Study Guide

A Teatro Milagro National Touring Production

JUDGE TORRES

MILAGRO
AUTHENTIC • VIBRANT • PROVOCATIVE

Ajai Terrazas Tripathi, Marissa L. Sanchez, Cindy Angel, and Eduardo Vazquez Juarez in ***Judge Torres.*** Photo by Russell J. Young.

Judge Torres is a modern day fairytale rooted in Salvadoran folklore. Judge Xiomara Torres faces many obstacles in her turbulent journey crossing the border, maneuvering the US foster care system, missing her family, aging out, and becoming the most recent Latinx judge in Multnomah County, Oregon. But these barriers are no match for her Salvadoran-American grit.

In this study guide, we look into the life of Judge Xiomara Torres and the influences she had in her life that shaped this play.

We hope this information helps you enjoy the show, learn more about Judge Torres, and lead to questions and discussions revolving around the topics in the play.

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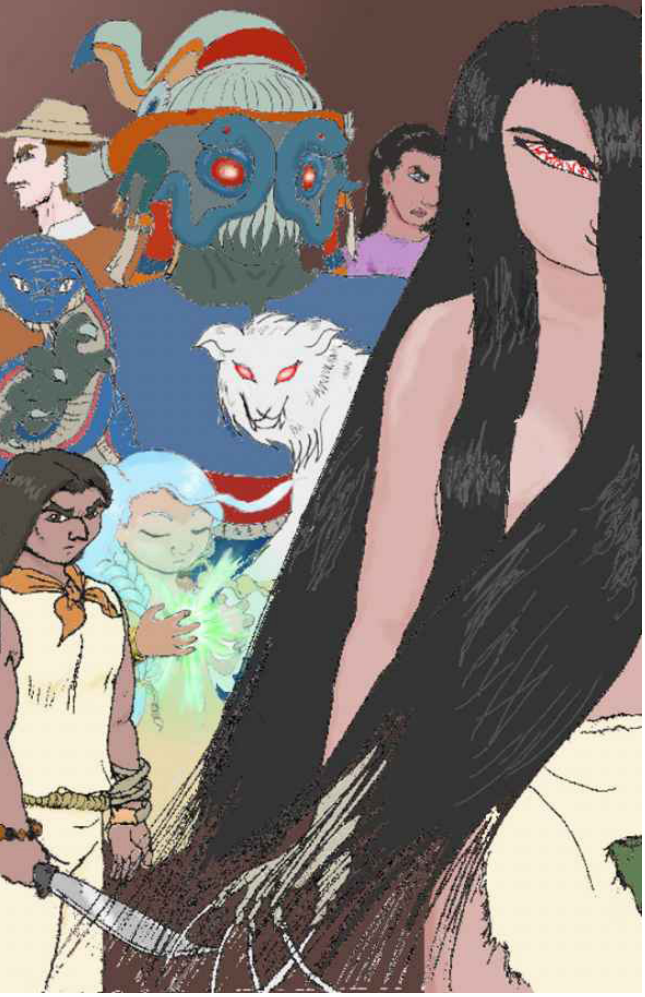
JUDGE TORRES

Written by **Milta Ortiz**

Directed by **Mandana Khoshnevisan**

Study guide research and writing by **Sylvia Malan-Gonzalez**



La Sihuanaba by Josue Misael Elias Romero, Jomir/DeviantArt

El Cipitío by Kamazotz/DeviantArt

Salvadoran Mythology

La Siguanaba and El Cipitío exist in Salvadoran mythology and in the childhood of Judge Torres. These legends, inherited from Mayan mythology, are shared in the play in a contemporary manner. La Siguanaba is a legend about a woman with long and tangled hair covering her face. When seen up close she has the face of a horse or a skull. She used to be called the “Sihuehuet”, meaning beautiful woman. She originally was a peasant girl that rose to become queen, when she seduced Tlaloc’s son, Prince Yeisun, with a witch’s brew. When her husband Yeisun was away at war she had romances with other men, and became pregnant with her son, El Cipitío. Sihuehuet was a neglectful mom, leaving Cipitío behind to pursue her romances and schemes. To take over the throne she came up with a plan to use a magic potion to poison Yeisun. After he drank the poison, Yesiun turned into a savage giant monster with two heads, and then consumed all the attendants at the palace’s feast. The guard intervened and defeated the beast, unfortunately killing Yeisun. When Yeisun’s father, Tlaloc, found out about Sihuehuet’s betrayal, he condemned her through the power of the gods. She would be then called Siguanaba ("hideous woman"). She would be beautiful at first sight, but she would then turn into a horrible creature luring in victims who were weakened by her powers. Legend states that she can be seen at night in the rivers of El Salvador, looking for her son, Cipitío, who was also cursed by Tlaloc to remain a boy for eternity. El Cipitío appears at night as a mischievous spirit, making jokes, laughing, and dancing around his victims. According to some villagers, Cipitío throws pebbles to beautiful girls that go alone to wash clothes in the rivers. El Cipitío is also recognized with his feet in backwards position, as a symbol of the tangled romance of his mother. Stories are told of farmers that come to their fields and find the footsteps of a boy, but eventually get lost following them, because not knowing that Cipitío has his feet backwards, they follow them in the wrong direction.

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Civil War in El Salvador

El Salvador is one of the smallest countries of Central America with a population of approximately six million people. From 1980 to 1992, a twelve-year civil war terrorized the people of El Salvador. The war was fought between the Salvadoran government and FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front), which was a left-wing group of guerillas. It also included the deliberate terrorizing and targeting of civilians by death squads, the recruitment of child soldiers, and other human rights violations, mostly done by the military. The National Guard of El Salvador was one of the most feared militaries. An unknown number of people disappeared during the conflict, and the UN reports that the war killed more than 75,000, many civilians and children. In 2016, the El Salvador Supreme Court ruled that the amnesty law was unconstitutional and that the El Salvador government could prosecute war criminals.

El Salvador, photo by Adam Kufeld.

Judge Xiomara Torres

Judge Xiomara Torres came to the U.S. in 1980 when she was only nine years old. She, her mother and three siblings fled El Salvador at the beginning of civil war. They walked through the wilderness for hours until they finally reached their destination.

Her father had already been living in the U.S. for about ten years, saving money to bring his family. In El Salvador, he had worked for the government translating telegrams, and ran into trouble when he tipped off guerillas about government plans to kill them. He was found out and had to flee to the U.S. for safety.

Judge Torres would take with her only memories. Memories of when she swam in the river near her home where women would gather to wash the household laundry. Memories of when she watched bullfights in the town plaza. Years later, as an adult, she returned after the war to find her home town filled with murals by Fernando Llort, who since has become one of her favorite artists.

Judge Torres and her family entered the U.S. without permission. They traveled by plane to Tijuana, and then slipped across the border through California. They met up with her father who was residing in Los Angeles, and they made a home in a small apartment. She loved school, but when she began, she barely spoke any English and the teachers only spoke English, so she realized she had to learn fast. Home life also made school difficult, but she was determined to succeed no matter what. She was 13 when she was abused by a family relative and didn't know what to do, and so she confided with her school counselor. Little did she know; her world would change from then on. A police officer picked her up from school, and then her siblings and their

belongings. They were moved to a foster care facility and within months she would lose contact with her parents, and she and her siblings would spend the next few years in the foster care system.

Growing Up In Foster Care System

Judge Torres's mother and siblings did not initially forgive her for tearing the family apart, and she found herself on her own, isolated from family and culture within the system that foster care had handed her. The families she stayed with were nice, but they did not speak Spanish, or have the kind of food that she was accustomed too. She had to grow up fast and learn to take care of herself. Judge Torres hoped to be adopted; but in her case, kids over the age of 13 have a 5% chance of finding a forever home. After 5 years in the foster care system she turned 18, then was out on her own.

The statistics for foster care kids leaving the system are bleak. One in five foster kids can become homeless, less than 3% will earn a college degree and over 70% of females will become pregnant by age 21. Judge Torres overcame the odds, thanks to a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) who became her mentor. In 1986, when Torres went to Los Angeles and testified against the relative who had abused her, she was introduced to Jan Brice as her CASA. Jan was a volunteer who looked out for the interests and welfare of foster care children. She was captivated by Judge Torres's strength and courage to stand up and defend herself and offered emotional support through some of her toughest years. Judge Torres credits Jan's support for an undergraduate recruitment offer from Berkeley, which offered her a scholarship based on her remarkable math scores. She coped with pressure in her life through the escape of books and phone calls with Jan. She put all her energy into college and willed herself to succeed

As Judge Torres matured and made strides, Jan was always by her side, rooting her through every accomplishment. Jan was the only one to attend her graduation from Berkeley in 1997, with a degree in sociology. Jan also continued to be a presence at her graduation in 2002 from Lewis and Clark Law School, and her swearing in ceremonies in April and June of 2017.

Becoming Judge Torres

When Judge Torres attended Lewis and Clark, she was struck by the lack of diversity as compared to the campus of Berkeley, in California. Historically, Oregon has not been a very accepting state for minorities. In the 1930's, Latinos were not welcome in Oregon and deportation laws were heavily enforced. Farmers preferred to hire 'White only' workers. Latinos were treated as a scapegoat for the dire economic times of the depression. During the 1950s, Operation Wetback was a national military operation that rounded up a million undocumented Mexicans for deportation. In Oregon, the city of Woodburn and other places where Mexican workers lived, they were affected by the presence of sweeps through local farms and roads that picked up undocumented workers. Despite the risks, many Oregon growers preferred to hire undocumented workers, to whom they could pay much lower wages. During those uncertain times, Latinos were planting firm roots in Oregon.

Judge Xiomara Torres is sworn in as a Multnomah County Circuit judge in June by U.S. District Judge Anna Brown, who is a mentor and friend. (Photo: Aimee Green | The Oregonian/OregonLive)

In the early twenty-first century as a result of all the deportations, the migration of Latinos declined nationally, but Oregon's Latino population continued to grow. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of Latinos in the state increased by 63%.

After September 11th in 2001, in light of the terrorist attack, there was a potential that policies on immigration would change and how that could affect those in civic positions such as Judge Torres. When she migrated to the U.S. with her family, she had been granted access as a temporary resident, and permanent residency status when she was a student at Berkeley. In 2003 at the age of 32, she received her permanent citizenship.

After passing the bar in 2003 and walking into the courtroom, Judge Torres still encountered prejudice. She was often mistaken as the Spanish-language interpreter, rather than a lawyer.

Society still holds, and projects stereotypes that immigrants must overcome, but many still come, like the Torres family did, for asylum and a safe place to raise their families, free from civil war.

#MeToo Dreamer

Judge Torres was inspired to become a lawyer to better the lives of children. She spent 14 years of her career specializing in juvenile law. She first started in private practice helping children who were wards of the state or caught between custody battles. Torres next went to work for the Oregon Department of Justice as an assistant attorney general, handling the other side of family law. She defended the state against lawsuits accusing child-welfare workers of failing to protect children from sexual abuse, beatings or neglect.

Since Judge Torres has become a Judge, she has faced a courtroom of emotion and tears. She proceeds over delinquency cases of teens who have skipped school or have done drugs. Judge Torres considers all perspective of the cases she encounters but keeps her own personal perspective out of it.

Judge Torres identifies as a '#MeToo' to acknowledge the Me Too Movement and bring significance to victims of sexual abuse. The Me Too Movement was founded in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, to find pathways to healing. The vision from the beginning was to address both the lack in resources for survivors of sexual violence and to build a community of advocates, driven by survivors, who will be at the forefront of creating solutions to interrupt sexual violence in their communities.

As for the 'Dreamer' part, this signifies for Judge Torres the opportunity of an immigrant having access to the 'American Dream'. More than a decade ago, she returned to El Salvador to tour the country for the first time since she left. Although she was aware of the conflict while in the safety of the U.S., she was shocked to see the amount of damage left by the civil war. She saw children with missing limbs and believed she could have been of those child soldiers if she had stayed. She is gracious for her opportunities and is proud of her immigrant experience. It has provided her with the ideals to uphold justice for all.

Cuéntame Coyote, 2005

Frida, Un Retablo, 2007

Super Ana!, 2015

Touring since 1989

Since 1989, **Milagro Touring & Arts Education** programs for schools embraces a cradle to career approach in arts education. As members of the Coalition of Communities of Color, the OYE Sexual Health Coalition and an Oregon Arts Commission model of best practices, Milagro's educational bilingual plays address a broad range of themes that include socioeconomic disparities, racism, environmental and health related inequity and loss of culture. Through workshops and residencies, Milagro engages students from elementary through college to foster self-determination, wellness and cultural pride.

Bi–, 2018

Marissa L. Sanchez portrays Judge Xiomara Torres in *Judge Torres.*
Photo by Russell J. Young.

Ensemble

Cindy Angel
Marissa L. Sanchez
Ajai Terrazas Tripathi
Eduardo Juarez Vazquez

National Touring Production

JUDGE TORRES

Written by **Milta Ortiz**
Directed by **Mandana Khoshnevisan**

January 10 – 19, 2019
Thursday–Saturday, 7:30 PM | Sunday, 2:00 PM

Milagro Theatre | 525 SE Stark Street, Portland

Tickets start at $27
Student, senior, and veteran discounts available
For group sales/student matinees,
contact Laurel Daniel
at 503-236-7253 x 117

Preview

Thurday January 10 at 7:30 PM

Opening night

Friday January 11 at 7:30 PM
followed by a reception in El Zócalo
courtesy of **Tamale Boy**

Special Event

ENFOQUE: Justicia, Arte, & El Salvador
Tuesday January 8, 6:30 – 8:30 PM
Admission: FREE
Hosted by Judge Xiomara Torres
Special guests: Pepe Moscoso and Maria Llort,
daughter of Salvadorean artist Fernando Llort

MILAGRO
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The Northwest's premier Latino arts and culture center
Mailing: 425 SE 6th Avenue, Portland OR 97214
503-236-7253 / www.milagro.org

Milagro has been dedicated to bringing the vibrancy of Latino theatre to the Northwest community and beyond since 1985. In addition to its national tours, Milagro provides a home for Latino arts and culture at El Centro Milagro, where it enriches the local community with a variety of community outreach projects and educational programs designed to share the diversity of Latino culture. For more information about Milagro, visit milagro.org or call 503-236-7253.