



## **Study Guide for *Yemaya's Belly* by Quiara Alegría Hudes**

Questions for audience members, students and teachers before seeing the play

### **Summary of the Play**

A boy is born into a humble farming family on a Latin American island, but after his first taste of a cold Coca-Cola, he dreams of a world beyond his family's meager acre. *Yemaya's Belly* follows the boy's epic journey into manhood and materialism, from farm to city, to a raft sailing to the north to meet the "President of America".

Pulitzer Prize winning playwright of *Water by the Spoonful* and a collaborator with Lin-Manuel Miranda (*Hamilton*) on the musical *In The Heights*, Quiara Alegría Hudes creates an unflinching view of the struggle to reach the United States of America through whimsy and brutal honesty.

Through *Yemaya's Belly*, see and discover the value of ancestry, culture, village life, family, spirit, and ritual within a world seemingly obsessed with commerce and a lust for wealth in a 'me first, me only' world. Through a young boy's coming of age story, we are led to face this universal and human dilemma.

Meet the characters Jesus, Maya, Mami, Lila, Jelin and Tico. Witness their stories, their losses, blessings and ultimately, their transformations, as they leave the shore and travel the sea, venturing even under the ocean while finding dignity, recognition, connection and freedom.

### **Study Questions**

- Why do people, especially those in Latin America and the Caribbean seek to migrate to the USA? (Please be specific as possible. For example, is it because of the food, iconic US dishes like hot dogs and French fries, the junk food? Is it because of the weather conditions, so varied and diverse?) Please state your understanding of the factors that cause people to migrate here.
- List some of the dangers faced by immigrants who come to the USA and state why these risks to life and liberty seem to still not make a difference to many in their decisions to migrate here.
- Some historians describe the USA as "a prison house of nations" while others say it is a "a refuge for the poor and those yearning to be free". Do you view any truth in



any of those conclusions or is one totally correct and the other totally incorrect? Why?

- Describe how it is possible for an adult person who migrated many years ago to the USA from a foreign country (and one that did not use English as its first or second language) still unable or unwilling to speak any English today?

### **Vocabulary Words**

- Machete
- Ritual
- Metaphor
- Hammock
- Nutrient-rich
- El Castillo
- Pentecostal
- Globalism
- Fiasco

### **Student Activity**

- If you (or you know someone who is) 1) fearful about their status as an undocumented alien who are affected by the public threats to deport them or 2) if, you are or know someone in the Muslim faith, affected by public threats to forbid travel, be forced to take a loyalty oath or to register in a special status, you can learn what their rights are under the law and how to obtain information about their rights There are several agencies or groups willing, able, and determined to assist them (See below).
- If you wish to be active, more supportive in enhancing our community, please consider volunteering and begin by checking out, selecting a non-profit entity; one that depends on volunteer support to attain its worthy mission (See below).

### **Resources:**

#### **American Immigration Lawyers Association**

Go to [www.ailatexas.org](http://www.ailatexas.org) for a lawyer near you

#### **Catholic Charites**



[www.ccdofw.org](http://www.ccdofw.org)

461 LBJ Freeway, Suite 128  
Dallas, Texas 75243  
Phone: 214.520.6590

**Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)**

[www.cair-dfw.org](http://www.cair-dfw.org)

Tel: (469) 554-0786

**Human Rights Initiative**

[www.hrionline.org](http://www.hrionline.org)

**214.855.0520**

*2801 Swiss Avenue  
Dallas, Texas 75204-5925*

**International Rescue Committee-**

[www.irc.org](http://www.irc.org)

(855) 973-7283

6500 Greenville Avenue  
Suite 500  
Dallas, TX 75206

**Mosaic Family Services-**

[www.mosaicservices.org](http://www.mosaicservices.org)

(214) 821-5393.

12225 Greenville Avenue, Suite 800

**Proyecto Inmigrante ICS, Inc.**

[www.proyectoimmigrante.org](http://www.proyectoimmigrante.org)

888.793.2182, extension 3201  
416 East Airport Fwy., # 150  
Irving, Texas

**Refugee Services of Texas**

[www.rstx.org](http://www.rstx.org)

(214) 821-4422  
9241 LBJ Freeway  
Suite 210  
Dallas, TX 75243



## **Part Two: For students after seeing the play**

### **The Characters**

Describe the behaviors of the characters in a word or two:

Jesus

Mulo

Maya

Yemaya

Mami

Lila

Jelin

Tico

### **Student Reflections**

What did the game of dominos seem to symbolize (if anything) to you?

What behaviors or actions by any of the characters could accurately be described as a ritual?

What discoveries were made by Mulo and Maya together?

What discoveries were made by Jelin and Jesus together?

What discoveries were made by Jesus and Tico together?

What discoveries were made by Mulo and Lila together?

What discoveries were made by Yemaya and Jesus together?

What two characters formed the best collaboration? How?



Describe what you feel is the relevance or meaning of (the island, the sea or the wind to the whole play's plot (please choose one element to describe)

What did Tico mean when he said to Mulo, " You don't know the difference between a blessing and a curse".