

# The Guide

*A Theatergoer's Resource*

## Education & Community Programs Staff

Kelsey Tyler  
Education & Community Programs Director

Clara-Liis Hillier  
Education & Community Programs Associate

Jonas Angelet  
Community Programs Manager

Matthew B. Zrebski  
Resident Teaching Artist

## Resource Guide Contributors

Yasmin Ruvalcaba and Nicholas Kessler

Benjamin Fainstein  
Literary Manager

Claudie Jean Fisher  
Associate Director of Marketing & Communications

Mikey Mann  
Graphic Designer

PCS's 2018-2019 Education & Community Programs are  
generously supported by:



with additional support from

**Rick Caskey and Sue Horn-Caskey**

**Goulder Family Foundation**

**Reser Family Foundation**

**Juan Young Trust**

**and other generous donors**

# Native Gardens

By Karen Zacarías

## Cast and Creative Team

Learn more about the team that created this amazing production.

[-Click Here-](#)

## An Interview with the Playwright Karen Zacarías

Explore the background of the play, the playwright and more.

[-Click Here-](#)

## The World of the Play

Explore the creation of Karen Zacarías' script  
and the design elements.

[-Click Here-](#)

## Brief Synopsis

Pablo and Tania Del Valle are a young Latino couple who have recently relocated to an affluent Washington, D.C, neighborhood. Pablo is a rising attorney, and his very pregnant wife Tania is preparing to defend her doctoral dissertation. Their next-door neighbors, Virginia and Frank Butley, are welcoming but nervous about changes to their community. After the Del Valles reveal their plan to update their dilapidated house and yard, the Butleys eagerly offer their approval. Tania and Frank bond swiftly over their mutual love of gardening, though their styles are vastly different, with Frank preferring the traditional English garden and Tania advocating for native, local plants.

When Pablo, pressured to impress the partners at his new law firm, accidentally "volunteers" to host an office barbeque one weekend, the Del Valles work quickly to get their yard in shape. During the process of replacing their fence, they discover that their property line actually falls two feet into the middle of Frank's prized garden. With both the barbeque and the neighborhood horticulture competition fast approaching, the couples have little time to settle the dispute before the fence must be installed. What begins as a property debate soon spirals into a comedic border dispute, exposing both couples' notions of race, taste, class and privilege.

In *Native Gardens*, playwright Karen Zacarías successfully weaves pertinent societal issues into fast-paced, humorous dialogue. And, she's managed to create four sympathetic characters: "Everybody has a heart. Nobody is trying to be mean. They're all good Americans, just four different kinds of Americans."



# THE ARMORY

## Theater Etiquette

*Please share the following points with your group of students. Encourage the students to practice these points throughout the workshop. Going to see a play is very different from going to the movies. During live theatre, the audience is as important a part of the experience as the actors.*

- **Live response is good!** If you're telling a story to a friend, and they really respond or listen, it makes you want to tell the story better—to keep telling the story. So, the better that an audience listens, laughs and responds, the more the actors want to tell the story. In this way, the audience (as well as the actors) can make a performance great.
- **The actors can hear you talking.** If an audience member is not paying attention, the actors know it. Have you ever had a conversation with someone and felt that they'd rather be someplace else? This is the EXACT feeling actors get when people in the audience are talking

- **The actors can see you.** Even though actors are pretending to be other characters, it is their job to “check in” with the audience in order to tell the story better. This is another way in which theatre greatly differs from the movies. Film actors can do a take over and over to try to get it right. Theatre actors have one chance with an audience and want to make sure they are communicating clearly. Imagine trying to tell a group of fellow students something only to see them slouching, pretending to be bored, or sitting with their eyes closed in attempt to seem disinterested and “too cool” for what you had to say. Think about it...

- **Cell phones, beepers, candy wrappers, loud gum smacking.** Please turn off all cell phones and do not eat or chew gum inside the theater. These things disturb the people around you as well as the actors. As much as you might be tempted to text a friend how cool the play you're watching is, please wait until after it is over to send any texts.

*\*Thank you to Montana Shakespeare in the Parks for these excellent etiquette suggestions.\**

## Education Programs: Stage Door

Portland Center Stage's Stage Door Program seeks to provide all young people with opportunities to experience and directly participate in the art of high-quality, professional theater in a context that supports their education. The following pages contain activities to help students explore themes found in our production of *Native Gardens*. We encourage you to choose the most appropriate activities for your group and adapt as needed.

### GOALS:

- To encourage personal connections between the students and the major themes of the play.
- To excite students about the story and introduce the theatrical elements of the production.
- To engage students using the actors' tools (body, voice, imagination).

## Activity #1:

### Last Straw

The goal of this activity is to have the students make creative decisions on when to put their foot down and refuse to accept an arrangement. It allows them to analyze what elements in life are more valuable over others and look at the reasoning behind those decisions.

#### HOW IT WORKS:

- Have all of the students move to one side of the room, and set up a “line” in the middle of the room.
- \*NOTE: this activity can also be done with the students sitting down, if there is not enough room to have them move around.
- Set up situations for the students to vote on. Have them cross the line if they are willing to take the compromise (\*if sitting, have the students stand).

#### EXAMPLES:

You get to meet your favorite movie star, BUT you never get to see one of their movies again.

You don't have homework for the whole year, BUT you don't get to talk to your friends during the school day.

You always get to have the newest iPhone, BUT the internet is always slow.

You get to eat at any restaurant that you want for free, BUT you never get to eat a home-cooked meal again.

You are able to recall everything for your tests and quizzes, BUT you forget all your childhood memories.

You get to travel anywhere in the world, BUT you don't get to see your family for a year.

You are able to speak all the languages in the world, EXCEPT for your native language.

- Take moments to ask the students to defend their choices. To those who didn't cross the lines, ask them what was it that held them back?

#### REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

Which compromises did you find the most difficult? Did you ever feel swayed by your fellow classmate's decisions? In which way, and why? If you were ever the first one to move/stand, did you feel hesitant? Do you think past experiences placed a role in making these decisions?

Do you think compromises are important in life? Have you ever had to make a compromise?

Would it be more difficult to make a decision if someone else was affected? For example, what if, you get to meet your favorite movie star, BUT they are never able to make another movie again?

## Activity #2:

### ...The End

This activity focuses on having the students work together in making group decisions. Then the activity also focuses on showing the students how everyone has different perspectives and may read moments differently.

#### HOW IT WORKS:

- The entire group will work together to create the beginning of the story.
- Decide on these elements:
  - Time period
  - Setting
  - Main Characters
  - Characters Relationship
  - A prop
  - An issue that arises
  - A sentence of dialogue
- Make sure everyone agrees on the beginning of the story. Now split up the group into 3-5 smaller groups throughout the space.
- Give them time to continue the story and have them write it down as a group, they must begin their section with the line of dialogue and must make sure to include the prop at some point in their story?
- What happens next? What is the climax of the issue? How is the issue resolved?
- Once the endings are complete, have the students come back together to share.

#### REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

We all started with the same ingredients, how did the ending differ? Why do you think the endings were different? Did you base your endings or any moments on personal experiences? How was the prop used differently in all the stories? How did your characters develop throughout the story?

Did you feel everyone in your group had a say in how the story went? Was it easier to work as a big group to create the beginning or to work in your smaller groups to create an ending together?

Which ending feels more like fiction, and which one seems the most realistic?

Which ending would you love to see?

## Activity #2B: Picture That

This next activity continues to focus on the different interpretations that we may have about situations. It also allows the students to visualize a story that is written, and see how different people's imaginations are.

### HOW IT WORKS:

- Have the students split back up into their groups.
- Take the ending that the most people would love to see, and define the moment in which the prop is used.
- Have the groups take 2-3 minutes to create a tableau of that moment. The tableau must showcase the characters, setting, prop, action, and intentionality.
- The groups once more come together and present their tableau of the moment.

### REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

We all had the same information, but how did the tableaux end up different?

Which tableau do you think represented the entire moment better? And what were some elements that achieved that? How does this compare to how we read situations in real life differently? Was it challenging to create the tableau with the different perspectives in your group?



## Activity #3: Traveling Themes

This activity allows students to dig into the themes of the play and the role they hold in both the fictional and real world. It also allows them to discuss the importance of the story and why PCS chose this play now.

### HOW IT WORKS:

- Have the group come together as one for the final discussion.
- Name the themes that we encountered during our activities today.
- Take a moment to discuss these themes and add in any others that play an important role in *Native Gardens*.
  - Conflict
  - Compromise
  - Putting your foot down
  - It's the law
  - "Things have always been this way"
  - Land ownership
  - Different cultures/backgrounds
  - Fairness
- Where else have we seen these themes and similar stories in media? Have the students name examples from movies, books, music, etc.

- Are these themes seen in any historical moments/pieces? Again, have the students share and discuss examples.
- Do you see these themes in any international elements? List and discuss.

### REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

Why is it important for PCS to choose this play now? Speculate how these issues will look like in the future? Do we imagine a different version of this play created in the future? Around what topics?

After discussing these themes are there any conflicts from your past that you can look back at differently? While *Native Gardens* shares themes with various media and moments, what makes it different and relevant?

## Post-Show Thought:

While watching *Native Gardens*, analyze the characters and find the character on stage you most align with. What do you find in common with them? What would you have done differently?

Above: L to R: Monica Rae Summers Gonzalez and Erick González in *Native Gardens* at Geva Theatre Center. Photo by Goat Factory Media Entertainment/ Courtesy of Geva Theatre Center