schooler & Dámaso Rodríguez