STIRRING NEW DRAMA FROM THE AUTHOR OF SONIA FLEW

BECOMING CUBA

CURRICULUM GUIDE

BY MELINDA LOPEZ

DIRECTED BY M. BEVIN O’GARA

HUNTINGTON THEATRE COMPANY
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STANDARDS

Student Matinee performances and pre-show workshops provide unique opportunities for experiential learning and support various combinations of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. They may also support standards in other subject areas such as Social Studies and History, depending on the individual play’s subject matter.

Activities are also included in this Curriculum Guide and in our pre-show workshops that support several of the Massachusetts state standards in Theatre. Other arts areas may also be addressed depending on the individual play’s subject matter.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 3
• Grade 8: Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
• Grades 9-10: 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 themes.
• Grades 11-12: Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop related 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).

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 5
• Grade 8: Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.
• Grades 9-10: 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.
• Grades 11-12: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 6
• Grade 8: Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.
• Grades 9-10: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
• Grades 11-12: Analyze a case in which grasping point of view required distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
• Grade 8: Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.
• Grades 9-12: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist).
**MASSACHUSETTS STANDARDS IN THEATRE**

**Acting**
- 1.7 — Create and sustain a believable character throughout a scripted or improvised scene (By the end of Grade 8).
- 1.12 — Describe and analyze, in written and oral form, characters’ wants, needs, objectives, and personality characteristics (By the end of Grade 8).
- 1.13 — In rehearsal and performance situations, perform as a productive and responsible member of an acting ensemble (i.e., demonstrate personal responsibility and commitment to a collaborative process) (By the end of Grade 8).
- 1.14 — Create complex and believable characters through the integration of physical, vocal, and emotional choices (Grades 9-12).
- 1.15 — Demonstrate an understanding of a dramatic work by developing a character analysis (Grades 9-12).
- 1.17 — Demonstrate increased ability to work effectively alone and collaboratively with a partner or in an ensemble (Grades 9-12).

**Reading and Writing Scripts**
- 2.7 — Read plays and stories from a variety of cultures and historical periods and identify the characters, setting, plot, theme, and conflict (By the end of Grade 8).
- 2.8 — Improvise characters, dialogue, and actions that focus on the development and resolution of dramatic conflicts (By the end of Grade 8).
- 2.11 — Read plays from a variety of genres and styles; compare and contrast the structure of plays to the structures of other forms of literature (Grades 9-12).

**Technical Theatre**
- 4.6 — Draw renderings, floor plans, and/or build models of sets for a dramatic work and explain choices in using visual elements (line, shape/form, texture, color, space) and visual principals (unity, variety, harmony, balance, rhythm) (By the end of Grade 8).
- 4.13 — Conduct research to inform the design of sets, costumes, sound, and lighting for a dramatic production (Grades 9-12).

**Connections**
- **Strand 6: Purposes and Meanings in the Arts** — Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings (Grades PreK-12).
- **Strand 10: Interdisciplinary Connections** — Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering (Grades PreK-12).

**AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE**

Attending live theatre is a unique experience with many valuable educational and social benefits. To ensure that all audience members are able to enjoy the performance, please take a few minutes to discuss the following audience etiquette topics with your students before you come to the Huntington Theatre Company.

- How is attending the theatre similar to and different from going to the movies? What behaviors are and are not appropriate when seeing a play? Why?
- Remind students that because the performance is live, the audience will affect the actors’ performance. No two audiences are exactly the same and no two performances are exactly the same — this is part of what makes theatre so special! Students’ behavior should reflect the level of performance they wish to see.
- Theatre should be an enjoyable experience for the audience. It is absolutely all right to applaud when appropriate and laugh at the funny moments. Talking and calling out during the performance, however, are not allowed. Why might this be? Be sure to mention that not only would the people seated around them be able to hear their conversation, but the actors on stage could hear them, too. Theatres are constructed to carry sound efficiently!
- Any noise or light can be a distraction, so please remind students to make sure their cell phones are turned off (or better yet, left at home or at school!). Texting, photography, and video recording are prohibited. Food and gum should not be brought into the theatre.
- Students should sit with their group as seated by the Front of House staff and should not leave their seats once the performance has begun.
Huntington Theatre Company’s production of Melinda Lopez’s *Becoming Cuba* marks several firsts: Last summer, Lopez was among the first cohort to receive a playwright-in-residence grant from the Andrew W. Mellon foundation. The Mellon grant has allowed Lopez to devote significant time to preparing *Becoming Cuba* for its Huntington production, in the Huntington’s Wimberly Theatre at the Calderwood Pavilion at the BCA, this spring. The production also marks the Huntington directorial debut of the company’s associate producer, M. Bevin O’Gara. Boston audiences are no stranger to O’Gara’s work (she has helmed productions at SpeakEasy Stage Company, Company One, and New Repertory Theatre), but *Becoming Cuba* marks the first time she will direct specifically for the Huntington Theatre Company’s mainstage season.

It’s not, however, the first time these two Boston artists have teamed up. O’Gara directed the premiere production of Lopez’s play, *Gary*,

at Boston Playwrights’ Theatre in 2008, as well as a workshop of Lopez’s *Caroline in Jersey* for the Huntington’s Breaking Ground Festival of New Work in 2009. It is also the second time that a Huntington season will feature a play by Lopez – the Huntington inaugurated its home for new work, the Calderwood Pavilion at the BCA, in 2004 with the world premiere of Lopez’s *Sonia Flew*. Similar to *Becoming Cuba*, *Sonia Flew* draws inspiration from Cuba to explore themes of identity and loyalty, and features a central female figure characterized by her strength, passion, and intense inner conflict.

In a recent conversation, Lopez and O’Gara discuss their artistic collaboration and their hopes for student audiences attending *Becoming Cuba*.

**Q:** What was the first theatre project you worked on together?

**M. BEVIN O’GARA:** *Gary* at Boston Playwrights’ Theatre about six years ago. It was a great, crazy adventure, with teenagers, rock bands, and rivers. In many ways, it was my first professional gig as a director. Melinda took a chance on me, and I will always be grateful for that leap of faith. I owe her and that production a lot as it really helped to start my career in Boston.

**Q:** What is it about each other’s work that appeals to you as an artist?

**MELINDA LOPEZ:** Bevin and I are good complements to each other. It’s like, when she is very organized, I am a mess. When she is very creative, I am focused on minute details. We work reflexively well – Bevin is really intuitive, smart, and generous. We both like a calm rehearsal room. I also love how she dresses.

**MBO:** The way Melinda tells stories is purely theatrical. She’s not writing with the mindset that audiences are more accustomed to movies and TV. Her plays are all stories that are told best through the medium of theatre – stories that reveal something about our basic humanity using a heightened bit of theatricality appeal to me the most and that’s what Melinda writes.

**Q:** Melinda, how does your background as an actress inform your writing?

**ML:** I get to imagine playing all the parts. If I think I would be bored in a scene, I rewrite it.

**Q:** How do the workshops help you refine your writing? How has *Becoming Cuba*, evolved during the process so far?

**ML:** The play has evolved a lot. Hearing the play over and over, talking about it – I get obsessed with it. Bevin feeds my obsession. Basically, I think I have taken all the characters and pushed them as far as I can – their loves, their honor. My mantra is – love your characters and then break them in half. If they keep going, break them again. Rip their hearts out. If they can’t get up, you’ve done your job.
Q: Bevin, what are the benefits to having a playwright like Melinda in the room as you rehearse?

MBO: I work in a very collaborative manner, so for me having someone who knows that play as intimately as the playwright does to bounce ideas off of and talk things through is endlessly helpful. Melinda brings such a deep passion for the work and attacks the play both as a writer and also through the actor’s eyes. Working with her both keeps me on my toes and allows me to breathe easier knowing there is someone else in the room that is deeply knowledgeable about each moment of the play. Having two different sets of eyes on the piece working towards a common goal is wonderful. We are good complements to each other.

Q: As you go into rehearsals for this production, what advantages do you anticipate you’ll have from your past collaborations?

MBO: It’s been great to develop a short-hand on the play over the two workshops that we’ve done. I know what Melinda feels strongly about and she knows what I feel strongly about. Working on a new play with the writer in the room is always different – who speaks when and about what – it can be a tricky balancing act. Since Melinda and I know each other so well, that balance is much more easily achieved.

Q: What do you hope student audiences will take away from this production? What do you want them to walk away talking or thinking about?

ML: I hope they’ll enjoy the scale of the story – I hope they’ll get interested in history, and how it always resonates in the present. I hope they’ll laugh, and not be bored. I hope they’ll all have crushes on the actors. I hope they’ll go home and tell their families, “I saw something really cool today.”

MBO: I hope they will come away curious about a time and place in history they didn’t know anything about before. I hope that they will see some of themselves and their lives in these characters and situations, realizing that they aren’t so different than people who lived very different lives from themselves. That understanding of the universality of humanity is very important to our perception of the world and our place in it. I also hope they are talking about how cool the ghosts were . . . we’re working very hard to make those moments very cool.

Melinda Lopez is the Huntington’s inaugural playwright-in-residence and a past Huntington Playwriting Fellow. Her play Sonia Flew (Elliot Norton and IRNE Awards, dir. Nicholas Martin) inaugurated the Huntington’s home for new work, the Calderwood Pavilion at the BCA, in 2004. It has subsequently been produced at Coconut Grove Playhouse, the Contemporary American Theatre Festival, Laguna Playhouse, the Summer Playwrights Festival (NY), the Milagro Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, and many others, and was broadcast on NPR’s “The Play’s The Thing!” Other plays include Caroline in Jersey (Williamstown Theatre Festival), Orchids to Octopi (IRNE Award, Central Square Theatre, commissioned by the National Institute
of Health), Gary (Steppenwolf’s First Look Repertory of New Work, Boston Playwrights Theatre), Alexandros (Laguna Playhouse), a new translation of Blood Wedding (Suffolk University), God Smells Like A Roast Pig (Women on Top Festival, Elliot Norton Award – Outstanding Solo Performance), Midnight Sandwich / Medianoche (Coconut Grove Playhouse), The Order of Things (CentaStage, Kennedy Center Fund for New Plays), and How Do You Spell Hope? (Underground Railway Theatre). She is among the first cohort to receive three-year-playwright-in-residency grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and was the first recipient of the Charlotte Woolard Award, given by the Kennedy Center to a “promising new voice in American Theatre.” Ms. Lopez is also an actress, having appeared at the Huntington in Our Town, Persephone, A Month in the Country, and The Rose Tattoo. She has appeared in regional theatres across the country and also works in film and radio. She has served as a panel member for the National Endowment for the Arts and the Cambridge Arts Panel and has enjoyed residencies with Sundance, the Lark, the New York Theatre Workshop, and Harvard University. She is a founding member of Munroe Saturday Nights, which produces free high quality arts performances in the Boston area. Ms. Lopez teaches theatre and performance at Wellesley College and playwriting at Boston University. She makes her home in Boston.

M. Bevin O’Gara is an Associate Producer at the Huntington Theatre Company where she will be directing Melinda Lopez’ Becoming Cuba this spring. Recent credits include Tribes and Clybourne Park (SpeakEasy Stage Company); You for Me For You, Love Person, and The Pain and the Itch (Company One); Matt and Ben (Central Square Theater); Two Wives in India and Gary (Boston Playwrights’ Theatre); 2.5 Minute Ride (Downstage @ New Rep); Othello and The Crucible (New Rep On Tour); Melancholy Play (Holland Productions); Bat Boy: The Musical (Metro Stage); Tattoo Girl, Painting You, and Artifacts (Williamstown Theatre Festival Workshop); and ANTI-KISS (3 Monkeys Theatrical Productions). She has also worked with New Repertory Theatre, the Gaiety Theatre of Dublin, and the Actors Centre of Australia. She has a BFA from Boston University in Theatre Studies.
“Do you know what my name is?” Adela asks American journalist Jackson Davis in Act II of Melinda Lopez’ *Becoming Cuba*. “Adela Fidelidad.” Davis pauses, translating in his mind. “Fidelidad,” he says. “Ever faithful.” But to whom and to what Adela is faithful is more complex than simple translation. As the Cuban War of Independence pits brother against sister, husband against wife, and Cuban against Spaniard, Adela finds that her efforts to remain a neutral party may be not only naïve, but impossible. In *Becoming Cuba*, loyalty to family and country are hopelessly intertwined.

As the daughters of a deceased Spanish mother and a Cuban father who joined the rebel forces, Adela and Martina are no strangers to divided loyalties. While Adela and Martina proclaim their love for both of their parents, they each identify strongly with a different side of their family. Adela fell in love with and married a Spaniard named Rafael, and though she maintains that this marriage was not an intentional act of allegiance to Spain, Rafael was a Spanish proxy for Adela’s national loyalty. As the play opens, Adela uses her Cuban birth and her now deceased Spanish husband’s memory as currency to move between worlds, even striking up a friendship with Fancy, the wife of a Spanish lieutenant. But Martina boldly suggests that when her sister chose Rafael, she chose Spain, too. “Not all of us married Spain like you,” Martina reminds Adela (I, 1). But according to Adela, her loyalty lies with the pharmacy Rafael left behind when he died. Meanwhile, as a young girl, Martina drew the ire of both the nuns at her school and her Castilian grandmother when she pinned the rebel flag to the bodice of her dress. Martina maintains that she was simply displaying pride in her country and that it is unfair to criticize her for it, but Adela takes a more practical approach. “Showing up to school wearing the rebel flag,” she chastises her sister. “How do you ever expect to get anything done in your life if you insist on provoking everyone?” (I, 1).

The sisters’ brother, Manny, complicates matters. Born to a Cuban mother rather than Adela and Martina’s Spanish one, Manny is fiercely loyal not just to their father, but to the rebel cause he fights for. In Act I, Manny arrives secretly in Havana with the goal of persuading Adela to return with him to the rebel camp in the mountains. Their father’s fourth child is due
to be born soon and Adela’s medical expertise is needed. Manny recognizes that he is asking his sister for a significant favor, but hopes that with Rafael gone, Adela may shift her allegiance to lie with the rest of her family. “We need your hands,” Manny begs. “While you had Rafael – you made your choice. We know that. But now?” Adela is quick to correct him: “Rafael was not a choice. He was my life. And now, his life – this building. These bottles. This life is mine” (I, 1). But Manny is not satisfied with her answer. He fears that Adela is walking a dangerous line and that neutrality is not possible. Adela feels that, despite her marriage to Rafael, she did not take a side in the war, but Manny fears what may happen to her if she does not declare herself for the Cuba as the rest of her living family members have done. “You think you’re safe because of his name? As Spanish as garlic? You’re going to find yourself on the wrong side in this war . . . I loved him, too. We all did. But he was fighting for the wrong side” (I, 1).

Inside the walls of the pharmacy, Manny’s familial loyalty to Adela trumps all else and he is willing to overlook his sister’s Spanish connections. But outside – whether in the streets or in the rebel’s mountain camp – all bets are off. When Martina is wounded by a Spanish bullet in a riot, Manny seizes the opportunity to leverage their blood-based bond and push Adela to declare herself for the rebels. Manny sees all Spaniards as the same and he strongly objects to Adela’s request that he escort Fancy home on grounds that he would be aiding the enemy. “Your friend just shot your sister,” he says. “Pick a side” (II, 2). To Manny, Adela’s insistence on neutrality is the same as choosing Spain over the Cuban rebels. Adela’s loyalty “to the matador and the firing squad” and Manny’s “to the torch and the machete” create a seemingly unbridgeable void between the siblings (II, 2). Martina’s transformation from rebel supporter to full-fledged member of the resistance only deepens the divide. Adela tries to dissuade Martina from joining the rebels, claiming that it is a ridiculous idea. But Martina knows Adela well and says aloud what Adela is unwilling to admit to herself:

I’m not ridiculous, Addy. You are. With your bottles. You’ll do anything for them, won’t you? So loyal to your chemicals and your glass jars. Well. Here is the day’s news. The headline in big, fat, black print. Rafael isn’t in this pharmacy, Adela. He’s not inside these four walls, or in the bottles. He’s dead. What are you saving your loyalty for? (II, 2)

Questions

1. Why does Manny ultimately decide to escort Fancy home?
2. Why does Adela resist Davis’s romantic advances?
3. What is Adela saving her loyalty for? Ultimately, where does Adela decide her allegiance lies? Why?
4. What does the phrase “blood is thicker than water” mean? How does it apply to the characters in Becoming Cuba?
5. Who or what are you loyal to above all else? Why?
Identity

Cuban. Spaniard. Rebel. Loyalist. Us. Them. The characters in Becoming Cuba varyingly embrace and reject the labels that serve to unite and divide them. How they identify themselves and each other profoundly influences their interactions. Identities generate conflicts and strengthen allegiances, and over the course of the play, some characters find themselves growing more secure in who they are, while others undergo transformations that lead them to embrace a new identity.

“It’s a national psychosis, mocking everything,” Adela says in Act I, Scene 1 when Fancy, the wife of a Spanish lieutenant, is offended by Martina’s joke about a recent guerilla attack on a Spanish military unit. Given Fancy’s high rank, Adela feels she must keep Fancy happy, and explains her sister’s humor away as something of a “Cuban thing” Fancy should not worry about. When Fancy leaves, the division between her and the sisters is sharply clear. Adela confides to Martina that she only agreed to attend a bull fight with Fancy because Fancy is one of “them” and, as Adela explains, “you don’t say no to them” (I, 1).

Divisions of “us” and “them” extend from the social hierarchy of Havana into Adela’s own familial relationships. Adela, Martina, and their brother, Manny, all share the same Cuban father, but while Adela and Martina’s mother was a Spanish woman from Castile, Manny’s mother was the family’s Cuban housekeeper. Adela takes pride in her Spanish heritage, adamantly reminding Martina that their “sainted mother was born in Madrid,” a stark contrast with Manny’s acknowledgement that their “mother owned the house that [his] mother cleaned” (I, 2). Class distinctions create a rift between the siblings that is only intensified by Martina’s rebel sympathies. Martina identifies much more strongly with her father’s Cuban roots than her mother’s Spanish origins and believes that because she and Adela were born on the island, they are more Cuban than anything else. “Stop showing off,” she gently scolds Adela. “You and me? We’re as Spanish as my old boots. Papi’s blood runs in our veins, too” (I, 2).

Manny identifies strongly not only as a Cuban, but as a revolutionary, which puts him in significant danger when he comes to Havana to ask Adela to return to the mountains with him. Simply being a young man in Havana puts Manny at great risk of being caught. “There’s not a man your age in the entire city,” Adela observes. “You stick out” (I, 1). To keep him safe until he returns to his rebel unit, Adela and Martina disguise Manny as a Loyalist by dressing him that belonged to Adela’s late Spanish husband, Rafael, and telling anyone who asks that he is their cousin, Joe. At first, the disguise seems to be a success – Manny not only “looks just like a Loyalist” in Martina’s estimation but his feigned Castilian lisp (“from Thpain”) adds an extra layer of authenticity (I, 2). Manny initially plays his role well – He argues that Madrid’s baseball team will easily defeat Havana’s team in an upcoming game and defends Spain’s military strategy when Davis, an American journalist, forces
him into a debate. But Manny cannot sustain this façade for long. When Davis asserts that it is only a matter of time until the Americans intervene against Spain – though not necessarily for Cuban independence – Manny’s rebel fire betrays him and reveals his true identity. Davis notes the rebel’s propensity for guerrilla tactics and how they “blend right into the populace” after attacking, but Manny issues a correction. “We are the populace” (I, 2).

Adela’s life is not so straightforward. “The truth is, I’m a half-blood,” she explains to Davis in Act II, Scene 1. “I don’t belong anywhere.” Her siblings push her to proclaim her Cuban heritage while Spaniards question her Spanish credibility. Fancy’s husband, Isidore, takes pleasure in putting Adela in her place, reminding her that the regulations that restrict inheritance are particularly stringent “for island born nationals” (I, 2). Adela’s ownership of her deceased husband’s pharmacy is tenuous at best, forcing her to defend her Spanish credentials. “I gave my husband to this war, your Excellency. He was cut down by a rebel bullet in a field hospital . . . Do you suggest that my dedication to servicing our countrymen is any less because I was born in Havana and not Madrid?” Later in the play, however, a slip of the tongue reveals that despite her protestations to the contrary, Adela is more Cuban than she would like to admit.

ADELA: What would you look at if you could see through things, Mr. Davis?
DAVIS: I’d want to know if people are lying.
ADELA: Perhaps that’s as it should be. Some things remain unknown.
DAVIS: Surprising to hear a scientist talk like that.
ADELA: I’m a woman. And a Cuban.
DAVIS: I don’t believe I’ve ever heard you claim that mantle before.
ADELA: What? “Woman”? I assure you, Mr. Davis—
DAVIS: I mean Cuban.
ADELA: I misspoke.
DAVIS: I know you’re a woman.
ADELA: I only meant that Cubans are contradictory.

(II, 1)

Questions

1. Although Adela and Martina have the same mother, Adela feels a much stronger connection to her maternal Spanish heritage than Martina. Why might this be?

2. Consider the line “The lady doth protest too much, methinks” from Act III, Scene 2 of William Shakespeare’s _Hamlet_. Who says this line, why, and to whom does it refer? How can it be applied to Adela in _Becoming Cuba_?

3. What does the title of the play, _Becoming Cuba_, suggest about the characters and their country?

4. Consider contemporary American culture. What types of “us” and “them” distinctions do people make in our society? What motivates those who label particular groups of people as “the other”? What is the impact of such distinctions?
The Promise of the Future

Becoming Cuba is set in 1897, two years into the third Cuban war for independence from Spain. By this time, the island had been “discovered” by Europeans more than four hundred years prior, enough time for a variety of groups to stake a claim to it. But why is Cuba perceived as so valuable to so many? What is so special about this one plot of land in the Caribbean? The answers vary for each group, ranging from ancestral rights to “New World” trade strategy, but to all of them, Cuba represents what could be – Native, colonial, and imperial factions all see it as a place of potential. They imagine opportunities and possibilities, some of which come to fruition while others are not quite what were hoped for.

In a vignette that begins Act I, Scene 2, a character referred to as “Hatuey’s Wife” (Hatuey was chief of the Tainos, an indigenous Cuban people) describes her first meeting with new arrivals to her land in the late 15th century. Her story recounts tentative first impressions followed by warm cross-cultural welcomes from a sympathetic, benevolent host:

I knew they were men . . . Deformed men, under all the armor. I thought they must be hideous to cover themselves like that. We have a man like that, and we never let him out of the cave where he lives. The sight of his body is offensive. I thought the white men were like him. Maybe they had been cast off from their land of beautiful brown people – too many of them to keep tied up, so the queen sent them away in this spaceship, over the ocean. I felt sorry for them . . . I invited them to dinner. (I, 2)

Unfortunately, things did not work out at Hatuey’s wife had hoped they would. “They came, they ate. And then they killed us” (I, 2).

Meanwhile, the Little Conquistador’s monologue that begins Act II, Scene 1 shares the new arrivals’ excitement at landing in what they believed to be Asia. He remembers the explorers’ excitement to arrive in what Columbus called “the Spice Islands,” but also that the men quickly discovered that this new land, Cuba, was not quite what they had hoped for. Still, they held out hope that Cuba’s promise would come true.

We ripped out every sapling within fifteen leagues . . . and we brought [Columbus] the trees

5. Make a list of all of the words that identify you. Consider
- Roles you play in your family, school, and community
- Religious and political affiliations
- Racial or ethnic background/heritage
- Hobbies or personal pursuits
- Where you live or grew up (For example, the person writing this would include Woman, Sister, Daughter, Wife, Auntie, Friend, Teacher, Actor, Bostonian, Vegetarian, Yogi, Portuguese, and Red Sox fan on her list)

How does each of these identities shape your perspective on the world? Your sense of justice? Is there any one identity you identify more strongly with than the others? Are there any labels that others place on you that you would prefer not to own?
to sniff. Cinnamon! Clove! No scent and you were whipped . . . At night, we spiced our meat
with the imagined flavors of Malabar and black pepper. No one had the guts to admit they
couldn’t taste them. We stuffed our faces with wild pig and land crabs. Saffron and frankincense.
More valuable than gold. We were gonna be rich men if we ever got off this island. Not
a tree left standing. (II, 1)

The potential inherent in the New World is made all the more vivid when contrasted with Spain
itself. “When we landed here,” another Conquistador recalls in Act II, Scene 3, “it was the most
beautiful country I had ever seen . . . So much water. So much green. My home, Castilla, may God all
powerful bless and protect her is . . . dry and dusty . . . For the first time in our lives, we would get
anything we wanted. All we had to do was take it.”

Hundreds of years later, Cuba in 1897 is still a fertile, green place full of change and possibility,
sharply contrasted with the dry stagnation of Spain. Davis clearly understands the potential the new
world holds over the old.

DAVIS: Spain is so –
ADELA: Dry?

DAVIS: Old. Everything that’s ever going to happen there has already happened. Not like
here. Every tree, every stone is - unknowable. It must have been so beautiful here. Before the
war. Like Eden. (II, 1)

Even Fancy, the wife of a Spanish lieutenant, would rather stay in Cuba despite her disdain for the
country, than return home. All that awaits her there are “two potatoes in the cold cellar and a crypt
full of bones. Titles, and not a gold coin among them . . . A moat full of ashes. That’s what’s left of
the empire. There’s not a man left standing in Madrid. Boys kidnapped off the street to come and
fight. Why do they care so much about this island of curses and disease? Let them all rot, I say” (II,
1). Fancy’s husband, Isidore, shares his wife’s impressions of Cuba and its inhabitants. “I have to say,
at first I didn’t know what she was talking about. My wife,” he remarks. “But now, I see it. That
intoxicating magic all you islanders have. It’s so . . . Modern. It’s the future, isn’t it?” (II, 3).

Questions

In Becoming Cuba, playwright Melinda Lopez begins multiple scenes with monologues spoken by
characters from Cuba’s past.

1. How does this choice lend context to the play’s events?

2. Read this excerpt from the play’s final moments:

   ADELA: Your palm. (DAVIS gives her his hand. SHE takes it. Studies it. Places it on her face.
   Traces the outline of her body. Rests it on her waist.) This is not the future. This is not tomorrow.
   This is now. And that is all there is.

   (SHE moves slowly in towards him. HE responds. THEY dance without music – the sound of the
   breeze in the trees. MANNY holds the baby. CHUCHO plays peekaboo.

   Music.

   HATUEY’S WIFE dances a slow easy two step with the CONQUISTADOR. THE SOLDIER smokes
   in the moonlight.)
Consider Adela’s words and the final image, which includes characters from the past and the present. What is the playwright saying about this moment in time?

3. Compare and contrast palm reading, the old world way of understanding someone, with the x-ray, a new technological innovation that Adela and Davis discuss in Act II, Scene 1.

4. As a member of the Cuban rebels, Manny believes that if Cuba is to live up to her promise, she may need to die first. What does he mean by this? What does Manny do? How does his personal sacrifice reflect his commitment to his dreams for his country’s future?

MASTERY ASSESSMENT

ACT I

Scene 1
1. Why has Fancy come to the pharmacy?
2. What is Martina eager to demonstrate for Davis?
3. Why does Adela refuse to carry newspapers in the pharmacy?
4. Why is there no tobacco in stock at the pharmacy?
5. Who is Chucho? What does he steal?
6. Where did Adela study?
7. What kind of event does Fancy invite Adela to attend with her?
8. Who is Manny? Why is he disguised as a beggar?
9. According to Martina, why did she get in trouble for her blue dress?
   According to Adela, why did she get in trouble?
10. For what reason has Manny come to see Adela?
11. Who is Rafael? What happened to him?
12. What did Davis retrieve for Adela?
13. What is the cause of Davis’s illness?

Scene 2
14. Dressed in Rafael’s clothes, what does Manny look like?
15. Who does Manny pretend to be when Davis wakes up?
16. How does Davis figure out who Manny really is?
17. Who is Isidore?
18. What items, left behind by Fancy, does Isidore hope to retrieve?
19. According to Davis, why can’t the Americans openly aid the Cuban rebels yet?
   How does Davis think he and other journalists can help?
20. According to Manny, why do the rebels burn the sugar mills?
21. What did Papi do when the Spanish seized his farm?
22. Where is Manny going with Davis? When will they leave?
ACT II

Scene 1
1. How does Davis plan to get his story back to his publisher?
2. How did Manny almost die as a child?
3. Why did Adela marry Rafael, even though his loyalties were in conflict with her family’s loyalties?
4. What happened three years ago at the last game between Havana and Madrid’s baseball teams?
5. Where are Manny, Martina, and Davis going?

Scene 2
6. How did Martina get shot?
7. What does Manny agree to do in exchange for fifty percent of Adela’s next shipment of medical supplies?
8. Who do Martina and Chucho hide from?
9. What does Adela think will happen if the Americans intervene in the war?
10. According to Manny, what did Papi consider doing the night before the Spanish came to take his family’s land?
11. Manny reveals that he was actually the one who ordered and led the burning of the family’s farm. Why did he do it?
12. Why does Martina decide to join the rebels?

Scene 3
13. What did Isidore find in the camp of the rebels his militia killed?
14. What does Isidore present to Adela in a box?
15. Where does Adela send Chucho with money and a note?

Scene 4
16. Why is Davis leaving Cuba?
17. What do the rebels call Papi’s new daughter?
The World Before the Play: The Road to Rebellion

Contagious Independence – 1776

America fights and wins independence from Great Britain, allowing them the freedom to trade with new countries and colonies. Cuba becomes a major trading partner, and this relationship with the freshly independent United States encourages Cuba to envision a future free from Spain.

Room for Sugar – 1789-1790

As French revolutionary ideals spread through the French colony of Haiti, slavery is abolished in the colony, thus ending Haiti’s leadership in sugar production. Cuba quickly fills the gap, and by the 1820s becomes the world’s leading sugar manufacturer. Cuba’s economy prospers, sharpening Cubans’ desire for independence.

Motherland Control – 1808

As Cuba flourishes, Spain finds itself engulfed in debt from past wars and colonial conflicts. To raise money, Spain looks to booming Cuba, taxing its resident twice as much as Spaniards to alleviate the country’s debt.

Taxing the people only spurs dissent in Cuba. To control the burgeoning rebellions attitudes, Spain institutes Captain Generals with absolute powers over the Cubans, often censoring rebels and only appointing leaders with allegiance to Spain.

Other Wars – 1860

Haiti and the Dominican Republic join a long list of Caribbean nations who fight for and win independence from colonial powers. Cuba and Puerto Rico remain Spain’s only colonies in the region. Cuba is dubbed “the ever faithful isle.” To fund its military losses, Spain imposes exorbitant taxes on the Cuban people.

The Glorious Revolution – 1868

On October 10, 1868, Cuban plantation owner Carlos Manuel Cespedes frees his slaves and proclaims rebellion against Spain, igniting the Ten Years’ War. By 1870, the goal of this rebellion becomes clear: Cuban independence and emancipation. Afro-Cubans in eastern Cuba support the effort, which remains isolated in eastern Cuba and does not spread to the richer, whiter, Western Cubans who still hold allegiance to Spain to protect their ability to use slave labor. The Ten Years’ War ends in a stalemate with a peace treaty in which Spain promises – but never delivers – some autonomy to Cubans.

October 10 is still a national holiday in Cuba, holding the same significance as our July 4 holiday.

After the War – 1878-1895

After the unsuccessful Ten Years’ War, Spain neglects the colony of Cuba. Roads and schools fall into disrepair, and the people grow increasingly poor and desperate.
A Desperate Situation – 1890-1895

In the early 1890s, the world economy enters a major recession. Spain raises taxes on American imports into Cuba and in turn, America raises tariffs on Spanish products entering the United States from Cuba. The trade relationship between Cuba and the United States ends, devastating the Cuban people further. Cubans perceive their only remaining option to be revolt and seizure of their independence once and for all from Spain.

On February 24, 1895, Cuban revolutionaries in eastern Cuba proclaim Cuba’s independence from Spain.

The Revolution – 1895

Jose Marti, beloved Cuban poet and idealist, and Generals Antonio Maceo and Maximo Gomez, veterans of the Ten Years’ War, launch a new rebellion. Marti is killed within two weeks and becomes a martyr to the revolution. He is still claimed by both the Communist party and the radical right as inspiration for a free Cuba.

Because the revolution is supported by the campesinos in the countryside, Spain institutes a policy of Reconstrucción. Cubans outside of the fortified cities are given eight days to leave behind all property and “concentrate” in city camps or be killed on sight. With no infrastructure in place to support the massive numbers of people, an estimated 200,000 Cubans, mostly women and children, die of starvation and disease. Photos of the skeletal citizens horrify and galvanize the American populace.

The Play Begins – 1897

Becoming Cuba begins two years into the Cuban revolution. Guerilla warfare proves to benefit the Cuban rebels, and disease alone kills nearly 22% of Spanish military personnel sent to Cuba. A Cuban victory seems possible, but the United States signs the Treaty of Paris with Spain which forces Spain to surrender and grant Cuba independence.
Who’s Who in the Third Cuban War for Independence

The Cubans

José Martí (1853-1895) – A poet and essayist who advocated for Cuban independence from Spain on the grounds that it was its own nation with its own culture and customs. He established the Cuban Revolutionary Party in 1892 to organize a war for independence from Spain. Martí was fiercely anti-colonial and opposed American intervention in Cuba. He was killed in a battle against Spanish troops in 1895 and is considered a Cuban national hero.

Maximo Gomez (1836-1905)
General of the Cuban Army of Independence who trained the fighters to use guerilla tactics, such as the machete charge. Retired in 1898 following the Cuban War for Independence.

Antonio Maceo (1845-1896)
Lieutenant General of the Cuban Army of Independence who was killed by a Spanish unit on his way to a meeting with Gomez. He is remembered as a genius of military strategy. In Becoming Cuba, Manny claims to have fought at Maceo’s side in the battle at Mal Tiempo.
**The Spaniards**

**Arsenio Martínez Campos** (1831-1900)  
Captain-General of Cuba who was replaced by Valeriano Weyler in 1895 after his failure to win over the rebels and refusal to use tactics such as internment camps and ethnic cleansing.

**Valeriano “Butcher” Weyler** (1838-1930) – A Spanish general who was named Captain-General of Cuba in 1896. In an attempt to suppress the Cuban Liberation Army, he instituted a “Reconstruction Plan” that separated peasants from insurgents by placing them into camps. The camps’ close quarters led to quick spread of disease and malnutrition. American yellow journalism sensationalized Weyler’s tactics and nicknamed him “the butcher.”

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**The Americans**

**James G. Blaine** (1830-1893) – United States Secretary of State under President Benjamin Harrison. Blaine focused U.S. foreign policy on expanding American power through the attempted annexation of territories like Hawaii, Samoa, and Cuba.

**William McKinley** (1843-1901)  
President of the United States during Cuba’s final war for independence and the subsequent Spanish-American War. McKinley shared in the American public’s outrage at the internment strategy Weyler employed against the rebels, but hoped that diplomatic measures would resolve the conflict. In 1898, following the explosion of the USS Maine in Havana’s harbor, McKinley turned to Congress, which declared war on Spain and issued the Teller Amendment, a pledge that the United States would not try to annex Cuba.

**Theodore Roosevelt** (1858-1919)  
An American colonel who was co-founder of the 1st United States Volunteer Cavalry, also known as the “Rough Riders.” Although the Rough Riders were one of three units that originally trained as a cavalry, they fought on foot and were the only unit to see action in the Spanish-American War.
Yellow Journalism

I. Origins

In *Becoming Cuba*, Adela refuses to stock newspapers in her pharmacy. There are “thirty-five dailies in Havana,” she explains. “The Enquirer, the Herald, the Elegente, the Independent . . . the Rebel, the New Rebel, the World, the Journal – Republican, Liberal/Conservative and Loyalist . . . all with three editions, and in translation for the tourists . . . If I carry one, I have to carry them all – no newspapers” (I, 1). Each paper reports on local events with a social or political perspective, so if Adela were to carry any particular paper, she would be sending a message that she endorses the viewpoints of that publication.

The type of reporting in these papers was known as “yellow journalism” and was focused more on sensationalism than facts. Exaggeration of events, bold headlines, vivid pictures or drawings, and dramatic sympathy with underdog figures were yellow journalism’s main hallmarks. The term itself originated with two American papers that Adela mentions – the *New York World*, published by Joseph Pulitzer, and the *New York Journal*, published by William Randolph Hearst. The *World* featured “Hogan’s Alley,” a popular cartoon strip by Richard F. Outcault that depicted life in New York City’s slums and included a character known as the Yellow Kid. In an effort to boost the *Journal*’s sales, Hearst hired Outcault away from Pulitzer, leading to a bidding war between the publishers. Hearst ultimately won, but Pulitzer hired a new cartoonist to continue drawing “Hogan’s Alley” for the *New York World*. According to the U.S. State Department’s Office of the Historian, “the battle over the Yellow Kid and a greater market share gave rise to the to the term yellow journalism. Once the term had been coined, it extended to the sensationalist style employed by the two publishers in their profit-driven coverage of world events, particularly developments in Cuba.”

II. United States Intervention

Jackson Davis, the American journalist in *Becoming Cuba*, writes for Pulitzer’s *New York World* newspaper. He wants to write a story about the independence movement that will help increase American sympathies for the rebels because he knows that public sympathy for the rebels will make American government intervention on their behalf more likely. Davis has seen first-hand journalism’s ability to influence public opinion back home. The Spanish general known as “Butcher” Weyler has “got Americans perturbed,” he explains to Manny, Adela, and Martina in Act I, Scene 2. “All those folks burned off their land, rounded up in camps, waiting to die. Skeletons on the front page of the *Journal* sent the Ladies Aid Society on a rampage. And you know, when women get it into their heads to support the insurgents, it’s all over.” Manny wants to skip the formalities and get right to the point. “Send us weapons,” he tells Davis. “Help the rebellion” (I, 2). But Davis knows that Congressional support is necessary and the only way to get that is by giving them the right kind of
motivation. “A million people read my newspaper. That’s who’s going to put pressure on Congress. And the way we do that is give ‘em the whole story, with a headline two inches wide” (I, 2). Adela, however, is not keen on the idea of America getting involved and choosing sides. She sees America’s interest in the war as hypocritical and self-serving and confronts Davis with truths he cannot help but acknowledge.

ADELA: Mr. Davis, you write the truth?

DAVIS: Yes. Exclusively.

ADELA: Then tell your readers about the iron bars of the Cuban prisons.

DAVIS: I have. Thousands of men unjustly imprisoned.

ADELA: Let’s leave justice out of it for the moment . . . Where does that iron come from, Mr. Davis? Cuba produces no iron of its own. The barricades, the barbed wire, the bullets – that kills innocents on both sides. Where does all that hardware come from?

DAVIS: Pittsburgh.

ADELA: Your readers supply the Butcher with one hand and cheer the insurrection with the other. (I, 2)

By 1897, the year in which Becoming Cuba is set, the United States government had already begun staking out its position on the island nation. In 1881, Secretary of State James G. Blaine, who recognized Cuba’s strategic importance for all trade in the Caribbean, wrote in a letter to the U.S. Minister to Hawaii that Cuba, “that rich island, the key to the Gulf of Mexico, and the field for our most extended trade in the Western Hemisphere, is, though in the hands of Spain, a part of the American commercial system . . . If ever ceasing to be Spanish, Cuba must necessarily become American and not fall under any other European domination.” In 1897, President William McKinley, who agreed with Blaine that Cuba should be under U.S. control but was reluctant to intervene militarily in the war, offered to purchase Cuba from Spain for $300 million. Spain rejected the offer, and McKinley sent the USS Maine to Havana harbor to protect U.S. interests as the conflict continued. The Maine mysteriously sank on February 15, 1898, killing 266 people, and although inquiries conflicted over the official cause, popular opinion in the United States placed blame squarely on Spain. Meanwhile, publishers like Hearst and Pulitzer added fuel to the anti-Spanish fires with a deluge of reporting about rumored Spanish plots to sink the ship. When a U.S. naval investigation found that the likely source of the explosion was a mine in the harbor, Hearst and Pulitzer seized upon the information to rally the war cause.

In Becoming Cuba, Davis sees similar opportunity in the riots that break out following a baseball game between Havana and Madrid. Davis finds safety from the fighting in Adela’s pharmacy, where he immediately sits down to write an article that clearly depicts the rebels as “innocent non-combatants” who have suffered through “horrors of death by starvation and disease” (II, 2). In the midst of the chaos, Davis knows that his account of the events will rally the troops back home.

DAVIS: Seventeen confirmed dead, scores wounded, the Loyalists on a rampage – Best of all, they’ve gone after the Americans. The Butcher and his fan club . . . It’s all over the wires – the pushback from the Loyalists – They feel the country slipping through their fingers . . . When this runs – Hearst sent me a wire – gave me the front page – it’s going to set Washington on fire. “Death throes of the Spanish empire . . .” that’s good – The
American ambassador . . . he sent a telegram to [Colonel] Roosevelt – asking for military presence in Havana – Congress had to respond. They’ll send –

MARTINA: How awful.

DAVIS: No, it’s good. If the Loyalists go after Americans – it’s exactly what we need. (II, 2)

Davis plans to embed with the rebels and is willing to risk his life to document the realities of war and the fight for Cuban independence. But meanwhile, embellished stories by other reporters, published with dramatic drawings of the events, were also instrumental in drumming up support for the Spanish-American war, which would commence following the explosion of the Maine. Headlines on February 17, 1898 included “Maine Explosion Caused By Bomb Or Torpedo” (New York World), and “Destruction Of The War Ship Maine Was The Work Of An Enemy” and “$50,000 Reward For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage” (New York Journal). In Becoming Cuba, set two years earlier, the anti-Spanish headlines are already common – and effective. “Save the Cuban people, stop the Spanish massacres! The United States is coming,” Davis warns, “And they’re not going to fight for Spain” (I, 2).

Questions

1. Fancy tells Davis in Act I, Scene 1, “I never read the news. That way, I’m never confused.” What does she mean? What broader point is she making about the state of news reporting in the late 19th century?

2. In Act II, Scene 2, Adela tells Davis: “You are not a man of honor. You are a man of words.” Why is being a “man of words” an insult? Is journalism, as Davis practices it, an honorable profession? Is it honorable today?

3. Do Manny and the Cuban rebels want help from the United States? Do they consider United States intervention a good thing or a bad thing?

4. While many journalists from the period were writing what we consider yellow journalism, there was also a core of serious, well-intentioned journalists who were embedded with the troops and committed to provide truthful, fact-based reports. Research the lives and writings of Sylvester H. Scovel, Grover Flint, and Richard Harding Davis, all of whom inspired the character of Jackson Davis in Becoming Cuba. How did their articles differ from the yellow journalism of the time?

5. What does the phrase “knowledge is power” mean? How did publishers like Pulitzer and Hearst use their position as gatekeepers of knowledge to influence events?

6. What are some examples (recent or from the past) where journalistic reporting has affected US foreign policy or more local action? What are some modern examples of yellow journalism?

7. The United States sent military forces to other colonies in the Spanish empire throughout the 19th century for the stated purpose of protecting American interests as the regions rebelled against Spain. Research America’s interventions in the various rebellions against the Spanish empire and in other countries in the 20th and 21st centuries. What was the extent of U.S. involvement in these conflicts?
Which branches of the military were deployed? Did the U.S. “take a side” or play more of a peace-keeping role? Has history revealed that there were objectives other than those that were explicitly stated?

8. Consider more recent U.S. interventions into other countries, such as Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia, Somalia, and Kuwait. What prompted these interventions? What were the mitigating factors in each? Did the countries request the U.S.’s help? How were they similar to and different from the U.S. intervention in Cuba, in terms of goals, military involvement, length of occupation, and outcomes?

9. Where do you get your news? How do you know if a news source is trustworthy? Which news outlets present objective reporting and which ones implicitly endorse a particular viewpoint? How
Cuba & Baseball

Baseball may be America’s pastime, but it is also Cuba’s official national sport. Cuban students returning home from school in the United States and sailors docked in Cuba’s Matanzas Bay brought the game to the island in the 1860s. The timing was meaningful; The United States, which had successfully separated from its colonial oppressor, Great Britain, was a major destination for Cuban sugar exports. American cities like New York were viewed as aspirational examples of progress and modernity. New technologies such as railways and telegraphs made their way to the island and young Cubans attended American universities to receive the education and training needed to implement them. In America, Cubans were considered precisely that: Cuban, not Spanish. Meanwhile, other Spanish colonies in the western hemisphere were in open revolt against the empire while Spain recouped financial losses by oppressing its Cuban subjects with heavy taxes and limiting their ability to independently trade in new markets. Cubans who had spent time in America compared their home to the United States and grew dissatisfied with Spanish restrictions they felt prevented Cuba from progressing. As they saw their fellow Spanish outposts gain their independence and form new nations, Cubans began to rally around the traditions, practices, and qualities that made their culture unique and that served as the foundation of a Cuban national identity.

Spain, meanwhile, saw a direct correlation between Cuba’s international activity and its people’s demands for political representation and control over their economy. To the Cubans, baseball symbolized freedom and independence, and as the game gained popularity, Spain grew concerned that Cubans had developed a preference for baseball over Spanish bullfighting. To the Spaniards, attendance at bullfights was a way of declaring cultural allegiance. In 1869, one year after the start of Cuba’s first war of independence, the Ten Years’ War, Spain banned baseball on the island.

In 1878, the Pact of Zanjón ended the Ten Years’ War. Thousands of Cubans who had immigrated to the United States returned home, bringing with them an increased knowledge of and enthusiasm for baseball. Not only had they spent the years playing on university and municipal teams in America, but also been among the first professional baseball players in the United States. From the late 1870s to the early 1890s, more than two hundred amateur baseball teams were
formed in Cuba. Many of these were considered “summer clubs” and played only during the months of low economic activity and seasonal unemployment that followed the sugar harvest. In 1878, three teams came together to form the Cuban League in Havana. Esteban Bellán, the first Latin American player in the American Major League was the captain of the Havana Club, which won the first official Cuban League game.

Cubans flocked to baseball games, but not without risk. In Becoming Cuba, set in 1897, Manny, Martina, and Davis plan to watch the Havana Club and the Madrid Saints play, and Manny recounts how the last game between the two teams began well but ended badly:

_The game is three hours old and the Spanish Vice Consul gets up to stretch his legs. He's not going anywhere, mind you, but the crowd doesn’t know that. The Cubans – the fans, you know, don’t like that. Someone boos. Someone else throws something . . . and all of a sudden, the militaries are up, flanking this guy – guns out – Dead silence. We’re about to massacre this Spanish team, and all of a sudden, assholes are pulling guns . . . Everyone is holding their breath – and out of nowhere, this voice – just one voice – Viva Cuba! Viva Cuba Libre! The crowd goes nuts . . . and just as two Cubans in the crowd tackle these goons . . . there’s a riot . . . They called the season a draw. Our coach moved to Tampa._

**Questions**

1. Many of the Cubans who led the development of baseball on the island studied in American universities where they played on the schools’ teams. Esteban Bellán, for example, studied at Fordham University and would later become the first Latin American player in Major League Baseball. Research the founders of baseball in Cuba. What roles did they take on as managers and players? How did they use their American educations to create and facilitate the early Cuban baseball teams and leagues?

2. Until 1900, the Cuban Baseball League was a segregated organization that fielded only white teams. What factors led to the league opening to non-white players? Compare and contrast the timeline of the racial integration of the Cuban Baseball League with that of Major League Baseball in the United States.

3. When Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in 1959, he abolished all professional sports. Why?

4. Research current Cuban-born MLB players such as José Iglesias, Yasiel Puig, Alexei Ramírez, Yunel Escobar, Kendrys Morales, and Brayan Peña. What experience did they have playing baseball in their home country? How did they come to play in the United States? Have they expressed their feelings about the ongoing tensions between the United States and Cuba?

5. Research Cuba’s national baseball program, which serves as a feeder for the Cuban National Team. How do boys enter the program? In which international competitions does the Cuban National Team participate? How does the Cuban National Team fare versus opponents from other countries? Are there any qualities that characterize the Cubans’ approach to training and playing the game?
Suggestions for Further Reading

Plays by Melinda Lopez
- Alexandros
- Caroline in Jersey
- Gary
- Orchids to Octopi
- Sonia Flew

Cuba & Baseball
- Cuban Baseball (cubanball.com)
- Stealing Home: The Case of Contemporary Cuban Baseball (pbs.org/stealinghome/index.html)
- A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864-2006 by Peter C. Bjarkman
- The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball by Roberto González Echevarría

Cuban Wars of Independence
- 500 Years of Cuban History (historyofcuba.com)
- Crucible of Empire: The Spanish-American War (pbs.org/crucible)
- The Spanish War: An American Epic 1898 by G. J. A. O'Toole

Yellow Journalism
- Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies by W. Joseph Campbell
- The Yellow Kids: Foreign Correspondents in the Heyday of Yellow Journalism by Joyce Milton
- U.S. Diplomacy and Yellow Journalism, 1895-1898
  (history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/yellow-journalism)
Acting 1 – Character Analysis and Inner Monologue

1. Select a character from *Becoming Cuba*. Create a biographical sketch of the character by answering the following in first person from the character’s perspective:

   - Full name and date of birth.
   - Where did you grow up? Where do you live now?
   - Do you have any siblings?
   - Describe your relationship with your parents.
   - How did your childhood influence who you are today?
   - When you were young, what were your dreams and aspirations? Have these dreams changed over time? If so, how and why?
   - Do you have any secrets? If so, what are they?
   - What is your best quality? What is your worst quality?
   - Describe your sense of humor.
   - Do you have any hobbies? If so, what are they? Why do you enjoy them?
   - List your favorites: Food, color, music, season.

2. Identify a moment in the play when the character makes a major choice that will impact the rest of their lives. Options include, but are not limited to:

   - Adela’s decision to marry a Spaniard.
   - Martina’s decision to join Manny and the rebels.
   - Manny’s decision to burn his father’s farm.
   - Davis’s decision to confess his feelings to Adela.

3. Use the information from your character analysis and your viewing of the play to write an inner monologue (what the character is thinking and feeling but not saying) for the moment you selected. Emphasize the pros and cons of the different choices the character has and the reasoning behind his or her final decision. Perform the monologue for the class, paying special attention to:

   - Body language and facial expression.
   - Vocal tone and pacing.
   - Rhythms of movement.
**Acting 2 – Family Stories**

*Becoming Cuba* explores the politics of the Cuban War for Independence through the relationships among three siblings – Adela, Manny, and Martina. The events and experiences in their family history that unite and divide them have significant impact on their interactions.

Ask students to stand in a circle with the teacher in the center. Tell students to face the outside of the circle and close their eyes so they cannot see anyone. Ask them to think about their household, where they live, and those who are in charge of making family decisions. Whoever it is – be it mom, dad, grandma, someone else – what is the thing they say most in the house? What is the thing they say over and over again?

Once students have chosen the line, ask them to open their eyes and face back into the center of the circle. Tell the students to imagine you are playing them and they are playing the role of that leader of the household. On a count of three, ask them to all say the line they chose to you. They should look directly at you and use as much emotion as possible as they deliver their lines all at once. Repeat this several times, encouraging them to use more and more emotion. Next, ask students to add a gesture. Coach them to think about what this person looks like when they say this line – do they point, put hands on their hips, open their arms wide? Repeat with everyone saying their lines together again, and adding the gesture. Experiment with different levels of volume. Bigger gestures with bigger voices. Once the gesture and voice are as big as they can be, go around the circle as each student does their performance one at a time.

The final step is improvisational acting. Invite two student actors to come to the center of the circle. Ask student A to perform his or her line and gesture and Student B to respond as the family member who is hearing the line. Encourage Student B to act in a genuine way when s/he hears the line. Encourage the two actors to improvisationally build the scene.

**Variation:** Do this process using characters from *Becoming Cuba*.

**Creative Writing – Yellow Journalism**

Median historian Dr. W. Joseph Campbell writes in *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies* that yellow journalism was marked by the following defining characteristics:

- The frequent use of multicolumn headlines that sometimes stretched across the front page.
- A variety of topics reported on the front page, including news of politics, war, international diplomacy, sports, and society.
- The generous and imaginative use of illustrations, including photographs and other graphic representations such as locator maps.
- Bold and experimental layouts, including those in which one report and illustration would dominate the front page. Such layouts sometimes were enhanced by the use of color.
- A tendency to rely on anonymous sources, particularly in dispatches of leading reporters (such as
James Creelman, who wrote for the Journal and the World).

- A penchant for self-promotion, to call attention eagerly to the paper’s accomplishments. This tendency was notably evident in crusades against monopolies and municipal corruption.

Imagine you are a foreign correspondent for an American newspaper in the later 1890s and you have been assigned to travel to Cuba and report on events in the rebellion. Similar to Davis in Becoming Cuba, you have accepted the opportunity to “embed” with the rebels – meaning, you will live and travel with them to learn and write about their military strategy, daily routines, the fighters’ personal reasons for joining the rebellion, and how they prepare for battle. Select an event from the list below on which to focus and write an article that satisfies Campbell’s criteria above.

- Valeriano “Butcher” Weyler, the Spanish Governor-general of Cuba, has sent 500,000 farmers into barbed wired concentration camps in an effort to stop them from supplying the rebels with food. There is inadequate food and shelter available in the camps and thousands of people, including women and children, are dying from disease, malnutrition and starvation.
- Lieutenant General Maceo, second in command of the Cuban Liberation Army, was recently killed when he and his men were ambushed by a Spanish unit near the town of Punta Brava. The Spanish troops abandoned Maceo’s body where he fell, not realizing the identity of who they had killed.
- The USS Maine recently arrived in Havana on President McKinley’s orders to protect Americans living in Cuba. At 9:00pm on February 15, the ship exploded killing 266 of the 350 sailors on board. Although no exact cause has been determined, an underwater mine is suspected and the Spanish have been blamed for the incident.

Creative Writing 2 – Playwriting

The child of two Cuban nationals, Melinda Lopez can trace the path of the Cuban wars for liberation through her family tree, and the spark for this play is born out of an ancestral myth. “There is a legend in my family about my great-grandmother, who lived through the Cuban War of Independence,” Lopez says. “When she was 16, the Spanish came to take over her farm and sent her family to internment camps. My great-grandmother refused to go. She took her pet pig under her arms and walked up into the mountains to join the rebels. The play that I eventually wrote is not her story, but it’s certainly infused with her indomitable spirit.”

Talk to your relatives and investigate your own family history. Were any of your ancestors present for important historical events? How did you family come to the United States? Select a story from your family’s history to write a ten-minute play. Consider:

- How much of this story can I explore in a short format?
- What do I want the audience to know, understand, or wonder?
- How can I take the large-level social issues or events that are the backdrop of the story and show their real impact through the central conflict in my play?
**Extension:** Cast, direct, and perform the 10-minute plays in class or for an invited audience.

**Visual Art 1 – Scenic Design**

In the *Becoming Cuba* script, playwright Melinda Lopez includes the following description of the play’s setting:

Most of the play takes place in a pharmacy and apothecary, Havana, 1897. The walls are lined with shelves containing glass bottles filled with ointments, tinctures, and colorful medicines. There are also sweets, tobacco, drinks, small toys, and other necessities for sale.

Research pharmacies in the late 19th century and assemble the images, colors, and patterns that find onto a poster board. Use your visual research to inspire a set design drawing for *Becoming Cuba*. In a presentation of your work to the class, describe how you interpreted the playwright’s description of the setting and used your research to inform your design.

**Visual Art 2 – Personal Symbol and Belief Collage**

The characters in Becoming Cuba struggle with concepts of identity and loyalty. Over the course of the play, Adela in particular goes through a process of defining who she really is and what she believes in.

Pass out index cards and markers or colored pencils to all students. Discuss:

- What is a symbol? Discuss the idea that a symbol is something that represents something else. Many cultures use visual symbols that represent their beliefs or values. The symbols remind them (and signal to others) what is important in that culture.

**Brainstorm:**

- What are some common symbols we recognize and what do they represent? For example:
  - The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of America and a reminder of independence and freedom.
  - Stars and stripes of the American flag stars to represent each of the 50 states, white = purity and innocence, red = hardiness and valor, blue = perseverance and justice.
  - McDonald’s “golden arches” to remind people of the product that restaurant is most famous for.
- What are some symbols in *Becoming Cuba*? What do they represent? Consider:
  - The bottles in Adela’s pharmacy
  - Baseball
  - Bullfighting
  - Adela’s earrings
  - Martina’s blue dress
  - Papi’s farm
Discuss:
• What do you believe in or value? What images are associated with your beliefs and values? What actions do you take in your life to support/carry out/embody those beliefs and values?
• If you had a symbol to represent yourself, what would it be?

Give students 5-7 minutes to draw a personal symbol that represents them on the blank side of the index card. On the lined side, they should write a personal belief statement, completing the sentence, “I believe in ____________.”

Use one of the following processes to share symbols, depending on what time allows for:
1. Place a poster board at the front of the room. Invite students to come to the front, one at a time, to tape their symbols to the poster board, and read their personal belief statements and describe actions they take to live out those beliefs.
2. Divide students into groups to share their symbols, statements, and actions.
3. Ask for a few volunteers to share their symbols, statements, and actions with the class.

Applaud each other’s contributions, then discuss:
• What similarities and differences exist between the beliefs and symbols of people in this learning community?
• What kinds of actions do the members of this community take to live out their values and beliefs?
• The characters in the play must all make a decision about who they are, what they believe, and what they are willing to do to live those beliefs. What actions do Adela, Martina, and Manny take?