

## WELCOME

Center Theatre Group is excited to bring you access to our archival performance of *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez, which was presented live at the Mark Taper Forum in winter 2017.

We believe a great play raises questions about the human condition, and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers.

We have designed these activities and the companion videos to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow up the performance with options for discussion, reflection, and creativity. During the videos, you can have your students follow the Teaching Artists and just pause the video when needed.

### PRE-SHOW GOALS

Introduce the play, playwright and themes of play.

Build curiosity about some of the big ideas in this play.

Provide information about the story, style and Inspiration for the piece.

### Activities (pages 2-19)

01—Introduction and Overview (7:50)

02—Cultural Mapping (10:41)

03—Thematic Auto-Images (6:43)

04—Meet the Family (5:48)

05—Community Norms (8:14)

06—Prop Transformation (8:47)

07—El Pachuco/Create Your Own Zoot Suit (21:07)

08—Code-Switching (2:44)

### POST-SHOW GOALS

Reflect on the art. What is staying with you?

Examine how this play connects to our lives and world.

Artistically explore ideas from the play.

### Activities (pages 20-29)

09—Reflection Questions (2:52)

10—Headlines and Media (6:11)

11—Create Your Own Inner Circle Language (10:50)

12—Make Your Own Actos (5:29)

13—Roles in Life (5:24)

## INTRODUCTION TO LUIS VALDEZ

Playwright and director Luis Valdez said, “If the last 50 years have taught us anything, it is that theater is a creator of community, and that community is the creator of theater. You are our community.”

Widely known as the father of Chicano Theatre, Luis Valdez grew up in farm worker camps across California. He began helping his parents work in the fields at age six. Valdez later made it his mission to give back to his community through theatre.

In 1965 on the picket lines of the United Farm Workers (UFW) struggle, Valdez co-founded **El Teatro Campesino**—now the most significant and longest-running Chicano Theater—to further the migrant farm workers’ fight for equality. His early short plays, known as *actos*, were written to encourage farm workers to leave the fields and join the UFW. His close relationships with César Chávez, the UFW, and the early Chicano Movement would greatly influence his body of artistic work.

Valdez would go on to create *mitos*, mythic plays that gave Chicanos their own contemporary mythology, and *corridos*, his Chicano re-envisioning of classic Mexican folktales. Other works would be based on documentary events and history.

In 1978, his play *Zoot Suit* debuted right here in Los Angeles at Center Theatre Group and was later the first Chicano play on Broadway. In addition to plays, Valdez has written and directed films, including the 1981 film version of *Zoot Suit* and the 1987 film *La Bamba*.

As an educator, playwright, and director, Valdez has garnered many awards over the years, including the prestigious Presidential Medal of the Arts. Still active with Teatro Campesino, he continues to leave his mark on the fabric of American theatre.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

*Zoot Suit* was written by Luis Valdez and premiered at the Mark Taper Forum on July 28, 1978. It broke all box office records in Los Angeles and went on to be the first Chicana/o play to be produced on Broadway. In 1981, it became a film, which launched the career of Hollywood actor Edward James Olmos, who played the role of El Pachuco. The production you are going to see is the 40th Anniversary of the play.

*Zoot Suit* tells the story of Henry Reyna, a wrongfully imprisoned youth and his personified conscience El Pachuco. Henry and the other members of the 38th Street gang navigate a landscape of racial intolerance, unjust law enforcement, and a discriminatory legal system as they are wrongly accused and convicted of murder. The story of their fight for freedom is a powerful example of cultural pride, creative spirit, and the resilience of a community.

*Zoot Suit* is an LA Story. It is a combination of real-life events and imagination and is loosely based on the Sleepy Lagoon Murder Trial of 1942 and the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. Drawn from documents, transcripts, letters, and newspaper articles of the time, the play recreates these historical events through the use of both fact and fiction.

The play starts in 1942. America is fighting in World War II. Japanese Americans are expelled into internment camps, Black people migrate North in droves to escape racial hostility in the South, and The Bracero Program, the largest U.S. contract labor program, brings several thousand Mexican guest workers into Los Angeles. The “City of Angels” has a booming economy, but discriminatory policies in employment and housing keep people of color on the periphery.

## **SLEEPY LAGOON MURDER**

A water reservoir located in East Los Angeles was known to the community as the Sleepy Lagoon. It was used as a swimming pool by Mexican American youth who were not allowed to use segregated public pools. On Sunday August 2, 1942, a Mexican-born 22-year-old named José Díaz was found murdered near the Lagoon. Following his murder, six hundred Mexican American youth were rounded up by the Los Angeles Police Department. Five months later, 15 Mexican American and two Mexican-born youths between the ages of 17 to 24 were convicted of murdering Diaz. Additionally, five young women who refused to testify against the young men were sent to a girls’ reformatory school. This miscarriage of justice would inspire community activists to form The Citizens’ Committee for the Defense of Mexican American Youth to help the unjustly accused young people.

## **ZOOT SUIT RIOTS**

The Zoot Suit Riots took their name from the zoot suits worn by many Mexican Americans and other minority youths during the 1940s. Once the United States entered World War Two, fabric was strictly rationed. Despite these wartime restrictions, many bootleg tailors in Los Angeles and other cities continued to make the popular zoot suits, which used huge amounts of fabric. Servicemen and other people saw the oversized suits as an unpatriotic waste of resources. But for the Mexican American youth, zoot suits were a symbol of pride and resistance.

In May 1943, conflict broke out on the streets of Los Angeles between U.S. servicemen and Mexican American young people. Servicemen physically beat the “zoot-suiters”, stripped them of their zoot suits, cut their duck tails and destroyed their clothing as the Los Angeles Police Department stood by and watched. The riots finally came to an end when the Navy declared Downtown Los Angeles off limits to all servicemen.

## CULTURAL MAPPING

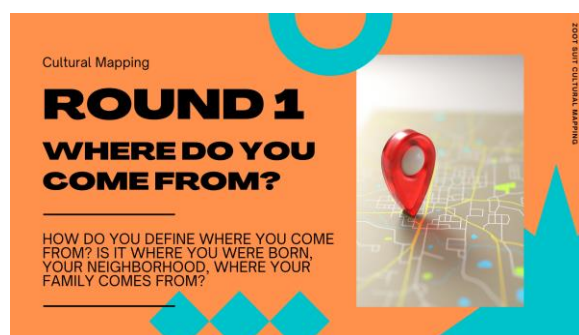
### Objectives

- Gain knowledge of commonalities and differences among classmates.
- Introduce the themes, language and characters in *Zoot Suit*.
- Make personal connections between our lives and the characters, themes and/or events in the production of *Zoot Suit*.

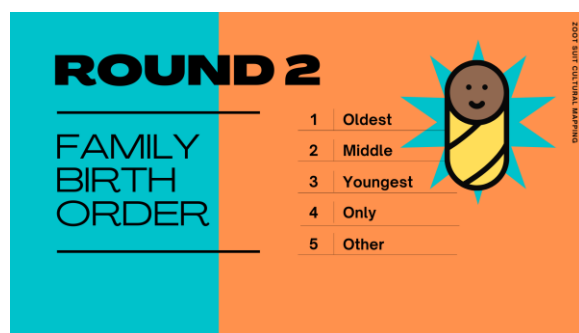
### Activity

This is an activity to discover commonalities and differences among the members of the class as well as start to make connections with ideas, characters and situations in the play *Zoot Suit*.

In a physical room we would make a map of the world with your school in the center and everyone positioning themselves north, south, east, west of that location. That is why it is called cultural mapping. For the Zoom version think about where you come from and what that means to you, then write it in the chat. Ask a volunteer to read the responses.



In *Zoot Suit*, neighborhood, family and heritage are all important parts of the story. While you watch the show, think about how the characters would answer the question “where they come from.”



Are you the oldest, middle, youngest, only child in your family? Or maybe none of those categories fit because families come in so many shapes and sizes. If none of the first four choices feel right to you, then choose other. Using the rename function on Zoom, put in the number of the selected category in front of your name. For example, I am the oldest child in my family so I would put a 1 in front of my name.

**Note to Educators:** Having the students add numbers in front of their names will make it easier for you to manually put them in breakout rooms according to their answers. (Ex. all the #1s will in one group etc.) Depending on the size of your class, give between 8-15 minutes for each category.

Once you are in breakout rooms, your goal is to find two additional things that your group has in common. These commonalities might be about the specific category being discussed, but can also be about food, music, movies etc. One you have discovered your commonalities, pick a spokesperson to share back with the whole group.

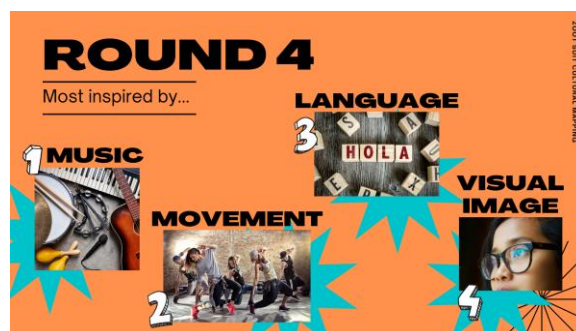
In *Zoot Suit*, the main character Henry is the oldest in his family (21), his brother Rudy is in the middle (19) and his sister Lupe is the youngest (16).



Using the rename function, put the number of the category that best represents you in front of your name. Once you are in breakout rooms, share the languages that you speak with your group, then find two additional things your group has in common. Once you have discovered your commonalities, pick a spokesperson to share back the commonalities with the whole group.

*Zoot Suit* is told in three languages: English, Spanish and Caló. You will learn more about Caló in an upcoming activity.

The first three rounds were based on facts that you know about yourself. This next round may be a little harder to choose, it is based on inspiration. You might be inspired by several of the categories but for this round pick the one that MOST inspires you.



Using the rename function, put the number of the category that most inspires you in front of your name. Once you are in breakout rooms, share why you chose this category. Why does music etc. inspire you? Notice if there are commonalities in why this category inspires each member of the group. Once you have discovered any commonalities, pick a spokesperson to share back with the whole group.

The production of *Zoot Suit* contains all these inspirations: a lot of music and singing, movement and dancing, it is told in three languages as mentioned in the last round and is full of visual imagery in the colors, and costumes and set design.

Our final round is quotes from the play you are going to see.

**Note to Educators:** *Have several people read the quotes out loud.*

**ROUND 5**  
ZOOT SUIT Quotes

1 "Ever since I was a kid, I've had this feeling like there's a big party going on someplace, and I'm invited, but I don't know how to get there."

2 "I know who you are. You're the one who got me here. My worst enemy...and my best friend. And you know what? You're me. So get lost."

3 "The play you are about to see is a construct of fact and fantasy."

4 "I've got to know why I'm here, see. I've got to have a reason for being here."

5 "I know you work hard for your clothes. And I know how much they mean to you."

6 "Their appearance is distinctive your Honor. Essential to the case."

ZOOT SUIT CULTURAL APPRECIATION

As you listen to each quote - pick the one that makes you the most curious, or that you like the most, or may be one of the quotes that makes you angry.

Using the rename function, put the number of the quote you are curious about in front of your name. Once you are in breakout rooms, share why you chose this quote. What made you curious? What caught your attention? Notice if there are commonalities in why people chose a particular quote. Pick a spokesperson to share back the commonalities with the whole group.

As you watch the production of *Zoot Suit* listen for the quote you chose. Who says it? Why do they say it? Does it seem to mean the same thing to the character as it did to you or is it a very different meaning?

## THEMATIC AUTO-IMAGES

### Objectives

- Embody some of the major ideas of the play.
- Connect our minds to our physical bodies.
- Express ourselves physically as a basic practice of theatre.

### Activity

Before we dive further into the world of *Zoot Suit* and we meet some of the characters, let us first explore some of the big ideas in the play. Because we are talking about theatre, we are going to take this opportunity to be physical and get into our bodies. We are going to use our bodies to explore some of the major themes in the play.

If you are able, please stand and turn your backs to the camera.

Call out a major theme in *Zoot Suit* and then give a 10-second countdown. When you get to 1, ask your students to turn around to face the camera and hold a pose with their body that is in response to the theme shared.

Example 1:

- Family (10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1)
- Turn to camera and hold a pose in your body. While holding this pose, see if you can notice the other poses of your colleagues.
- What do you notice?

**Note to Educators:** For large groups, half the students can stop their camera and watch while the other half of the students share their poses.

Other themes to explore:

- Police Brutality
- Toxic Masculinity
- The Media

Because theatre is a physical art form and relies on more than language to tell its story, it is important to connect our minds to our bodies. By physicalizing what we are thinking, we can make our ideas more concrete.


## MEET THE FAMILY

### Objectives

- Introduce the characters in the play and make predictions based on inferences.
- Pique students' curiosity about the play.

### Activity

Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* follows the story of Henry Reyna, a young Mexican American man growing up in the barrio of 1940s Los Angeles. Let's get to know some of the characters in the story with production photos from the 2017 revival.



**WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THIS SCENE? ADD THOUGHT/SPEECH BUBBLES AND TEXT TO FILL IN WHAT THE CHARACTERS ARE THINKING OR SAYING.**

Left to right:  
GEORGE  
(lawyer); EL  
PACHUCO;  
HENRY

L-R: RICHARD STEINMETZ, DENMAR BICUOR, MATIAS PONCE (SEATED) AND TOM G. HICKAMON (UNSEATED)  
**ZOOT SUIT | 2017**  
PRESENTED BY CENTER THEATRE GROUP  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH EL TEATRO CAMPESINO  
DIRECTOR: LUIS VALDEZ  
SCENARY: TOM GUT  
LIGHTING: STEPHEN STRAMBARQUE  
SOUND: STEVE DEVERSON  
PHOTO: CRAIG SCHWARTZ  
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**Note to Educators:** You can make a copy of the Jamboard to use with students to infer who these characters are and imagine what is happening in the story. This activity can be done together as a class or in breakout groups. Link for Jamboard auto-copying: [https://jamboard.google.com/d/10wjyiyODaQ4w7DPUtIOS6J3Rj5Cl\\_qY8Z34QwemabIU/copy](https://jamboard.google.com/d/10wjyiyODaQ4w7DPUtIOS6J3Rj5Cl_qY8Z34QwemabIU/copy)

Let's meet the Reyna family. Examine slides 1-8:

- What do you see? (read caption for character names)
- What do you think is going on?
- What do you think will happen next?

Once you've added in thoughts and dialogue, feel free to replace the text in the sticky note with a caption for the image.



## COMMUNITY NORMS

### Activity

Every community has a way of living and breathing that is specific to that community that outsiders may not understand. For example, where I grew up, it was seen as a sign of aggression or hostility to look a person directly in the eye.

In breakout rooms, I would like you all to share what are some of the social norms from your community. Talk about where you think they came from and how you feel about them. Do you agree with them? And how do they affect your life?

## PROP TRANSFORMATION

### Objectives

- Practice using a physical object in a way other than its usual function.
- Introduce theatrical ways props are used and transformed in *Zoot Suit*.

### Materials

- A “stick” (ruler, pen, etc.)
- A “circle” (frisbee, paper plate, etc.)

### Activity

Round 1: “This is not a stick...”

Say, “this is not a [stick]” and then SHOW students rather than tell them what you imagine the stick to be. The other participants can unmute and share verbally what they see or write it in chat. Stress that there is no wrong answer, and if you get stuck, the group can make suggestions to help.

As the object is passed around the Zoom space ask each student to show, rather than tell, the group what they are imagining. For example, a ruler could become a sword, an oar, a baseball bat, a paintbrush. A frisbee could become a steering wheel, a mirror, a beret, a flying saucer.

Round 2: “This is not a circle...”

Round 3: This is not a ...”

Have everyone in the class find an object in their room that they want to transform. Once students have their objects, have them share one at a time saying, “This is not a ...” and SHOWING rather than telling what they imagine the object to be.

In *Zoot Suit*, the artists play with this idea of theatrical transformation. While you watch the play, look how objects are transformed and used in different ways. Why do you think Luis Valdez decided to use prop transformation to help tell this story? How is transformation both a theatrical choice and a thematic element in the story?

## EL PACHUCO/CREATE YOUR OWN ZOOT SUIT

### Objectives

- Define the term “Pachuco/a” and the character El Pachuco in the play.
- Specify the role that zoot suit fashion played in Pachuco cultural identity.
- Encourage students to connect to the world of the play by physicalizing what fashion makes them feel proud, empowered, cool, safe, etc.

### Activity

This painting by Ignacio Gomez, called “Zoot Suit,” was created for the original production of the play, *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez, at the Mark Taper Forum in 1978. This image is now hanging in the Smithsonian American Art Museum and has since become an iconic symbol for Chicano/Latino pride. *Note: “Certain materials are included under fair use exemption of the U.S. Copyright Law... and are restricted from further use.”*

Take a moment to look at this image.

- What do you see?
- What do you wonder?

If you are able, stand and push your chair away. To the best of your ability, take on the same pose of the man in the image.

Play [Pachuco Boogie](#) as you ask students to do the following:

Hold this pose.

Take a deep breath in.

Let it out.

Lean into this pose.

Take a deep breath in.

Let it out.

What does it feel like to be in this pose?

What kind of character would strike this pose?

What might this character be thinking?

What might this character be saying?

Think of a short line of dialogue that this character might say.

Take a moment to write that line of dialogue into the chat.

Come back to the pose one more time and say the line of dialogue out loud.

Relax the pose. Shake it off. Come back to your chair.

The man in this image might also be called a “pachuco.”



**Pachucos** were members of a Mexican American subculture in the 1930s and 40s in the southwestern United States that became associated with zoot suit fashion, jazz and swing music, and a distinct dialect known as *Caló*. Pachucos practiced their own culture as a form of self-empowerment and to reject assimilation into mainstream Anglo-American society, the dominant culture at the time. Not only did Pachucos have a very distinct style and attitude, they also had a particular way of communicating amongst themselves.

**Caló, or “Pachuco Slang,”** is a way of speaking that is a key component of Pachuco culture. It blends and borrows words and expressions from English, Spanish, and indigenous languages. Caló also incorporates rhyming and code-switching.

In the play, dialogue flows seamlessly from English to Spanish to Caló. It is not necessary to understand everything that every character says but knowing some basics could be helpful.

The graphic features a black background with several green, cloud-like speech bubbles containing Caló words. The words are: **nel!**, **watcha!**, **ese**, **carnal**, **y qué?**, **qué traes?**, **chale**, **órale!**, **bato**, and **simón**. Below the bubbles, the title **SPEAK CALÓ** is written in large, white, bold letters. Underneath the title, there are two columns of definitions for the words shown in the bubbles.

<b>BATO</b> – DUDE, GUY	<b>NELI</b> – NO WAY!
<b>CARNAL/A</b> – BRO/SIS, CLOSE FRIEND	<b>ÓRALE</b> – HEY! RIGHT ON!
<b>CHALE</b> – NO	<b>WATCHA!</b> – LOOK!
<b>ESE/A</b> – MAN, DUDE, GIRL	<b>SIMÓN</b> – YES
<b>QUÉ TRAES?</b> – WHAT’S UP?	<b>Y QUÉ?</b> – SO WHAT?

Choose a word from the “Speak Caló” list and let’s go back into your “pachuco” pose. Speak your Caló word out loud.

**Note to Educators:** If you’d like to brush up on your Caló before you watch the play, please refer to the Caló glossary provided for the most common words and phrases from the show.

## CREATE YOUR OWN ZOOT SUIT



First made popular by jazz musicians, the zoot suit can be traced to African American youth in dance halls of Harlem in the 1930s.

In 1940s Los Angeles, poor and working-class African, Mexican, Jewish, Italian and Filipino American youth adapted the fashion to make it their own. Subsequently, the “zoot suit” became emblematic of Pachuco (part of what we now identify as Chicano) cultural identity.

In the “barrio”, both young men and women donned zoot suits and zoot suit-inspired fashion for special occasions—on nights out at the dance hall, and to meet up with friends at the movie theater.

Zoot suits are tailored outfits with broad shoulders and cinched waist pants that tapered at the ankles; accessorized by a key chain that dangled from the pocket, a felt hat and ducktail hairstyle.

For many young Mexican Americans, the zoot suit style represented a rebellion against mainstream Anglo-American culture and a departure from that of older Mexican generations. It was a bold form of self-expression that defied the norms of gender, class and segregation.



To better understand the significance of the zoot suit, let's design our own "zoot suit" of sorts. That is, a uniform that reflects how you want to be seen in the world. You can think of this "suit" as a costume that expresses who you are or who you would like to be. Maybe it highlights powers that are normally hidden (a la superhero?).

Remember, the original zoot suits were considered flashy (even extreme), so this outfit can be as extravagant or fantastical as you like.

# Design Your Own "Zoot Suit"

**HAIR:** What kind of haircut/style would you have?

**OUTFIT:** What kind of outfit would you wear?

**ACCESSORIES:**  
What kind of accessories would you sport?



Image credit: SeishinHermu at DeviantArt

Use this template or feel free to freehand draw/design your own "zoot suit".

Pachucos sported greased ducktail haircuts, and Pachucas teased their hair into pompadours. *What kind of haircut and style would you have?*



Pachucos wore fingertip coats and high-waisted pants called drapes. Some Pachucas opted for mini-skirts, long blazers, and high socks-- complete with lightweight shoes for dancing. *What kind of outfit would you wear?*





Pachucos often wore hats with feathers, suspenders, ties, belts, and a long pocket chain. Pachucas often donned earrings, mascara, and dark lipstick. *What kind of accessories would you sport?*



### Activating Your Zoot Suit

Take some time to elaborate your designs, and then put it up on its feet. Use your imagination to pantomime and take a walk in your new clothes:

1. Imagine that you are looking into a mirror. Visualize your new haircut. Is your hair wet or dry? Short or long? Do you need a comb or a brush? What about product? Gel, hairspray, maybe? Take your time to style it just right. (Feel free to do your makeup, too, if you have any.)
2. Go ahead and put on one or two articles of clothing. What kind of fabric or material is it made of? Does it feel soft? Warm? Hard? Cold? Tight? Loose? Light? Heavy? What color is it?
3. Add one or two accessories. Is there something on your head? Your wrists? Your back? In your pocket? Are you wearing perfume or anything else fragrant? What about your footwear? Go ahead and put it on. How does it feel?
4. Stand up. Notice how you feel in this new outfit. In the space you have, go for a stroll. Do you walk differently in this new outfit? Does it make you move faster or more slowly? Do you feel bigger or taller? Do you blend in or call for attention? Maybe it makes you want to dance? Go ahead and take yourself for a walk in your new outfit. How do you hold your head? How do you see the world and others?

### Variations

Ask students to walk in their suits and notice/take in the others around them. Add vocal greeting to walking the space.

### Reflection

How do you feel in your new outfit? What does your custom “zoot suit” convey about your beliefs, values, and attitudes?

### Alter Ego

In *Zoot Suit*, the **El Pachuco** character serves as the “personified conscience” of the main character, Henry Reyna. Henry says to El Pachuco: “I know who you are. *You’re the one who got me here.* My worst enemy...and my best friend. *And you know what? You’re me. So get lost.*”

We might consider El Pachuco to be an “alter-ego” of Henry Reyna. If we understand the “alter ego” to be the “other I”—we can understand that “el pachuco” is a core part of Henry Reyna’s identity.

While you watch the play, ask yourself:

- What purpose does El Pachuco serve in the storytelling?
- How does El Pachuco convey the core beliefs, values, and attitudes of Henry Reyna?

## CODE-SWITCHING

### Objectives

- Identify how we change physically, vocally, and emotionally based on setting.
- Explore what code-switching communicates to us and how it makes us feel.

### Activity

In *Zoot Suit*, we see the characters change the way they speak, move, and express themselves based on the setting they are in. In this activity, we are going to explore this assimilation through something we all do: code-switching. Assimilation is the way we change how we behave and express ourselves to avoid discrimination or standing out.

In randomized breakout groups, talk about how you adapt, or code-switch your behavior, interactions and reactions in your communities and/or in professional settings like work, school or job interviews. Discuss what it's like to greet people in those different settings: work, school, in your neighborhood. When you come back to the group, we're going to role-play.

**Note to Educators:** *ask for volunteers or choose students to role play what it's like to greet a friend in their neighborhood compared to an associate at school.*

Consider these questions:

- How you express anger in your community with outsiders surrounded by friends?
- How you express anger in your school with a teacher you trust?
- How are those responses different?

While you watch the play think about the idea of code-switching and other themes including family, fashion and language. Notice the theatrical choices the artists made.

- How do music and dance help tell the story?
- Why do you think Luis Valdez decided to combine fact and fantasy to bring this story to life?

## POST SHOW REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### Objectives

- Share thoughts and reactions to seeing *Zoot Suit*.
- Discuss artistic choices made in the production.
- Explore how the production connects to your own life.

**Note to Educators:** *These reflection questions can be used for whole or small group discussion or individual writing.*

1. What is staying with you after seeing *Zoot Suit*? An image, a moment, a character, a feeling, a line from the play?
2. El Pachuco says, “But there’s other ways to end this story” and the play shares different possible endings for Henry’s life including going back to prison, serving in Korea and winning the Medal of Honor, marrying Della and having 5 kids. How do you think Henry’s story ends?
3. Transformation is both a theatrical choice and a thematic element in the story. What were some of the visual elements you saw transformed onstage? Why do you think creator Luis Valdez used theatrical transformation to help tell this story? Which characters changed or transformed through the journey they took in the play? How did they transform? Who or what still needs to change or transform at the end of the play?
4. *Zoot Suit* was performed at Center Theatre Group’s Mark Taper Forum Theatre in 1978 and revived in 2017. Center Theatre Group Artistic Director Michael Ritchie described *Zoot Suit* as “A play about discrimination. About anger. About violence. And although it takes place in the 1940s and was written in the 1970s, that discrimination, that violence, that anger, still exists. And we still have a forum—the Mark Taper Forum—to not only tell that particular story, but also to use that as a starting point for a dialogue that helps to change the narrative.”

Does watching and talking about *Zoot Suit* help make change? How might theatre help change or transform things like discrimination, violence, anger? What power does theatre have?

## HEADLINES AND MEDIA

### Objectives

- Identify how the media communicates information about people of different backgrounds and how that influences perspectives on them.

### Activity

Today, we live in a clickbait society. Websites, newspapers and magazines often use catchy polarizing headlines in order to grab readers' attention. Media refers to magazines, social media, newspapers, movies, movie posters, websites and television. All these mediums use images to communicate a narrative and story. What are they saying? What are they saying about you? What are they saying about people, communities, and experiences you don't know?

In the chat, write a group that you belong to. It could be a race, ethnicity, community, job or role in your family/community. Any group that you feel connected to.

SHARE

Now, in the chat, write what the media says about the group you belong to.

SHARE

What are some things in the chat that stick out to you? If nothing sticks out to you, please share what you wrote if you're comfortable.

SHARE

In the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial, the media played a big part in telling the story.

Here is an example of how the media still does this today (timestamp: 5:30-6:46)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MHXY6vloe4>

The media plays a very large role in how we see the world, then and now. Newspapers in the time of the events in *Zoot Suit* were the equivalent to the news stations or social media of today. Often, it is our only connection to the happenings in the world that we do not experience or have secondhand knowledge.

Here is a newspaper article that ran during the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial. Take a look and share what it communicates to you.

*Santa Maria Times*

## Los Angeles (U.P.)

January 13th, 1943

# Zoot-Suit Gang Convicted of Murder



**Twelve Zoot Suit youths today awaited sentence for murder, climaxing a three month trial aimed at halting terroristic neighborhood "kid gangs".**

Of 22 defendants ranging in age from 17 to 23, three were convicted late yesterday of first degree murder, with life sentences recommended; nine of second-degree murder, carrying five years to life; five of felonious assault, and five were acquitted.

Specific charges, preferred after a wave of killings, beatings, riotings and robberies by juvenile gangs, involved a raid by the gang on a picnic in which Jose Diaz, young rancher, was killed.

<https://docs.google.com/document/u/0/d/1bQwbWFaCiqKq2TeWbptNbbqYQGcUxtiXuBgupzDZbk/copy?pli=1#heading=h.uwtpzkmp9874>

Think about how you can edit this article to change the way the group is seen?

SHARE

The next step of this activity is to change the picture that goes with the headline. There are four pictures from the class to choose from that you can see here.



<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TDI-uvSb9WNAdiOJDbSxt3uUADGGbBeXBF6MLxko8fy/copy>

Now, let's compare our old newspaper articles with the ones we made changes to.

"The press distorted the very meaning of the word zoot suit. All it is a way for your guys to say Mexican."

**Note to Educators:** There also is a second article that you can do this activity with. Please feel free to use current articles and for this exercise as well.

Article 2:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BameFSM1T4i7gvzklUP732AjsmCYvoB3Qc9KL7aap1Q/copy#heading=h.qi2yc3xr710>

## CREATE YOUR OWN INNER CIRCLE LANGUAGE

### Objectives

- Explore the formation of original slang as a way of communicating amongst a specific group.
- Analyze the pros and cons of “inner circle languages.”

### Activity

The characters in *Zoot Suit* use several languages to communicate. In the play, you heard English, Spanish, and slang known as Caló, which borrows from English, Spanish, and other indigenous languages.

Much like Pachuco fashion, different languages were stitched together to form a new way of communicating that was unmistakably Pachuco. Known for its mocking word play, lightning-fast code-switches, and rough humor, Caló survives today as casual speech used primarily by Chicana/o youth.

In this warm-up activity, we'll try out a few Caló words for ourselves.

1. With a partner, count to 3 together, alternating turns. Now, one person chooses a word from the Caló glossary.
2. Count to 3 again (starting with the person who did not pick out a word), and instead of saying the number “2” out loud, replace it with the word you chose.
3. For the third and final round, do the same, but this time, the other person should choose a different word from the glossary to replace the number “3”.

**Note to Educators:** *If you have some adventurous students, you may also invite them to add simple gestures that accompany each word.*

In the play, why do you think Pachucos spoke in Caló? What did the adults in their lives think of their particular way of speaking? Are there ways of communicating with your friends and family that make sense only to you? Slang? Expressions? Jokes? Do you speak one way around certain people and another way around others? Why or why not?

### Breakout Group Activity

Now that we are warmed up, let's have some fun with language. In breakout groups, you will work together to create your own community slang—that is—new words, phrases, and expressions to communicate specifically with the members of your breakout group, aka your “inner circle”.



**CREATE YOUR OWN  
INNER CIRCLE LANGUAGE**

CREATE AND PERFORM DIALOGUE THAT

1. INCORPORATES ENGLISH
2. BORROWS FROM OTHER LANGUAGES/DIALECTS/  
VERNACULARS THAT MEMBERS OF YOUR GROUP SPEAK
3. INCLUDES AT LEAST ONE ENTIRELY MADE-UP WORD OR  
PHRASE



# CALÓ GLOSSARY

<b>AGUAS</b> – BE CAREFUL	<b>PONTE ABUSADO</b> – SHAPE UP, WISE UP, GET SMART
<b>AGÜITALA</b> – CONTROL YOURSELF	<b>PEDO</b> – HASSLE, EXCITEMENT
<b>AHI TE WATCHO</b> – SEE YOU LATER, SEE YOU THERE	<b>PURO BASILÓN</b> – IT'S ONLY FUN
<b>BATO</b> – DUDE, GUY	<b>MENUDO</b> – TRIPE SOUP
<b>BORLO</b> – DANCE	<b>ME LA RAYO</b> – FOR SURE, IT'S THE TRUTH, I SWEAR
<b>BOTE</b> – JAIL	<b>MIRA/WATCHAI</b> – LOOK!
<b>BOLILLO</b> – WHITE BOY	<b>NO HAY PEDO</b> – NO PROBLEM
<b>BRIBÓN</b> – WISE GUY	<b>NO TE HAGAS GACHO</b> – DON'T BE RUDE
<b>CÁLMENLA</b> – CALM DOWN, COOL IT	<b>POS</b> – WELL
<b>CALMANTES MONTES</b> – CHILL, TAKE IT EASY	<b>QUE DESMADRE</b> – WHAT A MESS
<b>CARNAL/A</b> – BROTHER/SISTER, CLOSE FRIEND	<b>QUÉ PUES, NUEZ?/QUÉ TRAES?</b> – WHAT'S UP?
<b>CARNALILLO</b> – LITTLE BROTHER	<b>RIFA</b> – (IT) RULES
<b>CHAFÁ</b> – TAWDRY	<b>RUCA</b> – WIFE, GIRLFRIEND, CHICK
<b>CHALE</b> – NO	<b>RUCO</b> – OLD
<b>CHANGO</b> – MONKEY	<b>SABES QUÉ?</b> – YOU KNOW WHAT?
<b>CHICAS PATAS</b> – CHICANO	<b>SIMÓN</b> – YES
<b>CHULAS</b> – PRETTY GIRLS	<b>SUAVE</b> – COOL, OKAY
<b>CON SAFOS</b> – WITH RESPECT/PRIDE	<b>SURA</b> – SOILED, UNCLEAN
<b>CUBILANDO</b> – HORSING AROUND	<b>SUROTE</b> – BAD (GOOD) DUDE
<b>DRAPES</b> – PANTS	<b>TACUCHE</b> – FINGERTIP COAT, ZOOT SUIT
<b>ESE/A</b> – MAN, DUDE, GIRL	<b>TE CURAS?</b> – CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?
<b>FRAJO</b> – CIGARETTE	<b>TRAPOS</b> – THREADS, CLOTHES
<b>GABACHO</b> – GRINGO, PADDY, WHITE AMERICAN	<b>TRUCHA LA JURA</b> – WATCH OUT, THE COPS!
<b>HUISA/JAINA</b> – GIRLFRIEND, WOMAN	<b>VERDOLAGA</b> – NAÏVE, HICK
<b>JEFITA/JEFITO</b> – MOTHER/FATHER (“BOSS”)	<b>Y QUÉ?</b> – SO WHAT?
<b>LA JURA</b> – THE LAW	<b>YA ESTUVO</b> – THAT'S ENOUGH
<b>NELI</b> – NO WAY!	<b>YA ME ESTÁS CAYENDO GORDO</b> – YOU'RE BEING A PAIN
<b>ÓRALE</b> – HEY! RIGHT ON!	<b>YA PUÉS</b> – OKAY, FINE/THAT'S ENOUGH

#### SOURCES:

[HTTPS://ZOOTSUITTURGY.SITES.UCSC.EDU/GOT/](https://zootsuitturgy.sites.ucsc.edu/got/)  
[HTTPS://RESEARCH.POMONA.EDU/ZOOTSUIT/ES/CULTURA/](https://research.pomona.edu/zootsuit/es/cultura/)  
[HTTPS://WWW.CENTERTHEATREGROUP.ORG/NEWS-AND-BLOGS/NEWS/2017/JANUARY/A-ZOOT-SUIT-GLOSSARY/](https://www.centertheatregroup.org/news-and-blogs/news/2017/january/a-zoot-suit-glossary/)

(THIS GLOSSARY HAS BEEN EDITED TO EXCLUDE WORDS/PHRASES THAT COULD BE CONSIDERED PROFANE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES. ADDITIONAL LEXICON FROM THE PLAY CAN BE FOUND ONLINE.)

## GETTING STARTED

A: [HEY, CLOSE FRIEND OR OTHER RELATIONSHIP]! [WHAT'S GOING ON]?

B: [HI, MAN/WOMAN], I'M GOOD. NICE (INSERT CLOTHING ITEM)!

A: THANKS. I'VE GOT PLANS WITH MY [GIRLFRIEND/BOYFRIEND/FRIENDS] TONIGHT.

B: [RIGHT ON]!

A: [YEAH], THAT'S WHY I'M WEARING MY FAVORITE (INSERT ITEM). WE'RE GOING TO (INSERT ACTIVITY OR PLACE).

B: ISN'T YOUR [BROTHER/SISTER/MOTHER/FATHER] GOING TO BE MAD?

A: [YEAH, SO WHAT]? [SEE YOU LATER]!

B: [SEE YA]!



## AND IN CALÓ...

A: OYE, BATO! QUÉ PUES, NUEZ?

B: EY, CARNAL. NICE TRAPOS!

A: THANKS. I'VE GOT PLANS WITH MY RUCA TONIGHT.

B: ÓRALE!

A: SIMÓN. THAT'S WHY I'M WEARING MY FAVORITE CALCOS. WE'RE GOING TO BOLORTEAR.

B: ISN'T YOUR JEFITA GOING TO BE MAD?

A: SIMÓN, Y QUÉ? AHÍ TE WATCHO!

B: AL RATO, BATO!



**Note to Educators:** It may be helpful to have students start by brainstorming some of the slang they already know. You may want to clarify with your students what would and would not be considered “classroom-appropriate” language for this activity.

Once you have shared your dialogues with the rest of the class, consider the following:

- Were there any conversations that you (as an outsider) had difficulty understanding? If so, why?
- Why do you think groups of people create their own inner circle languages?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of inner circle languages?

## MAKE YOUR OWN ACTOS

### Objectives

- Create an original piece of theater.
- Use the style of El Teatro Campesino to address political issues of the day.
- Encourage students to connect to their own political views and artistic voices.

### Activity

Before Luis Valdez wrote *Zoot Suit* in 1978, he co-founded El Teatro Campesino in 1965, the longest-running Chicano Theater company in the United States. Founded in 1965 on the picket lines of the United Farm Workers' struggle, El Teatro Campesino's work always carries a political lens. The early plays of El Teatro Campesino were called actos and they were created in collaboration with migrant farm workers to address their most pressing issues.

The basic acto can be defined as a short, improvised scene dealing with the socio-political experiences of the people creating the acto—it could be a conversation between a boss and his striking worker; a situation involving a civilian and a police officer, or any scene in which power is being leveraged between two or more parties.

*Actos* highlight a social/political problem, suggest a solution, and are meant to inspire people to action.

Here's a short example of an acto from El Teatro Campesino:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Sr4P6woodk>

### Performance Guidelines:

- Address an important sociopolitical issue of the day
- Include at least 2 characters and 1 narrator
- Add some sort of visual element like costumes, props, etc.
- Include a beginning, middle, and end (circumstances, conflict, resolution)
- Include a positive call to action

What do you want the audience to do now that they have seen your acto?

Though it is not a traditional acto in the sense that it is improvised, *Zoot Suit* addresses several political issues of importance to the people in the play.

Some of these issues include:

- Racial injustice
- Sensationalist journalism
- Cultural identity: language, fashion, music
- Segregation
- Police brutality

## ROLES IN LIFE

### Objectives

- Reflect on the roles that the character Henry Reyna played in *Zoot Suit*.
- Think about all the different roles they play in their own lives.
- Share a role from their life that makes them proud.

### Activity

In *Zoot Suit*, we saw actors playing the roles of different characters. Some actors played more than one role and we watched them transform their bodies, faces and costumes to create different characters. The character of Henry Reyna played many roles in his own life, some roles he chose and some roles the world chose for him. You might remember these words from the end of the play.

Ask for a volunteer, or volunteers to read the lines out loud.

**Roles in Life**

WHO IS HENRY REYNA?

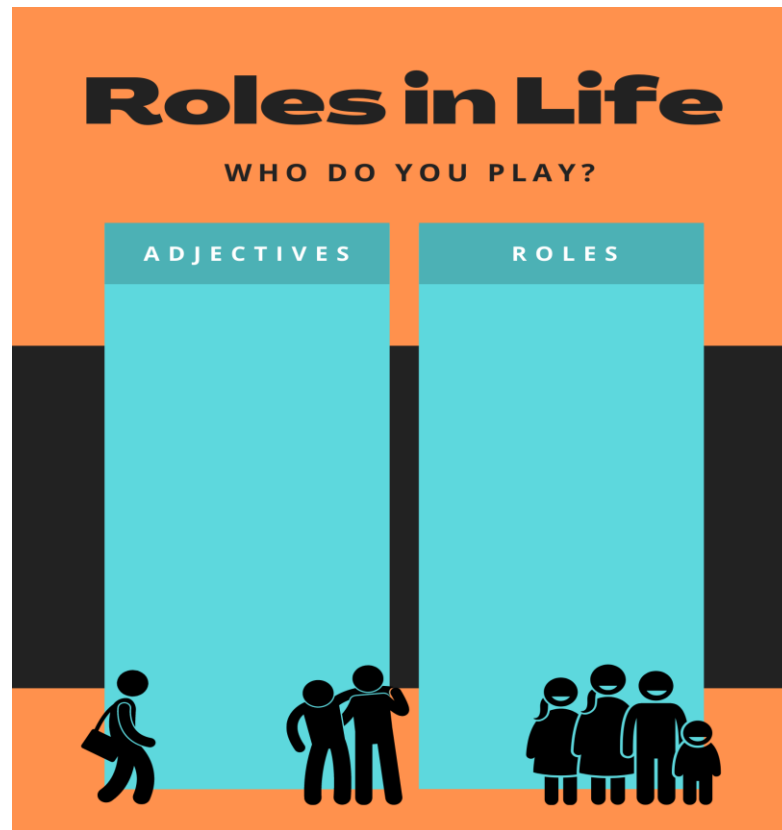
Henry Reyna, the born leader...  
Henry Reyna, the social victim...  
Henry Reyna, the secret corner warrior...  
Henry Reyna, el carnal de aquellas...  
Henry Reyna, the zoot suiter...  
Henry Reyna, my friend...  
Henry Reyna, my brother...  
Henry Reyna, our son...  
Henry Reyna, my love...  
Henry Reyna... El Pachuco...  
The man ... the myth ... still lives.

The graphic features a large orange background with a central light blue rounded rectangle containing text. Below the text are three black silhouettes: a person walking with a bag, two people talking, and a family of five.

Those are some of the roles that the character of Henry played in his life and in the lives of others. We are going to look at the roles we play in our own lives.

Start with the roles column on the right hand side of the paper. Think about the different roles you play in your life. For example—you might be a daughter, or a dog lover, an activist, an athlete, a friend, a leader, maybe you coach, or write or dance...

**Note to Educators:** you can use this image as a template if you are in a physical space together or have the class draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper to create two columns.



Timed writing (1 minute): List all the roles you play in your life. If you get stuck, think about what you do each day and who you spend time with.

Timed writing (1 minute): On the left-hand side of the paper, list an adjective that describes you in each role. Maybe you are a bossy sister, a loving son, a loyal friend, a passionate activist.

Pick one role on the list that you feel proud of and that you are comfortable sharing. Each student shares their name and one role they are proud of with the rest of the class.

Example: I'm Deb and I am an enthusiastic collaborator.