

Virtual Latin America

Study Guide

Thank you for choosing to make The Rose Theater a part of your students' learning experience. We will do our best to make the experience both meaningful and educational. This study guide has been created to help identify the themes and lessons from *Virtual Latin America*, so they can be further developed in the classroom through discussion, activities, and assignments.

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Pre-Show Activity

Theater Etiquette

In-chair activity • 10-20 minutes

Objective: For students to understand appropriate theater behavior and why it's important.

Discussion: How should you act when you see a play? Is it the same way you act when you are at a basketball game? Is it okay to laugh during a play if you think it is funny? Is it okay to answer questions if they are asked to the audience? *Please note that "Virtual Latin America" is an audience participation play, which means there are sections of the play where it's appropriate to speak to the actors on stage.*

Definitions: Participation - The act of taking part in something.

Disruption - The interruption or impediment of a progress, movement, or procedure.

Brainstorm: As a class, make a list of good and bad theater behaviors and write them on the board.

Activity: Select various good and bad theater behaviors from the list on the board and ask the class to act them out while remaining in their seats. Have the students assess why the behaviors are either good or bad. Stress that bad behaviors should not be portrayed as "the cool thing to do."



A Behind-the-Scenes Spotlight on Playwriting

An interview with *Virtual Latin America* playwright Michael Harrelson

Virtual Latin America

Written by Michael Harrelson

Artistic Team

Director Michael Wilhelm
Props Master Kirsten Davis
Video Editor Michael Harrelson
Sound Designer Michael Harrelson
Costume Designer Rena Klegin

Cast

Richard Benjamin
Hirschfield Michael Harrelson
Simón Bolívar Kevin Ehrhart

Q: Why did you pick Latin America as a topic to adapt into a play?

A: The Rose wanted to create a play that would tie into sixth grade curriculum. Latin America fit that criteria, and I selected it because of the region's rich history, culture, and story lore.

Q: What was the biggest challenge you overcame for this project?

A: The biggest challenge was finalizing the central plot of the play. I wanted to use a video game theme, but I wasn't sure how to incorporate it. Surprisingly, I got my answer on an airplane flight after talking to the fifth grader, Destiny, who was seated next to me. I bounced some ideas off her, and the next thing I knew, I had a story about a guy whose video game comes to life!

Q: What research did you do before writing the play?

A: I used Google to search for images, facts, various accounts of history and videos related to Latin America. One of the best resources was a sixth grade text book, from which I pulled a substantial amount of information.

Q: What are your favorite parts of the play?

A: As a playwright, I would have to say my favorite part is when Simón and Richard have the brain/body exchange that draws Richard into the video game. My other favorite part is at the beginning when Richard enters and acts so childish.

Q: What are your other responsibilities at The Rose?

A: I oversee community outreach with our arts partners, schools, organizations, and special need audiences. I also teach theater classes, coordinate The Rose's scholarship program and direct and/or perform in one to two shows each year.

Q: What advice would you give to someone who wants to be a playwright or an actor when they grow up?

A: Keep writing and auditioning! When writing, ask friends to read your work, so you can get their feedback. Audition for plays at your school or in the community. And don't give up! Stay positive. You're valuable and awesome regardless of whether you get every role you want.

Explore Playwriting with a Post-Show Activity

Pearls on a String

Out-of-chair activity • 10-15 minutes

Objective: For students to learn the importance of creating a beginning, middle, and end to a story.

Discussion: What are the three parts to a story? What constitutes a beginning, middle, and end? How are each of these parts different from one another?

Activity: Ask the class for a story that includes place, time, and characters. Choose three students to stand in a line in front of the class. The first student creates a sentence to begin the story. The second student supplies a sentence that fits in the middle of the story. The third student supplies a sentence to end the story. Next, choose two more students and ask them to stand in between the first three students. The first student retells his/her sentence, the second creates a new sentence, the third retells his/her sentence, the fourth creates a new sentence, and the fifth student ends the story by retelling his/her sentence. Together, these five students have created a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Extension: Add four students instead of two students to the original three, or have the students create a storyline that serves as a sequel to *Virtual Latin America*.

Post-Show Activities

Deciphering Hieroglyphics

Out-of-chair activity • 20-30 minutes

Objective: For students to be creative using the Mayan hieroglyphic alphabet.

Vocabulary: Hieroglyphics - A pictographic script in which many of the symbols are recognizable pictures of the things being represented.

Discussion: During the show, Simón explains to Richard that hieroglyphics is a system of symbols that the Mayans and other cultures used to communicate. He then shows Richard the Mayan alphabet and challenges him to decode it.

Activity: Divide the students into groups of five or six and ask them to pull out the Mayan hieroglyphic sheets that they received during the show. Instruct them to use their bodies to spell their names using the Mayan hieroglyphics as their alphabet.

Side Coaching: How can you use your spine, fingers, and neck? What does each symbol look like? Can you use two or three people together to create one symbol?

Extension: After your students have had time to spell out their names in hieroglyphics, have them share one name in front of the class. Have the class guess whose name they are spelling. Do students interpret the letters differently? Ask each group to share their thoughts on the difficulty of the exercise. How could it be made easier? And, try the exercise again.

Map Design

In-chair activity • 15-20 minutes

Objective: For students to design a map that will help Richard through the last level of the game *Virtual Latin America*.

Research: Richard has ten minutes to find his way out of the forest and to the suspension bridge in the Andes Mountains before the timer runs out! Can you remember your way around the school hallways? What do the trees look like around the school? What do you think your school would look like if you looked down on it from the sky?

Brainstorming: What landmarks are located in the hallways around you? Are there plants around you? How wide or narrow are the hallways? Richard had to go through obstacles to find his way to the suspension bridge. What kind of obstacles can you come up with in your school hallway?

Activity: Divide the class into groups of three or four to create a map of the hallways outside your classroom. While creating this map, ask the groups to think of challenges that they might have to face in order to get back to the classroom. Challenges can be things like finding ten pieces of trash in the hallway or answering a history question about Latin America before being able to proceed. Have them focus on items that would symbolize the different Incan technologies such as road, stone, bridges, or earthquake-proof buildings.

Extension: Ask students to create maps of Latin America and the specific locations that were explored in the play.

Creating a Character

Out-of-chair activity • 15-20 minutes

Objective: For students to use their bodies, voices, and imaginations to become characters from Latin American history.

Discussion: What does an actor do to become a character? Acting, like any other job, requires tools. The tools an actor uses include his body, voice, and imagination. By manipulating these tools, actors can become anyone, anywhere, at any time.

Research: Students should learn about different figures and cultures from Latin American history. Please note the references at the end of the study guide for helpful websites.

Brainstorming: Ask each student to choose a historical figure that they're familiar with and then ask them a series of questions. What is your name? How old are you? Do you have a family? Where are you from? What kind of clothes do you wear? How do those clothes make you feel?

Warm Up: Have students find their own spot in the room. Using their actor tools (bodies, voices, and imaginations), have them walk around the room as their selected characters.

Side Coaching: As your character, how do you walk? What do you think of other people? How confident are you?

Activity: Select a student to sit at the front of the classroom as his/her selected character. As him/her what did he/she do and how did it feel? Students should be encouraged to contribute to the questioning. Were you brave? What did you eat? What is your job? What tools did you use? After the first student models the interview process, set up four or five chairs and interview several characters at once.

A Day in the Life of an Explorer

Out-of-chair activity • 10-15 minutes

Objective: For students to imagine what it would be like to explore the lands of Latin America.

Discussion: Simón Bolívar is a Latin American hero who helped free the countries of Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, and Panama. This means Simon did a lot of exploring!

Activity: Ask students to find a space on the floor where they can lay down and pretend they are asleep. Next, have them wake up as an explorer and move around the room silently as if they are exploring the lands of Latin America. They should move when you say "go" and freeze in position when you say "freeze." Have them explore the different levels of the landscape while encountering different animals. Finally, after five to ten minutes of exploring, ask the students to find a spot on the floor to set up camp, start a fire and eventually settle down into the night.

Side Coaching: What are you searching for? Is it hot or cold? What animals do you see? Are you tired or excited?

Extension: When students are done using their imaginations to explore Latin America, set up chairs to interview each explorer. Have them explain, using a change in their body and voice, what they were exploring and which animals they enjoyed seeing the most.

Bibliography

For additional information about Latin American history and culture, please consider the following books and web sites.

Please feel free to contact us!

Letters may be written to:

The Rose Theater
2001 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68102

Emails may be sent to:

Michael Harrelson at
michaelh@rosetheater.org



Information about Simon Bolivar

- *Simón Bolívar: A Life* by John Lynch - This is the first major English biography of Bolívar.
- Students and teachers can learn more about Bolívar's life at <http://www.militaryheritage.com/bolivar.htm>.

Information about Ancient Latin America

- *Latin American Civilization: History and Society (1492 to the present)* by Benjamin Keen - This classic book of readings has been used by teachers and students since 1955.
- Civilization began in the Americas long before anyone initially realized. The Olmecs and Mayans were two of the first. Other civilizations developed in North and Central America. Learn more at this kid-friendly web site: <http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/subjects/ancientamerica.htm>.

Information about the Mayans

- Learn about the Mayan classic period, the region, history, economy, society, and religion at <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/CIVAMRCA/MAYAS.HTM>. This site features lots of great photos and drawings.

Information about the Aztecs

- Learn about Aztec geography, history, language and daily life at <http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/mesoamerica/aztec.html>.
- Additional information about Aztec history, foods, art, language, clothing, music, and more is available at <http://www.aztec-history.com/index.html>.

Information about the Incas

- Learn about Incan geography, history, tribes, government, judicial system, religion, architecture, inventions, and more at <http://incas.mrdonn.org>. The site is great for children to visit with their parents.

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For more information, please contact James Larson at 502-4618.