

THE
GOODMAN

100
YEARS



THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO

STUDY GUIDE 2026

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NOTE: THIS STUDY GUIDE REFLECTS THE SCRIPT AS OF OCTOBER 2025.

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PRODUCER

ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN | SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

WRITERS

JARED BELLOT | CLIFFORD DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT
TYRA BULLOCK | ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN | SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER
LO WILLIAMS | MICHAEL MAGGIO DIRECTING FELLOW
GABRIELLA BONAMICI | MARKETING COORDINATOR
VICKY MEJIA | DIGITAL MARKETING ASSOCIATE
MARCO ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ | PLAYWRIGHT

DESIGNER

RAFIA AFZAL | GRAPHIC DESIGNER

EDITOR

MICHEN DEWEY | COMMUNICATIONS CONTENT MANAGER

TRANSLATOR

ALEXIS A. TORNEZ MARTINEZ

A WELCOME LETTER TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

BY JARED BELLOT, CLIFFORD DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Welcome (back!) to The Goodman's Centennial Season!

We're thrilled to share with you *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a story where history, memory and mythology collide in a glorious, diasporic, Tolkienesque epic traversing language, time and place. This production, based on Junot Díaz's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, adapted for the stage by Marco Antonio Rodriguez and directed by Wendy Mateo, asks a pair of questions that echo through every family, every community, every lifetime: **How are cycles created? How are they broken?**

**HOW ARE CYCLES
CREATED?**
**HOW ARE THEY
BROKEN?**

At the heart of this theatrical epic lives our hero: Oscar de León, a first-generation Dominican-American living with the vastness of his family's lore—stories of survival, legacy and diaspora that are shaped by Dominican culture, history and mythology. But Oscar is not the typical hero one normally encounters in grand epics like this. He is awkward. Deeply nerdy. Hopelessly romantic. He loves boldly, dreams wildly and writes entire universes in his head. He is haunted by a *fukú*, a generational curse lurking in the shadows, threatening to crush him under its weight. And yet, in the face of all this, Oscar chooses courage, imagination and, above all, love.

Playwright and adaptor Marco Antonio Rodriguez describes Oscar as "pure love," noting that no matter what suffering or hardship he experiences—be it physical or emotional—Oscar remains able to love, and how that is his greatest superpower. For Oscar, love is *zafa*—a mythical counter-curse that can disrupt and transform the effects of *fukú*. Where *fukú* seeks to limit, shadow and control, *zafa* appears when we choose love—when we care, act and stand up for ourselves and others. Love, in this story, is not just a feeling—it is an active verb, a protective spell, a force that breaks cycles, heals our inherited pain and opens new paths forward.

This study guide is designed to help you explore Oscar's world—his family, his culture, the history of the Dominican Republic and the Dominican diaspora and the fantastical universes Oscar builds in his imagination. Inside of these pages, you will meet the artists who bring this story to life on stage and off, engage in activities designed to dive deeper into the themes of the play and perhaps, be provoked to consider how unabashed love, authenticity and a deep perseverance against all odds can help break open the treacherous cycles we inherit.

We hope that you find something empowering here:

A spark.
A question.
A reminder that cycles—no matter how old—can be broken.
That *zafa* is possible.
That every person has a story worthy of love.

Thank you for sharing in this story with us. We're so glad you're here. Let's nerd out.

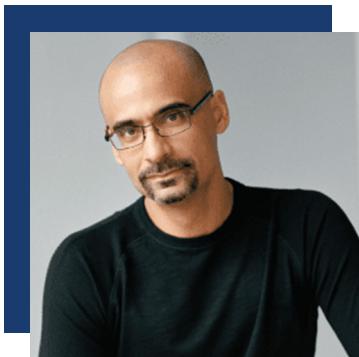


JARED BELLOT

CLIFFORD DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

FROM PAGE TO STAGE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND PLAYWRIGHT



JUNOT DÍAZ

Junot Díaz (Author) was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in New Jersey. He is the author of the critically acclaimed *Drown*; *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award; and *This Is How You Lose Her*, a New York Times bestseller and National Book Award finalist. He is the recipient of a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship, PEN/Malamud Award, Dayton Literary Peace Prize, Guggenheim Fellowship and PEN/O. Henry Award. A graduate of Rutgers College, Díaz is currently the fiction editor at *Boston Review* and the Rudge and Nancy Allen Professor of Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is the cofounder of Voices of Our Nation Workshop.



MARCO ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ

Marco Antonio Rodriguez (Playwright) is a Dominican-American, award-winning bilingual writer. He holds a double MFA in acting/television and screenwriting. He was named a Top 50 Figure in LatinX and Latin American Theatre by Routledge. His plays *Ashes of Light* and *Barceló on the Rocks* have been performed all over the world. His Spanish stage adaptation of Junot Díaz' *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* just celebrated five years Off-Broadway at the Spanish Repertory Theatre. His play *Bloom* had an acclaimed run at New York's IATI theatre. His half-hour pilot *Our Friendly Neighbors* was produced in short film format by DominiRican Productions. He was a National Hispanic Media Coalition Scriptwriters Program Fellow and the Movement Theatre Company x Black List Playwriting Commission winner. His new play *Domino Effect* was commissioned by People's Theatre Project. He was a recipient of New York Stage & Film and Space on Ryder Farm Residencies. As an actor, he voices Uncle Nestor in the Emmy-nominated PBS Kids series *Alma's Way* and Alo the unicorn on the Netflix animated series *Barbie: A Touch of Magic*.

A DREAM AND A RESPONSIBILITY

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT AND DIRECTOR

BY VICKY MEJIA,
DIGITAL MARKETING ASSOCIATE

VICKY MEJIA: What does it mean to you to bring a Dominican story like this to The Goodman?

MARCO ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ: Growing up, I didn't see Dominican stories on major stages—certainly not ones that reflected the complexity, humor and contradictions of our communities. To now bring *Oscar Wao* to The Goodman is a dream and a responsibility. It says our stories, our language, our rhythm belong in spaces of national conversation, not just in the margins. And it affirms that the Dominican experience is not niche, but part of the American story.

WENDY MATEO: Both the book and now the play live in this big, beautiful full-circle moment for me. When I first read the novel back in 2007, it cracked something open in me and caused a seismic shift in how I saw my artistry. At the time, I was a sketch comedy writer and performer navigating a mostly White, male-dominated world. Then along came this book that was so unapologetically Black, so unapologetically Dominican, so unapologetically itself, and it won a Pulitzer Prize! That was revolutionary. It showed me that our stories, the ones filled with messy, magical, complicated, loving, brave humans, my people, were not only worthy, they were extraordinary. These were people who survived dictatorships and generational trauma, who built new lives out of the rubble of old ones, who laughed loud and danced bachata in the kitchen, even when the weight of silence sat heavy on their hearts. That was my family. That was my community. And the book mirrored it all back to me with love and power.

So now, being a Dominicanita born in the Bronx, the kind of nerdy kid who was into musicals and obsessed with TV but never saw herself in those stories, getting to bring *Oscar Wao* to life on The Goodman stage is beyond personal. It's spiritual. It's legacy work. This story changed me and my own reflection on my childhood. Oscar was a nerd like me, his nerdiness was shaped by comic book culture and anime, but his world expected him to be this Dominican macho guy into dominoes and women. Oscar could never live up to that expectation because his own dreams were far too big for anyone to understand. I get that, on a visceral level. Now I get to help this story reach a new generation, to let them see themselves, their families, their magic, their inner power in a place that once didn't hold space for us. When this opportunity came, I didn't take it as a coincidence. I treated it with the care that fate deserves. To tell a story this bold, this Dominican, this ours, on one of the most iconic stages in the country? That's not just an honor; that's a full-on dream come true.

Playwright Marco Antonio Rodriguez and Director Wendy Mateo, both of Dominican heritage, share their thoughts of bringing their lived experiences and artistry together and what they hope audiences will take with them after watching *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.



MARCO ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ
PLAYWRIGHT



WENDY MATEO
DIRECTOR

V: What is something you hope audiences take with them after seeing this production?

M: I hope audiences leave with a sense that, at his core, Oscar is pure love. He's awkward, he suffers, he stumbles—but through it all, he continues to love openly and without fear. That's radical. I want people to reflect on how trauma echoes through generations, but also to see that breaking cycles is possible. If Oscar can keep his heart open, maybe we can too.

W: I hope audiences feel like they've been on an epic adventure, one that cracks something open and leaves them ready to release the weight of what no longer serves them. This story is about confronting the shadows we inherit, the ones we don't always talk about, but that live in our bloodlines and our memories. Every time I go back to the play in preparation for rehearsals, this quote keeps coming to me and it may sound cliché, but it's, "The truth shall set you free." Because freedom isn't just joy and sunshine; it's also the willingness to walk through the dark and to face what hurts. I want people to leave feeling seen, yes, but also charged. Like they're carrying a spark of liberation in their chest.

V: Which character do you most relate to in this story and why?

M: I relate deeply to Oscar. His outsider-ness, his nerdy obsessions, his longing to be seen and loved—all of that resonates with me as a Queer Dominican kid who often felt like he didn't fit in either culture. But I also connect with Lola's fire, her refusal to accept the world as it is. Between the two of them lives the battle I've always carried: the dreamer who longs for connection and the fighter who won't give up.

W: I'd say it's a straight split between Oscar and Lola. In Oscar, I see all my beautifully nerdy parts: the kid who was obsessed with stories, who lived half in her imagination and who maybe loved people a little too loudly. He's constantly searching for belonging, for that ultimate sense of comfort in the world and I so get that. Then there's Lola's fire, her defiance, her deep need to define herself on her own terms that speaks to my soul. I relate to her drive to celebrate her Blackness, to dig into her roots, to speak the truth about who she is and where she comes from. I'm half dreamy Oscar, half fierce Lola; a hopeful romantic wrapped in a truth-telling warrior.

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"THIS STORY IS ABOUT **CONFRONTING THE SHADOWS WE INHERIT**, THE ONES WE DON'T ALWAYS TALK ABOUT, BUT THAT LIVE IN OUR BLOODLINES AND OUR MEMORIES."

- WENDY MATEO

V: Both of you have worked in different mediums such as theater, filmmaking, television, etc. What are your thoughts on the current state of Latine storytelling across industries?

M: We're in a moment of both frustration and possibility. There's more visibility than when I started out, but too often Latine stories are still filtered through stereotypes or gatekept by people outside our communities. The exciting part is that more of us are taking the reins—writing, directing, producing our own work—and audiences are hungry for it. The challenge now is making sure the industry moves beyond "checking boxes" and actually embraces the breadth of our stories, from the comic book nerds to the activists to the abuelas casting spells.

W: Casting alone doesn't change a thing. You can fill a stage or a screen with "diverse" faces, but if the people calling the shots: the writers, directors, producers and executives don't come from those lived experiences, you'll never get the authenticity that truly connects with audiences. Representation isn't just about who's seen; it's about who's crafting the vision.

What's happening right now in American theater is both historic and long overdue. The fact that Marco and I, two Dominicans, are leading a major regional production and telling an unapologetically Dominican story shouldn't be an exception. The success of productions like *Buena Vista Social Club* and *Mexodus* proves that audiences are hungry for the full spectrum of Latine stories. I'm hopeful we're moving in that direction, but the numbers still tell a hard truth: we're not there yet. Latines make up a \$4.1 trillion market, and yet the industry still acts like we're optional. If we collectively decided to invest our time, money and energy only in the spaces that truly represent us, we'd shift culture overnight. That's the power we hold. And the more we recognize it, the louder and more unstoppable our stories become.

V: Who inspires your work on and off stage?

M: On stage, I'm inspired by writers who aren't afraid to fuse the personal with the political—Henrik Ibsen, Tennessee Williams, Dominique Morisseau, María Irene Fornés, Jean Genet, Dominican writers Juan Bosch and Franklin Dominguez. Off stage, I am often inspired by my mother. Our complicated relationship, her strength and contradictions, are at the heart of almost everything I write. And then there are the everyday Dominicans I grew up around. Especially the amazing women. Their humor, their poetry, their survival instinct. They remind me why these stories matter.

W: I'm not being hyperbolic when I say this: Beyoncé inspires me! Her artistry, her precision, the way she conveys ideas through music and imagery, it's next-level magic. I've drawn from so many of her ideas and energy, the feeling of power she instills in people. And my mom, Wanda, inspires me. She's a force, a reckoning, with the kindest, most generous heart. To know her is to know her laugh, and if you know my laugh, you know where it came from. Also, my daughter. She's my sun, moon, starshine, and inspires me every single day. She's smart, intuitive and hilarious. I love impressing her, and I can always tell if I've succeeded because her face doesn't lie.

My comedy comes from my Dominican family, who never met a light they didn't step into, or a story they didn't act out through 18 different characters. From a tiny antenna TV in the back room of my mom's office, where she sold insurance in the Bronx, I was mesmerized by Lucille Ball, Sally Field, Carol Burnett, Marsha Warfield, Gilda Radner, John Leguizamo, Whoopi Goldberg. They shaped how I see performance, timing and heart. These days, my inspiration comes from my Chicago artistic community. The women who paved the way, the ones doing it now, and the next generation coming up. There are too many to name without leaving someone out. I am deeply inspired by the work coming out of Chicago and Chicago artists. They're some of the fiercest I know.

V: Lastly, what is your favorite Dominican dish?

M: Bistec con tostones (flank steak with fried plantains) and a nice green salad with tons of Dominican aguacate (avocado)! I'm also a huge fan of my mami's Dominican sancocho de gallina (hen soup).

W: Your base is mangú, which is green plantain boiled and mashed (like potatoes). On the side are your three hits of salchichón (fried salami), queso blanco (fried white cheese) and huevos frito (fried egg). And then for presentation, you should have some red pickled onions over top and a couple of avocado slices on the side. For a good place to grab that dish in Chicago, go to El Sitio or Tropical Taste in Humboldt Park!

THE OSCAR CINEMATIC UNIVERSE: CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

BY MARCO ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ, PLAYWRIGHT,
AND ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN, SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER



OSCAR WAO

Afro-Latino. Nerdy, overweight, mini afro, wears thick bifocals. Determined to find love.

PLAYED BY LENIN IZQUIERDO



MANNY

Jenni's ex-boyfriend.
PLAYED BY ARIK VEGA



YUNIOR

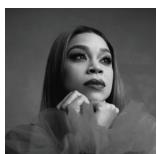
Oscar's college roommate and friend. Handsome. Flirt. Playboy wannabe. Suave. Womanizer. A bullshitter of sorts. Appears to be very sure of himself but is more of an immature little boy.

PLAYED BY KELVIN GRULLON



LA INCA

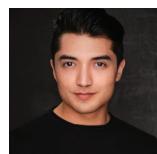
Afro-Latina. Cousin to Beli's father. Raised Beli.
PLAYED BY ROSSMERY ALMONTE



LOLA

Afro-Latina but lighter skinned. Older sister to Oscar. Spitfire. Hell on wheels. A rocket of a woman. Direct. Blunt. No bull. A little insecure.

PLAYED BY JULISSA CALDERON



DIONISIO

Beli's abusive ex.
PLAYED BY ARIK VEGA



BELI

Afro-Latina. Mother to Oscar and Lola. Tough love kind of woman. Proud of her accomplishments in the United States.
PLAYED BY YOHANNA FLORENTINO



YBÓN

Prostitute who lives in the Dominican Republic.
PLAYED BY JALBELLY GUZMÁN



JENNI

Oscar's college crush.
PLAYED BY JALBELLY GUZMÁN



CAPITÁN

Ybón's primary client.
PLAYED BY ARIK VEGA

A BRIEF WONDROUS SYNOPSIS

BY GABRIELLA BONAMICI, MARKETING COORDINATOR

ACT ONE

The play begins in 1995 at Rutgers University, where Oscar, an awkward Dominican American freshman, is moving into his dorm room. He meets his roommate, Yunior, who is cool, confident and seemingly the opposite of Oscar. But the boys soon realize that being Dominican American is not the only thing they have in common. Yunior is also a fan of comic books and a writer.

Lola, Oscar's sister, arrives at the dorm room. Yunior flirts with her, but she immediately rejects him. The three of them head to the cafeteria for lunch. After Lola leaves, Oscar notices Jenni, a pretty goth girl. Yunior encourages him to go talk to her. Oscar is convinced that he's destined to be the first Dominican man to die a virgin because of fukú, a familial curse. Yunior takes it upon himself to be Oscar's mentor and teach him how to pick up women.

With newfound confidence, Oscar approaches Jenni. Oscar declares his love for Jenni to Yunior, who warns him not to get ahead of himself. Oscar and Jenni begin to spend time together. She tells him that she has an older ex-boyfriend, Manny, who is still in her life. Yunior asks Lola out. Although hesitant, Lola agrees.

It is Halloween, and Oscar is dressed as Dr. Who. Yunior tells Oscar that the costume makes him look like Oscar Wilde, mispronouncing it as "Oscar Wao." Lola expresses her concern for Oscar and his relationship with Jenni. She tells Yunior that the last time Oscar liked a girl, he went on a hunger strike and was committed to a psychiatric ward. At a Halloween party, Lola confronts Jenni, who insists that she and Oscar are just having fun. Oscar sees Jenni kissing Manny and is furious. Back at the dorm room, Oscar tells Yunior how depressed he is and runs off. Oscar throws himself from the top of a train station.

ACT TWO

Oscar wakes up in a hospital room to his mother, Beli, who scolds and insults him. Oscar tells her that he plans to go to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. Beli thinks this is a terrible idea. Lola enters and gets into an argument with Beli. Although she is sick, Beli is working multiple jobs to provide for her children and her mother, La Inca, in Santo Domingo. Yunior visits Oscar in the hospital, and Oscar invites Yunior to come with him to Santo Domingo. Lola decides that she will also join them.

Oscar, Lola and Yunior arrive in Santo Domingo and are welcomed by La Inca. La Inca embraces her grandchildren but is less warm to Yunior. Later, Oscar is writing at a restaurant where he meets Ybón, a beautiful older woman and sex worker who lives next door to La Inca. Yunior warns him about falling in love with someone he barely knows.

Back at La Inca's, she and Lola also discourage Oscar's infatuation with Ybón. La Inca tells Oscar and Lola about their family history and the origin of their fukú. The play flashes back to 1960, where a young Beli meets Dionisio, who works for dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. She becomes pregnant, and Dionisio leaves her. Henchmen attack Beli, causing her to have a miscarriage. La Inca sends Beli to the US. Back in the present, Oscar visits Ybón, who admits that her ex-boyfriend is a police captain. Oscar tells Ybón that he's in love with her. The Captain walks in on them and beats Oscar.

Oscar once again wakes up in a hospital, this time in Santo Domingo, surrounded by Beli, La Inca, Lola and Yunior. Lola compares Oscar's situation to that of Beli and Dionisio, which infuriates Beli. When Oscar and Beli are alone, Beli opens up to him about Dionisio. Oscar tells his mother that she is beautiful. Ybón enters, and Beli confronts her. Oscar insists on talking to Ybón alone. Ybón tells Oscar that she's going to marry the Captain. Oscar wants to stay in Santo Domingo, but Beli reveals that her cancer is back, and she plans to stop treatment.

One year later, back in the US, Oscar visits Yunior at his apartment. Oscar also tells Yunior that he is moving out of the dorms to an apartment in Brooklyn, and asks for a loan of \$300, which Yunior gives him. When Yunior tells Lola about Oscar's visit, Lola realizes that Oscar has lied and gone back to Santo Domingo. In Santo Domingo, Oscar visits Ybón and loses his virginity to her. The Captain discovers them and takes Oscar away at gunpoint. Oscar tells the Captain that he and the Trujillos of the world will never know true glory; they are the real fukú. The Captain shoots and kills him.

Back in the US, Lola brings Yunior a package that Oscar left for him. Inside is a manuscript. Yunior gives Lola his journal, telling her that it's "the beginning of something."

THE WORLD OF OSCAR WAO

BY JARED BELLOT, CLIFFORD DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT
AND LO WILLIAMS, MICHAEL MAGGIO DIRECTING FELLOW

Explore how Oscar's story comes to life on stage, preserving the original novel's humor, heart and cultural richness while offering a fresh theatrical take that blends magical realism, pop culture and the history of the Dominican Republic.

BRINGING OSCAR TO THE STAGE

The journey to adapting *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* from a novel to a stage play began in 2011, when playwright Marco Antonio Rodriguez first met author Junot Díaz. The two men learned that their life experiences were parallel to one another, in opposite ways, each having lived in both the United States and the Dominican Republic at different points throughout their lives. As Rodriguez describes in ["The Long, Wondrous Adaptation of Oscar Wao,"](#) both felt "the same sense of dislocation, though in reverse." This shared feeling became the spark that inspired the theatrical adaptation.

Before granting the rights to adapt the book, Junot asked Marco to share his perspective about what an adaptation ought to look like. In the novel, Oscar does not serve as the main narrator. His story is largely told through the voices and observations of others. For the stage, Marco believed that this should shift and that Oscar should tell his story from his own perspective, stepping into the center of the narrative. Marco described Oscar not as a tragic figure but as a hero on a quest for unconditional love, explaining that "[Oscar's] fight for...unconditional love is a true hero's journey." Upon hearing this take on the story, Junot gave the green light for Marco to write the adaptation, and the journey began.



The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao premiered as a Spanish-language piece at New York's Repertorio Español in 2019. However, to keep the novel's humor, rhythm and Spanglish heartbeat intact, Marco first drafted the play in English then adapted it into Spanish. When he converted the piece to Spanish, he didn't translate all the words literally but instead did so in a way that honored and emphasized the Dominican roots of the story. For this new English translation, premiering at The Goodman, Marco has

kept certain culturally charged words like *fukú* and *zafa* in Spanish, and has kept the code-switching intact, too. The result is "a deliberately hybrid [text]...[neither] purely Spanish or English." This mix of English and Spanish language, along with American and Dominican culture, is the soul of the piece.

MAGICAL REALISM AND ALLUSIONS



ILLUSTRATION BY LUISA RIVERA FOR THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE BY GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ. THE NOVEL USES MAGICAL REALISM TO EXPLORE THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF COLOMBIA, BLENDING MYTH AND FOLKLORE INTO REALISTIC SETTINGS TO ILLUMINATE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEMES SUCH AS COLONIALISM AND OPPRESSION. (SOURCE: LUISA RIVERA, FAIR USE)

A key feature of the theatrical language of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is its use of magical realism, a theatrical and storytelling style that blends the everyday with the supernatural, introducing magical elements into an otherwise realistic environment. Originating in Latin American literature and visual art, magical realism appears in the works of authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges.

Marco has built magic directly into the movement and structure of the play, though some of the elements of magical realism in his writing came as a matter of practicality. Because Repertorio Espanol, where the show premiered, performs "in repertory," switching daily between performing different productions in the same theater space, the technical elements and special effects of Marco's adaptation couldn't be especially complex or overwhelming. Instead of relying on complicated practical elements, Marco added subtle transitions in his writing and stage directions

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that blur memory, time and the laws of reality. Oscar has some control of the transitions, whether it's a hand motion through the air to change dimensions, or a snap of the fingers to shift into a different time. With these "subtle but charged" gestures, the audience sees "the supernatural fukú [become]...a living metaphor for trauma passed through generations", and therefore something Oscar can seek out to destroy.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao is also filled with many literary and pop culture allusions, references to other characters, places and events outside of the story. These allusions often reveal Oscar's inner world or contain themes or messages that can be applied to the story at hand to deepen the story's themes. For example, Oscar is a devoted fan of science fiction, fantasy, anime, manga and comics—particularly of the Japanese animated film *Akira*. The story of *Akira* is one of resilience, hope and strength—very similar to themes taking place in the play. Other references to writers like Oscar Wilde, a writer who struggled as an outcast in his community and was persecuted for it, and the graphic novel *Watchmen*, a comic that discusses heroism, morality and the declining state of the world, similarly connect Oscar's personal struggle to larger questions about heroism, morality, identity and belonging. These stories give Oscar a language for his own life. They also frame his journey as a quest, not unlike the heroes he admires, where love, loyalty and hope become acts of resistance.



TRUJILLO, FUKÚ AND THE ROOTS OF A DIASPORA

Both the novel and stage adaptation of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are deeply rooted in the history of the Dominican Republic and the brutal legacy of Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. Trujillo came to power in February 1930 and established an oppressive dictatorship that lasted until his assassination in May 1961. Known as "El Jefe," or "The Boss," he ruled through violence, fear and a vast network of secret police and informants who created an atmosphere of constant surveillance and paranoia. Under the Trujillo regime, civil liberties were virtually nonexistent and brutality and terror dominated daily life. Dominicans were required to hang portraits of Trujillo in their homes, schoolchildren were taught to revere him and in 1936 he even renamed

"THESE STORIES GIVE OSCAR A LANGUAGE FOR HIS OWN LIFE. THEY ALSO FRAME HIS JOURNEY AS A QUEST, NOT UNLIKE THE HEROES HE ADMires, WHERE LOVE, LOYALTY AND HOPE BECOME ACTS OF RESISTANCE."

the capital city Santo Domingo "Ciudad Trujillo" in his own honor—an act that symbolized the total reach of his control.

One of the most infamous and horrific acts of Trujillo's rule was the 1937 Parsley Massacre, in which his soldiers murdered thousands of Haitians and Haitian Dominicans living and working in the country, many of them sugar cane laborers. Estimates of the dead range from 13,000 to 30,000 adults and children. Trujillo's violence also extended beyond the island itself, including the assassination of political dissenter Jesús de Galíndez in New York City and an attempted assassination of Venezuelan President Rómulo Betancourt.

Trujillo abused his power not only politically but personally. He was known for exploiting and harassing young women, and in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* his obsession with Abelard's daughter becomes the fukú that haunts an entire family. In this way, the mythical idea of fukú is directly tied to real historical violence. Trujillo becomes the embodiment of the curse itself and a symbol of how cycles of violence and fear can ripple across generations.

The impact of Trujillo's dictatorship drove major waves of migration away from the island and gave rise to the Dominican diaspora that forms the backbone of Oscar's story. Although Dominicans had been migrating to the U.S. since colonial times, movement was tightly restricted during the early decades of Trujillo's rule in the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1950s, as his grip began to weaken and travel restrictions eased, more Dominicans were able to leave the country, as is the case for Beli in *Oscar Wao*. Larger waves followed in the second half of the twentieth century.

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ry: first in 1961 after Trujillo's assassination, again in 1965 after the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic loosened travel restrictions and again in the 1980s as poverty and unemployment intensified on the island. Today, Dominican Americans are the fifth largest Hispanic group in the United States, with more than 2.4 million people living in the country as of 2021. Most Dominican Americans live in New York (about 42%) and New Jersey (about 15%)—the very communities that shape Oscar's world.

OSCAR'S LEGACY

Junot Díaz's novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2008, a recognition that underscores the novel's literary and cultural importance. Beyond the accolades, the story gives voice to Latine experiences in the United States, particularly the Dominican-American experience, at a time when these perspectives are often overlooked. Oscar, as a first-generation Dominican-American, inhabits the space betwixt and between two identities, Dominican and American. His journey shows how immigration, identity and culture intertwine, and how generational cycles of inherited fear, systemic oppression and historical violence can shadow families across time.

Importantly, both the novel and play confront entrenched cultural ideas and stereotypes. An exploration of concepts like *la mejoranza de la raza*, the privileging of lighter skin, reveal how internalized racism influences family dynamics and perceptions of beauty. At the same time, Oscar subverts stereotypes of the "Latin lover" trope invoked by Yunior and others. He does not conform to traditional notions of strength or toughness; instead, his sensitivity, romanticism and intellect become his true sources of power. Similarly, the women in Oscar's family—Beli, Lola and La Inca—offer a spectrum of Dominican womanhood, resisting one-dimensional portrayals. Beli is fierce and defiant, Lola navigates love and identity while carrying intergenerational burdens and La Inca provides wisdom and steady guidance across generations.

In this focus on individual stories, Oscar Wao expands who gets to be at the center of an epic story. Instead of presenting immigrant communities through a single narrative of struggle or hardship, it shows a rich, complex world filled with love, imagination, fear, hope and resilience. By blending history with fantasy, Spanish with English, and realism with myth, the story honors the full humanity of its characters, and in doing so, transforms the idea of what it means to be the protagonist of a story.

FUKÚ VS ZAFA

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

BY TYRA BULLOCK,
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao highlights magical realism in Latine culture through a supernatural curse called fukú and its counterspell, zafa. In this activity, each student will investigate the role of superstitions in culture and design a mosaic artwork that examines these terms in the context of their own lives. If students are unfamiliar with the play or novel, read the "A Brief and Wonderous Synopsis" on page 7 of this guide before facilitating this activity.

TIME: 60-75 MINUTES

VOCABULARY

- Colonialism
- Fukú
- Mosaic Art
- Zafa

MATERIALS

- Glue stick
- Construction paper (at least 3 sheets per student)
- Writing utensil
- Additional materials (optional): Tissue paper, magazines, sticky notes, jewelry beads, art tiles, paint swatches, dried beans, dried candy, coins, colored duct tape, bottle caps, etc.

LEARNING STANDARDS

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: VISUAL ART

- VA.Cr.2.3.2a: Repurpose objects to make something new.
- VA.Cr.2.3.11a: Redesign an object, system, place, or design in response to contemporary issues.
- VA.RE.7.2.4a: Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages.
- VA.RE.7.1.5.a: Compare one's own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others.

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: THEATRE

- TH.Cr2.1.1a. Explore the function of history and culture in the development of a dramatic concept through a critical analysis of original ideas in a drama/ theatre work.
- TH.Cn.10.1.11a. Investigate how community ideas and personal beliefs impact a drama/theater work.

"THE CURSE FIRST CAME FROM AFRICA, CARRIED IN THE SCREAMS OF THOSE WHO WERE ENSLAVED. **IT WAS THE DEATH BANE OF THE TAÍNOS, UTTERED JUST AS ONE WORLD PERISHED AND ANOTHER BEGAN; A DEMON DRAWN INTO CREATION THROUGH THE NIGHTMARE DOOR CRACKED OPEN IN THE ANTILLES! ALL OF US ITS CHILDREN! BUT MY LINEAGE WILL BE SAVED FROM THIS CURSE! THIS... FUKÚ!"**

- OSCAR

OBJECTIVES

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

- Explore how societal, cultural and historical context influence personal and community beliefs.
- Apply critical thinking to reimagine a societal, cultural or historical obstacle that influences their lives.
- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to produce an original mosaic artwork.

- TH:Re8.1.1b. Identify and compare cultural perspectives and contexts that may influence the interpretation of a drama/theatre work.

- TH:Cn11.1.1 a. Explore how cultural, global and historic belief systems affect creative choices in a drama/theatre work.

ILLINOIS SOCIAL SCIENCE STANDARDS

- SS.3.H.2. Explain how the diverse perspectives of people and events develop and shape communities and/or regions.
- SS.9-12.H.1. Evaluate the context of time and place as well as structural factors that influence historical developments.
- SS.9-12.REL.8. Interpret how beliefs, behaviors and experiences of belonging to various communities affect and are affected by other social, political and cultural forces.
- SS.9-12.REL.9. Give examples of how beliefs, behaviors and community experiences shape and are shaped by one another in particular social and historical contexts

BEFORE CLASS: SET UP

1. Draw a horizontal line on the board. On the far left, write "There's no such thing as luck" and on the far right, write "Luck definitely exists!" as demonstrated below.



STEP 1: ASSESS (10 MINUTES)

1. Ask students if they believe in luck (good or bad).
2. Invite students to walk up to the board and mark where they fall on the spectrum.
3. As a class, discuss the following:
 - a. Where did you place yourself on the horizontal line and why?
 - b. Are you surprised by the classroom results? Why or why not?
 - c. What factors do you think help shape a person's beliefs around superstitions? Can you provide some examples?

STEP 2: CONTEXTUALIZE (15 MINUTES)

1. Define
 - a. Provide the definitions of fukú and zafa on display somewhere in the class for the students to view.
 - b. Invite students to read the definitions aloud.

FUKÚ is a generational curse, or stroke of bad luck, experienced by Dominican people as a result of European colonization.

ZAFÁ is the remedy that purges a human of the fukú curse.

2. Share

- a. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, our title character spends most of the play trying to escape "fukú americanus," or "the Curse and the Doom of the New World" he holds responsible for the historical tragedies endured by his family and those of Dominican descent. The term 'fukú' is mentioned a total of 38 times in the script. In comparison, **zafa**, the counterspell to this generational curse, is only mentioned 19 times, indicating to the audience the scarce relief experienced by the characters in the story.
- b. The novel's author, Junot Díaz, uses fukú and zafa to examine the history and impact of colonialism in the Dominican Republic. **Colonialism** is a system of hierarchy and epistemology (theory of knowledge) used to dominate a group of people that has occurred throughout human history. The 16th century saw a new phase of

European colonialism in the Western Hemisphere as European nations scrambled to control land in the Caribbean and throughout North and South America, its effects especially prominent following the enslavement of West and Central Africans. In fact, many Dominicans, including the characters in the play, believe that the source of fukú stems from the events of the transatlantic slave trade.

3. Discuss

- a. With these definitions in mind, what are some examples of fukú and zafa at work in the play? Feel free to reference the "A Brief Wondrous Synopsis" located on page 7 of this guide.
- b. Do you believe a person has the power to shape their own fate? Explain.
- c. Do you believe a community has the power to influence the fate of its people? How so?

STEP 3: EXPLORING FUKÚ (5-7 MINUTES)

1. Ask students to think about what fukú means to them.
2. On a sheet of construction paper, have students write or draw their responses to the prompts below—this feedback will represent their 'fukú':
 - a. What is an obstacle or adversity you've experienced? What internal or external factors contributed to this hardship?
 - b. Have you or your family ever experienced oppression due to your cultural lineage?
 - c. Is there a pattern of behavior in your family or culture you'd like to see change?

STEP 4: HARNESSING ZAFÁ (5-8 MINUTES)

1. Ask students to think about what zafa means to them. Remember, this is a counterspell or cure to fukú!
2. On a separate sheet of construction paper, have students write or draw their responses to the prompts below – this feedback will represent their 'zafa':
 - a. What do you think you need to combat the fukú? How can others (family, friends, community, government, etc.) support you in defeating the fukú?
 - b. In what ways is zafa a form of protection? A superpower?
 - c. What images or words come to mind when you think of zafa? Is it an internal and/or an external force?

TIP:

If you need to spread this activity across multiple class periods, consider using Step 4 as the dividing point.

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STEP 5: THE ART OF BREAKING FREE (25-30 MINUTES)

1. **Instruct** students to rip or cut up their responses to fukú into small pieces. Let them know that they will use these remains to create a mosaic art that represents their zafa. **Mosaic art** is a decorative art form where a picture or pattern is created by assembling small, colored pieces of material.
NOTE: If desired, students are welcome to use additional materials for their design. Make sure these are readily available for easy access.
2. **Have** students take the construction paper with responses to zafa. Let them know that this will be used as the foundation for their artwork. They will need this, and a glue stick to assemble the pieces into a new work of art that represents their zafa. Make sure their name is written on the back of the paper to receive full credit.
3. **Share** the examples provided on page 14 of this guide with the students for inspiration!

RECOMMENDED MOSAIC MATERIALS

- Construction paper
- Tissue paper
- Sticky notes
- Jewelry beads
- Art tiles
- Paint swatches
- Dried beans
- Dried candy
- Coins
- Colored duct tape
- Bottle caps
- Buttons

EXAMPLES OF MOSAIC ART ON THE NEXT PAGE

STEP 6: MOSAICS ON DISPLAY (5 MINUTES)

1. Have students display their mosaics with care somewhere in the classroom.
2. Hand each student a stack of sticky notes to record their reactions to each other's work. Encourage them to think about the following: *What do they notice? What are they curious about? What do they think it represents?*
3. Take a few minutes to reflect on this activity aloud.
4. If time permits, consider repeating the exercise from Step 1 to see if the class's opinion has shifted by the end of this activity.

EXTENSION IDEA

Have students make a list of superstitions observed by their culture, then compare these to the ones practiced in Dominican culture. In their research, make sure students document the origins of these beliefs. When complete, invite students to share their findings with the class.

EXAMPLES OF MOSAIC ART



BEHIND THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS: MEET THE DESIGNERS

BY ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN,
SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

When you see a show, you may notice several ways you are transported to the world of the play. Perhaps you have experienced lights that signal a shift in time or sound that alters the mood. Behind the sights and sounds of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are a team of designers helping bring the show to life.

On The Goodman's team for this production are Lighting Designer **Max Grano De Oro**, Costume Designer **Raquel Adorno** and Set Designer **Regina García**. Read on to learn about their vision for the show and what they hope you notice!

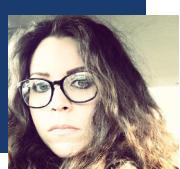


MAX GRANO DE ORO LIGHTING DESIGNER

As I step into a design process, I always ask myself the question: **What role does the lighting play in this story as a character?** In this case, the lighting serves as a reflection of Oscar's experience throughout the piece. This world shifts based on Oscar's perspective, often drawing inspiration from 80s and 90s anime, specifically *Akira*, as well as graphic novels from the same time period.

Simultaneously, Oscar's world is haunted by the fukú, and so we must ask: **How does the presence of this entity shift the world?** The fukú often invades the space as a grounding, realistic force of nature, tearing Oscar away from his fantasy, overwhelming the space. Early in the process, the visuals for the fukú were inspired by Magritte's *The Banquet*, which can be found at the Art Institute of Chicago.

While watching the play, students should look for how lighting helps reflect Oscar's state of mind and when the mood of the lighting actively contrasts what we think Oscar is experiencing. **How does the lighting tie into the scenic and projection designs to convey a sense of location and emotion? How does the world change when fukú is dominant?**



RAQUEL ADORNO COSTUME DESIGNER

My design is deeply inspired by the aesthetic of comic books, graphic novels, the vibrant imagery of botánicas and Yoruba Orishas. Style icons of the 90s like Romeo Santos, Antony Santos and Lisa Bonet have influenced the design's sense of style. Ultimately, I want the design to tap into personal and collective memory.



REGINA GARCÍA SET DESIGNER

Throughout the play, we see Oscar writing in his journal taking note of what he sees and witnesses in the world, so most moments happen around him or nearby. Same with locations! The world reaches out to "fold" him in. Each moment in his life has a "comic book" double where elements, including color and texture, are augmented. Our skyline of shadow boxes, the set, is a 3-dimensional expression of the comic book panels and border lines attempting to frame moments in Oscar's life. Some of them float in space and some interlock to connect us back to the ground, where we discover the fukú is always lurking.

Because of the epic nature of the story and how fast it moves (it is a "Brief Life" after all...), we are giving the ensemble of actors a series of converging pathways to travel on when on stage, while also providing for a backstage life that is comprehensive for both actors and crew.

INTIMACY, VIOLENCE AND MOVEMENT:

A CONVERSATION WITH GREG GEFFRARD

BY ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN,
SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER



GREG GEFFRARD
INTIMACY/VIOLENCE AND
MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

Greg Geffrard shares his approach to creating sustainable moments of intimacy, violence and movement on stage.

ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN: Could you share a bit about your roles on *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and what they entail?

GREG GEFFRARD: I have three roles, and two of them are combined. I'm doing the intimacy and violence for the show, and I'm also doing movement direction. For intimacy, my job is to help create sustainable practices for people to do scenes of intimacy on stage. If any parts of your intersecting identities are being leveraged in a moment, then it is very likely that it will be intimate for you because those identities still exist even when you're not in the world of the play. And the same thing applies to violence. The only thing that's different is one deals in the *intended*, and the other one deals in the *actual*. For example, my fight choreography is intended to look like somebody is being slapped in the face, but what's actually happening is not that. And in intimacy, you're not just acting like you're kissing someone, you are actually kissing that person.

A: How is this work related to your movement direction?

G: For me, the difference between choreography and movement direction is that choreography is created on my body and I'm putting it on your body, whereas movement direction is generated in the role with the storytellers. My role with movement direction is going to focus on Oscar living in a world between our reality and the comic book land. It's going to be my responsibility to find where those worlds intersect and help with transitions.

A: What does the rehearsal process look like for you?

G: I first introduce consent and boundaries, making sure that folks have the tools to be able to say yes, and making sure that yes and no will be respected and heard. We're not going to kiss on the very first day. I'm not going to bring a prop gun into the space on the very first day. It's thinking and being mindful about when we introduce things into the space, be it language or action or props.

Once we've established all of that, we do the choreography and document it to ensure that what we've created is repeatable. If it needs to change, we make sure that the documentation is up to date because once I leave the process, the stage manager is going to be the one responsible for maintaining and keeping this up.

A: What drew you to working on intimacy, violence and movement for theater? How did you get into it?

G: I was primarily an actor, and I was being asked to work on some pretty heightened material, specifically navigating trauma. I was very interested in how I could make sure I was able to work in a way that allowed me to have a long career. In 2021, when theater was reopening, a lot of people didn't come back because you can't ask people to find their joy in the same place they lost it. Many places were putting up their Black Lives Matter signs, but their practices weren't reflective of change for people who were being asked to bring their wounds into the space and then essentially be forgotten about once their contract ran out. I just wanted everybody to have the ability to work on a show for two to three months and not have to be processing that show for the next two to three years.

**"YOU CAN'T ASK PEOPLE
TO FIND THEIR JOY IN THE
SAME PLACE THEY LOST IT."**

I also have a background as a sexual assault prevention educator. I was working with the military doing their sexual assault prevention and response classes. And yet, I would walk into rehearsal and be like, "Hey, person whose middle name I don't know. By the end of this rehearsal, we're going to be kissing each other." And it was just like, why do we not have these same practices in theater where we are asked to be intimate and vulnerable in an urgent manner?

So, I took a workshop when I started teaching at the collegiate level and met this woman named Chelsea Pace. We immediately had a shared language because I had already been doing consent work. I found out that Chelsea wrote the first book on the field of intimacy, and I didn't realize this work was something that was already happening. Then I became a part of her company, Theatrical Intimacy Education, and I continue to be a part of that company and do this work professionally.

A: What do you hope students notice in your work when they see the show?

G: I consistently question the need for intimacy and violence in storytelling. I find myself in a place now where I look at intimacy and violence the same way I look at musicals, where this just can't be expressed in any other way. I'm hoping they're able to glean why intimacy and violence are necessary for this specific story.

SENDING SHOCK WAVES: S.T.E.A.M. ACTIVITIES

BY ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN,
SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

How can biology, physics and math help illuminate key ideas of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*? Try the activities below to find out!

BIOLOGY: GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND EPIGENETICS

Oscar and his family navigate generational trauma, or the idea of trauma being passed down through generations. Some scientists link generational trauma to epigenetics, or the study of changes to gene expression that are caused by environmental factors, such as trauma.

What is the science behind generational trauma? How is pain biologically inherited? How are these cycles broken? Watch the following video for an overview:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7Vh99lFG7s>

After undergoing additional research, ask students to create a visual representation of their findings. What diagrams, symbols, colors, textures, patterns, etc. can be used to communicate the science behind generational trauma? Time permitting, students may dig deeper into DNA specifics.

Lastly, have students connect their findings to the play. How is generational trauma present in the play? How do characters from the play map onto students' visual representations?

PHYSICS: OSCAR'S SHOCK WAVES

In the play, Oscar sends shock waves of seismic energy through the air by swinging his arms à la X-Men's Arclight. The rippling force is enough to send people spinning!

What are shock waves? What is seismic energy? Clarify that shock waves travel at supersonic speeds and are produced by sudden changes in pressure and density like explosions, while seismic waves travel through the earth and are often caused by earthquakes and other geological events. Learn more about shock waves [here](#), and observe types of seismic waves [here](#). Ask students to note similarities and differences between the two. Play with calculating differing Mach numbers and angles using $M_a = v/c$ and $\sin \mu = c/v$. How would different values impact the shockwave? Model P- and S-waves with a spring and a rope. What are different ways seismic waves can move?

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

- **NGSS-HS-LS3-1:** Ask questions to clarify relationships about the role of DNA and chromosomes in coding the instructions for characteristic traits passed from parents to offspring.
- **NGSS-HS-LS3-2:** Make and defend a claim based on evidence that inheritable genetic variations may result from . . . mutations caused by environmental factors.

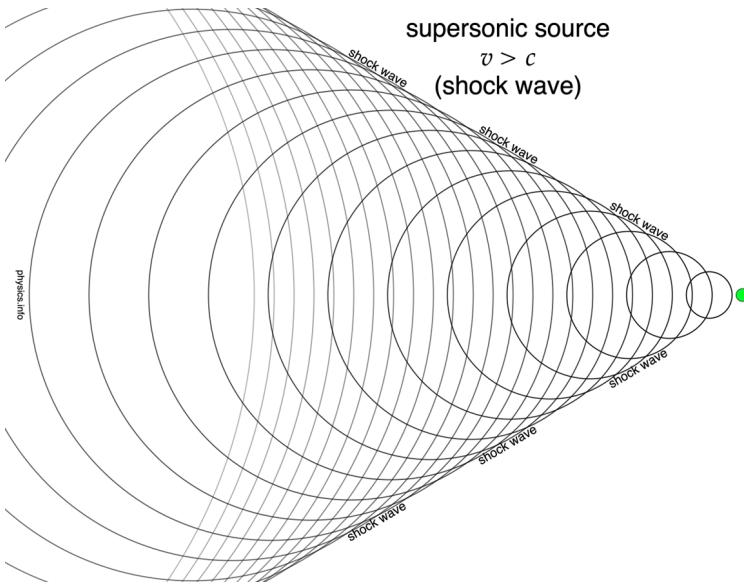
ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: THEATRE

- **TH.CN11.2.A:** Research societal, historical and cultural context for a performance.
- **TH.RE8.A:** Use personal experience and background knowledge to create or interpret a drama/theater work.

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

- **NGSS-HS-PS4-1:** Use mathematical representations to support a claim regarding relationships among the frequency, wavelength and speed of waves traveling in various media.
- **NGSS-HS-PS3-2:** Develop and use models to illustrate that energy at the macroscopic scale can be accounted for as a combination of energy associated with the motion of particles (objects) and energy associated with the relative positions of particles (objects).

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE



Source: [Shock Waves – The Physics Hypertextbook](#)

Lastly, use these findings to inspire staging and design for Oscar's shockwaves. Review those moments in the play (p. 126 and p. 127). What visuals, sound and movement might effectively convey the shockwaves? Demonstrate with flashlights, sound effects and actors.

MATH: GRAPHING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT UNDER TRUJILLO

Beli grew up in the Dominican Republic under the Trujillo regime. What were his economic policies like?

Pass out copies of the table below, which outlines principal crop production under Trujillo. The table can be accessed [here](#) under Agricultural Development, but don't reveal the full story to students yet.

Table 4.--Principal crops: Estimated production of principal crops, Dominican Republic, average 1952/53-1954/55, annual 1957/58-1961/62 1/

| Crop | Average 1952/53- 1954/55 | 1957/58 | 1958/59 | 1959/60 | 1960/61 | 1961/62 |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| -----1,000 metric tons----- | | | | | | |
| Sugar, centrifugal.. | 618 | 787 | 902 | 859 | 873 | 872 |
| Coffee..... | 29 | 39 | 26 | 35 | 30 | 36 |
| Cacao..... | 36 | 35 | 31 | 39 | 35 | 35 |
| Tobacco..... | 18 | 21 | 18 | 18 | 23 | 26 |
| Rice (rough)..... | 93 | 111 | 125 | 116 | 136 | 144 |
| Corn..... | 90 | 94 | 89 | 84 | 86 | 83 |
| Beans | 21 | 18 | 21 | 27 | 24 | 17 |
| Peanuts | 27 | 61 | 65 | 62 | 45 | 55 |
| Sweet potatoes..... | 85 | 79 | 80 | 80 | 80 | 80 |
| Yuca..... | 130 | 138 | 154 | 159 | 168 | 188 |

Source: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Regional Analysis Division, 1963.

Ask students to create a line graph of this data. Have them calculate percent change between certain years using $\% \text{ Change} = (\text{New}-\text{Old})/\text{Old} \times 100$. Which years had the largest increase? The largest decrease? Ask students to infer why.

Then, invite students to learn more [here](#). How does the story compare to their conclusions? What new context did they learn that the data didn't show? How might this context have impacted Beli growing up?

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

- **NGSS-HS-ETS1-2:** Design a solution to a complex real-world problem by breaking it down into smaller, manageable problems.

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: THEATRE

- **TH.Cr3.c:** Integrate design elements that create an emotional impact or convey meaning.
- **TH.Re8.a:** Use personal experience and background knowledge to create or interpret a drama/theater work.
- **TH.Cn11.2.b:** Research societal, historical and cultural context to create a unified drama/theater design.

COMMON CORE MATHEMATICS STANDARDS

- **CCSS.Math.Content.HSF.IF.B.4:** For a function that models a relationship between two quantities, interpret key features of graphs and tables in terms of the quantities.
- **CCSS.Math.Content.HSS.ID.A.1:** Represent data with plots on the real number line.
- **CCSS.Math.Content.HSS.ID.C.7:** Interpret the slope (rate of change) and the intercept (constant term) of a linear model in the context of the data.

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: THEATRE

- **TH.Cn11.2.a:** Research societal, historical and cultural context for a performance.
- **TH.Re8.a:** Use personal experience and background knowledge to create or interpret a drama/theater work.

A BACHATA IN FREAKIN' RUTGERS: HUMANITIES ACTIVITIES

BY ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN, SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

Want to dive into Oscar's world through music, social studies and English? Check out the activity ideas below!

MUSIC: PERICO RIPIAO AND BACHATA

Two Dominican styles of music in Oscar Wao include Perico Ripiao and Bachata. What makes these styles unique?

Play samples from these [Perico Ripiao](#) and [Bachata](#) playlists, but don't tell students which is which yet—just invite them to guess, citing rhythms, instruments, time signatures and other elements they hear! Then, have students research each style. What are their origins? What instruments do they typically involve? What rhythms? What dance moves go along with them? After some initial research, play the samples again and see if students can correctly identify them.

Then, visit two scenes from the play featuring Perico Ripiao (pp. 86-87) and Bachata (p. 49). Read those moments aloud, then have students pick songs for the scenes to act out with music in small groups. Give them time to select songs and practice. Before acting out the scenes for the class, ask groups to explain why they chose the particular songs they did. After the performances, discuss how the mood, tempo, etc. of the music impacted the scenes.

OSCAR
My most excellent lady knows all!

Bachata music starts to play.

YUNIOR
HARK! Hearth that? A Bachata in freakin' Rutgers! Wherever did it come from?

OSCAR
Yunior, don't tell me that--

YUNIOR
You two simply must dance.

OSCAR
I don't think that Jenni--

JENNI
Come on!

Jenni and Oscar dance.

AN EXCERPT FROM ACT I, CHAPTER 7 OF THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO

SOCIAL STUDIES: TRUJILLO TABLEAUX

La Inca refers to Trujillo as "our then dictator-for-life." What were key facets of Trujillo's dictatorship?

Invite students to learn more [here](#). Give students a heads up that the content includes mentions of violence and sexual assault. Split students into groups covering three categories: 1. Trujillo's Political and Social Control, 2. Trujillo's Economic Policies and 3. Democratization of the Dominican Republic. Have students create three tableaux representing three main ideas for their assigned section.

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: MUSIC

- MU:Cn10.1.I.a: Demonstrate how interests, knowledge and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing and responding to music as developmentally appropriate.
- MU:Cn11.1.I.a: Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts and daily life as developmentally appropriate.
- MU:Re7.1.I.a: Apply teacher-provided criteria to select music for specified purposes, supporting choices by citing characteristics found in the music and connections to interest, purpose and context.
- MU:Re7.1.I.b: Compare passages in musical selections and explain how the elements of music and context inform the response.
- MU:Re7.1.I.c: Identify and compare the context of programs of music from a variety of genres, cultures and historical periods as developmentally appropriate.

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: THEATRE

- TH:Cr1.1.I.b: Explore the impact of technology on design choices in a drama/ theater work.
- TH:Cn11.2.a: Research societal, historical and cultural context for a performance.
- TH:Re8.b: Interpret how culture influences a performance.

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: SOCIAL SCIENCE

- SS.9-12.H.4: Analyze how people and institutions have interacted with environmental, scientific, technological and societal challenges.
- SS.9-12.H.8: Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically underrepresented groups.

Dictatorship and Development

The Dominican Republic Under and After Trujillo

Zixu Wang
December 13, 2024

[Introduction](#) [Timeline: Trujillo's Dictators...](#) [Trujillo's Political and Socia...](#) [Trujillo's Economic Policies](#) [Democratization of The Dominic...](#)

Introduction

The Dominican Republic experienced a long history of dictatorship from 1930 to 1961 under Rafael Trujillo. Under his dictatorship, the Dominican economy prospered yet civil liberty was significantly deprived. In my final project, I am to first provide an overview of Trujillo's dictatorship, laying out the timeline of his gain of power, consolidation of authoritarian

SOURCE: [StoryMaps: Dictatorship and Development](#)

Present the tableaux to the class. As each group presents, have the class describe, analyze then interpret what they see. What do they notice? What do they wonder? What meaning can they make? After the class responds, each group should explain their three main ideas. As a full group, discuss how the effects of Trujillo's dictatorship can be seen in Beli and her family.

ENGLISH: ADAPTATION

This play is an adaptation of the novel by Junot Díaz. How did playwright Marco Antonio Rodriguez go from page to stage?

Read ["The Long, Wondrous Adaptation of Oscar Wao"](#) by Marco Antonio Rodriguez to learn more about his process first-hand. What challenges did he face? What solutions did he find? What choices did he make in the process?

The Long, Wondrous Adaptation of Oscar Wao

How a Playwright Translated Junot Diaz's Beloved, Epic Novel of Dominican Dislocation for the Stage

By Marco Antonio Rodriguez / November 20, 2025



After meeting novelist Junot Diaz at a book signing, playwright Marco Antonio Rodriguez embarked on a journey to adapt Diaz's beloved novel, "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," for the stage. | Mario Pupo as Yunior, left, and Reynaldo Romero as Oscar. Credit: Courtesy of author.

SOURCE: [The Long, Wondrous Adaptation of Oscar Wao](#)

Next, try going from stage to page! Read the first scene of the play, then have students write out the scene in prose. Include narrative elements such as dialogue. Once finished, act out the scene, then read students' narrative pages aloud. What changed? What was preserved? What was the adaptation process like?

- SS.9-12.H.13: Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: THEATRE

- SS.9-12.H.4: Analyze how people and institutions have interacted with environmental, scientific, technological and societal challenges.
- SS.9-12.H.8: Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically underrepresented groups.
- SS.9-12.H.13: Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots) and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS: THEATRE

- SS.9-12.H.4: Analyze how people and institutions have interacted with environmental, scientific, technological and societal challenges.
- SS.9-12.H.8: Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically underrepresented groups.
- SS.9-12.H.13: Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BY ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN,
SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

BEFORE OR AFTER WATCHING

- How have your ancestors and/or family members shaped who you are today? How have you made your own path?
- What does love look like to you? What is something you've done in the name of love? How far would you go to pursue love?
- What are some examples of cycles (political, generational, interpersonal, etc.) you've witnessed or experienced? How were they created? Do you think cycles can be broken? Why or why not?
- Where do you feel like your most authentic self? When have you felt like you didn't fit in? Why?
- Describe a time you advocated for yourself. Was it easy for you to do so? Why or why not?

AFTER WATCHING

- What stood out to you? What characters, moments, language, design elements and/or take-aways are sticking with you?
- What stereotypes are present in the play (gender, racial, etc.)? How are some stereotypes subverted or challenged?
- What cycles (political, generational, interpersonal, etc.) did you observe? What causes them? Are any of them broken? How so?
- What are some of the literary and pop culture references in the play? What purposes do they serve? How do they help tell the story?
- Describe how Spanish is woven into the play. What impact does it have on the storytelling?
- Why does Oscar end up going back to Santo Domingo? How do you feel about his decision?
- Which characters did you relate to the most? Which characters did you relate to the least? Why?

GLOSSARY

BY ANNA ROGELIO JOAQUIN, SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

POP CULTURE REFERENCES

Adrian Veidt - Watchmen antagonist, also known as Ozymandias (p. 11)

Akira - 1988 Japanese anime film set in post-apocalyptic Tokyo (pp. 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 17)

Alice Walker - Author best known for The Color Purple (pub. 1982); quoted from a foreword to Zora Neale Hurston's Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo" (written 1927, pub. 2018) (p. iii)

The Ancient One - Marvel sorcerer and mentor to Dr. Strange (p. 86)

Anime - Japanese animation style (pp. iv, 10)

Aragorn - Lord of the Rings protagonist (pp. 38, 134)

Arwen - Lord of the Rings elf princess who gives up immortality for Aragorn's love (p. 38)

Asimov - Refers to Isaac Asimov, prolific science fiction writer best known for the Foundation series (1920-1992) (p. 4)

Batman/Bruce Wayne - DC superhero who avenges the murder of his parents, Thomas and Martha (p. 77)

Black Widow - Marvel spy and founding member of the Avengers (p. 63)

Daredevil - Marvel lawyer turned superhero who was blinded in an accident then sharpened his superhuman senses (p. 92)

Darkseid - DC villain whose Omega Effect enables him to fire powerful beams from his eyes (p. 6)

Dr. Manhattan - Watchmen physicist turned government-sponsored superhero (p. 9)

Duke Leto Atreides - Compassionate leader and central character of Dune (p. 130)

Dune - Frank Herbert's 1965 science fiction novel about power and survival on the desert planet Arrakis (pp. 43, 130, 135)

Dungeons & Dragons - Fantasy role-playing game (p. 27)

Fantastic Four - Marvel superhero team created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1961 (p. iii)

Folding of time - Science fiction concept of bending time and space (pp. 9, 93)

Galactus - Marvel cosmic entity who eats entire planets to sustain himself (p. iii)

Gandalf - Protagonist wizard from Lord of the Rings (p. 17)

George Orwell - Author best known for dystopian novel 1984 (pub. 1949) and allegorical novella Animal Farm (pub. 1945) (p. 99)

Glinda the Good Witch - Sorceress in L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz book (pub. 1900) who travels by magic bubble in the 1939 The Wizard of Oz film (p. 87)

Grayskull - Magical castle in Masters of the Universe, also known as the He-Man or She-Ra series created by Mattel (1982-1988) (p. 43)

Green Hornet - Masked crime fighter first featured in The Green Hornet radio series in 1936 before appearing in television, comics and film (p. 117)

Heinlein - Refers to Robert A. Heinlein, influential science fiction author known for Starship Troopers (pub. 1959) and Stranger in a Strange Land (pub. 1961) (p. 4)

Henry Miller - Author known for sexually explicit autobiographical novels, including trilogy The Rosy Crucifixion (pub. 1949-1959) (pp. 34, 44)

"In the end? Nothing ends. Nothing ever ends." - Final line from Watchmen (p. 136)

John Singer Sargent's "Madame X" - Controversial 1884 portrait of Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau in a black satin gown; contrasted by Yunior with Antonio de La Gándara's 1898 painting of the same subject (p. 40)

José José - Mexican singer known as "El Príncipe de la Canción," or "The Prince of Song" (1948-2019) (p. 4)

Kaneda - Akira protagonist and friend of Tetsuo (p. 6)

Legend of Zelda - Nintendo video game series first released in 1986 in which Link rescues Princess Zelda from evil Ganon (pp. 26, 86)

Legion - Marvel mutant with multiple personalities (p. 127)

Lord of the Rings - Epic fantasy trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien (pub. 1954-1955) (pp. 7, 17, 38, 43, 72, 134)

Lovecraft - Refers to horror and science fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) (p. 4)

Morgoth's Bane - Commonly known as Durin's Bane in Lord of the Rings, a former Balrog servant of Dark Lord Morgoth who eventually fell to death in a confrontation with Gandalf (p. 6)

Nintendo - Video game console company which released the Super Nintendo in 1990 (pp. 4, 26, 73)

Oscar Wilde - Irish author known for *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (pub. 1890) and his 1895 conviction for gross indecency / homosexuality (p. 45)

Pedo mellon a minno - "Speak, friend, and enter" in Sindarin, an Elvish language created by J.R.R. Tolkien (p. 7)

Ra's al Ghul - DC supervillain who is often an adversary of Batman (p. 46)

Robert Fulghum - U.S. American author known for *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (pub. 1988) (p. 6)

Rorschach - *Watchmen* antihero who wears an inkblot mask and believes in moral absolutism (p. 9)

Saruman - A wizard and antagonist of *Lord of the Rings* (p. 72)

Sauron - The primary antagonist of *Lord of the Rings* whose Eye sees all (p. 63)

Scarlet Witch - Marvel human mutant with telekinesis and chaos magic abilities (p. 37)

Sindarin - One of the Elvish languages created by J.R.R. Tolkien (p. 7)

Stan Lee & Jack Kirby - Marvel Comics creators (p. iii)

Súper Plátano Man - Oscar's invented superhero (pp. 87, 116, 117)

Superman - Iconic DC alien superhero (p. 133)

Swamp Thing - DC swamp monster superhero (p. 18)

Tetsuo - Akira antagonist (pp. 1, 17)

Thanos - Marvel warlord who snaps his fingers to eliminate half of all life (p. 56)

Tony Stark - Marvel superhero inventor whose alias is Iron Man (p. 111)

Voldemort - Antagonist of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (pub. 1997-2007) (p. 63)

Walter Mercado - Puerto Rican astrologer and TV personality (p. 128)

Watchmen - 1986 DC graphic novel and 2009 film deconstructing superhero mythology (pp. 11, 26)

Wonder Woman - DC warrior princess (p. 132)

X-Men's Arclight - Marvel supervillain who creates shock-waves by clapping (p. 126)

DOMINICAN AND SPANISH TERMS AND PHRASES

Abuela - Grandmother (pp. 3, 9, 12, 27, 80, 88, 89, 90, 91, 93, 96, 101, 111)

A la mesa y a la cama, solo se llama una vez - To the table and to bed, you're only called once (p. 132)

Aficiao e' que 'tá el caballero - The guy is head over heels (p. 39)

Aficiao e' que 'tá el tigre - The tough guy is hyped (p. 111)

Alcanfor - Camphor tablets (p. 9)

Anda! Dime! Porque la verdá' e' que yo no entiendo esa cabeza tuya! - Go on! Tell me! Because the truth is I don't understand that head of yours! You're not all there! (p. 77)

Anda pal - Expression of disbelief (p. 92)

Ahora si e' verdá' que se le torció el rabo al puerco - Well, now we got a swine with its tail in a bundle (p. 63)

Ahora si me jodí yo con ete mondongo - Now I really screwed myself up with this mess (p. 6)

Arrácame que me pica de arriba abajo - Scratch me because I'm itchy from top to bottom (p. 18)

Asopao de habichuelas - Bean soup (p. 89)

Asquerosa - Disgusting (pp. 55, 109)

Bachata - Style of music/dance (pp. 47, 49, 65)

Balaguer - Refers to Joaquín Balaguer, Dominican president for three non-consecutive terms from 1960-1996 (p. 116)

Bayahibe - Rose and national flower of the Dominican Republic (p. 86)

Bemba - Big lips (p. 29)

Bendición - Blessing; greeting from children to elders (p. 88)

Bistec encebollado - Steak with onions (p. 104)

Bizcochos, bocadillos and pasteles - Pastries, sweet treats and savory stuffed dough (p. 80)

Bueno - Good, okay (p. 91)

Buena freca - You've got some nerve (p. 80)

Cállate - Quiet (p. 23)

Calvario - Torment, suffering (p. 130)

Calvos - Bald people (p. 80)

Campo - Rural area; implies lack of sophistication (pp. 94, 106)

Capitán - Captain (pp. 113, 117)

Cara 'e teta - Boob-face (p. 67)

Carajo - Expletive expressing anger, frustration or surprise (p. 2, 77, 80, 86, 109)

Ciguapa - Mythological creature with backwards feet known for luring men into danger (p. 53)

Claro - Clear, of course, obviously (pp. 50, 66, 96)

Cojón - I don't give a shit (p. 3)

Coñazo - Intensified version of coño (pp. 55, 80, 125)

Coño - Damn, fuck, shit (pp. 3, 4, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 33, 48, 54, 68, 78, 82, 85, 94, 101, 103, 131)

Country Club - Popular Dominican soda brand (p. 104)

Cuchifrito - Fried street foods (pp. 19, 22)

Culo - Butt (pp. 10, 31, 116, 126)

Cuánto e' que caben en un solo motoconcho? - How many people can fit on a single moto-taxi? (p. 86)

Dale - Go ahead (pp. 48, 51)

Dale con gana' que esa mata 'e mango 'tá al reventá' - Go at it hard because this mango tree is about to burst (p. 48)

Deja el relajo - Stop fooling around (p. 58)

Deja que lleguemo' a la casa pa' que tu vea la tremenda pena que te voy a da'! - Wait until we get home and you'll see the beating you're gonna get! (p. 77)

Demagogo - Demagogue, or a political leader who tries to gain power by appealing to emotions over solid arguments (p. 68)

Diablo - Damn, wow, oh shit; Devil (pp. 2, 89, 117, 119)

Diablo abuela pero vamo' a eplotá' - Damn, grandma! We're gonna explode! (p. 89)

Diablo, men! Le dieron hata donde dicen Cirilo! - Holy shit, man! They beat the crap out of him! (p. 117)

Dímelo - Tell me, what's up (pp. 43, 127)

Dios mío - My God (p. 66)

Dio' me lo' bendiga y me lo' ampare y me lo' protega - God bless, shelter and protect you. (p. 88)

Dios, Patria y Libertad - God, Fatherland, Liberty; Dominican Republic national motto (p. 135)

Dios te salve, María, llena eres de gracia... - Hail Mary, full of grace... (Hail Mary prayer) (pp. 5, 55, 135)

Diparate's - Nonsense (pp. 3, 118)

Dique - So-called, supposed (pp. 4, 27, 84, 102, 119)

Despierta, carajo! - Wake up, dammit! (p. 2)

E' clarito que te veo - I see you loud and clear (p. 72)

El Jefe - The Boss; Trujillo's nickname (p. 102)

El Malecón, La Zona Colonial, El Faro a Colón - Seaside boulevard, historic colonial district, lighthouse honoring Christopher Columbus (p. 97)

El que quiere moño' bonito', aguanta jalone' - Whoever wants pretty bows, endures tugs (p. 127)

"Enamorada y Herida" - "In Love and Wounded" (p. 111)

Eso - That, that's it (pp. 4, 48, 86, 91, 101, 118)

Eta mujer no me va a dejá' terminá - This woman isn't going to let me finish (p. 66)

Ete 'tá má' totao que un chicharrón - This one is more fried than a pork rind (p. 42)

Ete 'tá réquete jodío - This one is beyond fucked (p. 1)

Ete que - Um (p. 66)

Fantoche. De arriba abajo, mijito. - Phony. From top to bottom, kiddo. (p. 83)

Fo! - Expression of disgust at smell (p. 8, 130)

Fo! Hiede má' que un bolsillo 'e loco! - Ugh! It stinks worse than a crazy person's pocket! (p. 130)

Fukú - Curse or doom (pp. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 17, 27, 28, 29, 40, 53, 54, 58, 71, 75, 77, 78, 80, 82, 86, 90, 100, 102, 110, 115, 124, 133, 134)

Guapo/a - Beautiful, attractive (pp. 3, 27, 28, 64)

Hazme el jodío favor - Do me a damn favor, oh please (p. 70)

Héchate pa' allá - Get over there (p. 80)

Hija de tu maldita madre! - Daughter of your damned mother! (p. 120)

Hombre de dió' - Man of God (p. 78)

Imagínate - Think about it. Can you imagine? (p. 54)

Jodío - Messed up (pp. 1, 3, 4, 6, 18, 72, 87, 91, 100, 120)

La Capital - Refers to Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic (pp. 91, 107)

La Jablesse - Temptress figure in Caribbean folklore (pp. 26, 32, 46)

La va a reventá' - He's going to crush it (p. 38)

La verda' que eto' si son una balsa 'e papelero' - The truth is these guys really are a bunch of show-offs (p. 53)

Locrio de arenque - Rice with herring (p. 89)

Mamao, cara 'e nalga, lambe sica - Idiot, butt-face, brown-noser (p. 86)

Mangú con huevo frito - Traditional Dominican breakfast of mashed plantains, salami, eggs and cheese (p. 49)

Manín - Bro (pp. 27, 61, 75, 119)

Mañoso - Particular (p. 95)

Mataron al chivo - They killed the goat (p. 110)

Me cago en na' - Shit, damn (p. 72)

Mierda - Shit (p. 4, 78, 92)

Mijo/Mija - My son/my daughter (pp. 3, 28, 38)

Mira - Look, hey (pp. 3, 4, 30, 67, 68, 71, 77, 83, 88, 93, 97)

Mira, tu. Mango podrío. - You there. Rotten mango. (p. 83)

Moreno - Dark-skinned person (p. 23)

Morí' viví' - Plant with sensitive leaves that droop at night or when touched or shaken (p. 89)

Muchacho/a - Boy/girl (pp. 2, 53, 54, 78, 82, 92, 107, 119)

Muchacho 'el cojollo! No confunda la azucar con la mierda! - Listen, little boy! Don't confuse sugar with shit! (p. 92)

Muñequitos - Cartoons (p. 4)

Negro/Negra/Negrita - Black person (pp. 4, 5, 55, 103, 104, 109, 116)

No me enrolle' la' albóndiga' que se me acabó el orégano - Don't roll up my meatballs because I ran out of oregano (p. 88)

"No Me Vuelvo a Enamorar" - "I Won't Fall in Love Again" (p. 92)

No quería ñema, toma clara! - You wanted this so badly? Take that! (p. 99)

O sea - I mean (pp. 1, 57)

O sea, el tipo 'tá réquete jodío - I mean, this guy is all kinds of jacked up (p. 1)

Oh padre todo poderoso - Oh almighty father (p. 67)

Oíste? - You hear? (pp. 4, 55)

Oye - Listen (pp. 3, 75, 79, 119)

Palacio - Palace (p. 108)

Palo - Afro-Dominican sacred music (p. 110)

Pal carajo con to' eso' bulto' - To hell with all that baggage (p. 86)

Palomo - Bro, my main man (pp. 9, 27)

Pegajoso - Clingy (p. 52)

Pendejo - Idiot (p. 120)

Pendejá - Foolishness (p. 28)

'Perate - Wait (short for espérate) (pp. 88, 95, 99, 107)

Perico Ripiao - Oldest style of merengue dating back to the 1850s (p. 86)

Pernil - Roast pork shoulder (p. 89)

Pero déjame hablá - But let me speak (p. 66)

Pero tu sabe' - But you know (p. 91)

Pero yo te digo a ti que - I am telling you (pp. 77, 118)

Plátano - Plantain (pp. 47, 87, 116, 117, 134)

Plátano maduro no vuelve a verde - A ripe plantain doesn't go back to being green (p. 134)

Por qué en inglés e' dique vierne'trece pero en epañol e'marte? - Why is it in English it's Friday the 13th, but in Spanish it's Tuesday? (p. 102)

Pue' - Well (pp. 88, 96)

Puta - Whore (p. 99)

Que ya - Enough already (p. 27)

Que lo qué - What's up (pp. 7, 64)

Que lo qué con ete fuñio tipo? - What's up with this messed up guy? (p. 1)

Que no, maldición - I said no, God damn it (p. 6)

Que te calles - I said shut up (p. 23)

Qué tu dice? - What did you say? (pp. 55, 124)

Quita - Stop, get off (p. 52)

Samaná - Northeastern Dominican province (p. 105)

Salpica - Bounce, get out of here (pp. 67, 72)

Salsa - Style of music/dance (p. 80)

Sancocho - Dominican stew with mixed meats (pp. 89, 99)

Se jodió la vaina - It's over, shit has hit the fan (p. 72)

Su santísimo! Que mardito nombre! - God damn! Now that is a motherfuckin' name! (p. 59)

Súper Plátano Man - Super Plantain Man; Oscar's invented superhero (pp. 87, 116, 117)

Taínos - Indigenous Caribbean people (pp. 2, 117)

Te digo a ti que - I am telling you (pp. 77, 118, 121)

Te dije que NO - I told you NO (p. 126)

Tenga piedad, por favor! Mi bebecito no! - Have mercy, please! Not my baby! (p. 110)

Tigre - Slick guy (pp. 30, 111)

Toma - Take that (p. 45)

Tostones - Smashed fried plantains (p. 53)

Trujillo - Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, brutal dictator of the Dominican Republic from 1930–1961

Un foforito en el fuiche - A little flint under the butt (p. 46)

Una buena trompá e' lo que te voy a da' yo a ti - A good smack upside your head is what I'm about to give you (p. 119)

Vámono' - Let's go (p. 2, 23)

Ven acá - Hold up, wait a sec (pp. 82, 99, 122)

¡Vivito y coleando! ¡Como si nada! Mira que yo te lo advirtí, ah? - Alive and kicking! Like nothing happened! See, I warned you, huh? (p. 77)

Ya deja el asunto - Drop it already (p. 67)

Y entonce' - And so (pp. 37, 87)

Ya con esa vaina - Enough with that thing (p. 18)

Ya lo pasado pasado - What's past is past (p. 4)

Y qué fue, muchacho? Ni que fuera la ciguapa! - What's up with you? It's not like I'm the damn ciguapa! (p. 53)

Ya empieza con la mima mierda - Here he goes again with the same crap (p. 78)

Yo soy un mon(s)tru - I am the bomb (p. 65)

Zafa - Counter-spell against fukú (pp. 2, 5, 6, 17, 27, 40, 63, 75, 82, 86, 126, 136)

OTHER TERMS

Ameliorative - Making something better (p. 28)

Arduous - Difficulty requiring great effort (pp. 60, 61)

Assimilating - Absorbing, understanding (p. 61)

Cisco - Brand of fruity wine with high alcohol content (p. 73)

Crisco - Brand of vegetable shortening made from a blend of oils (p. 73)

Diaspora - People who have been dispersed or spread from their original homeland (p. 87)

Dubious - Suspicious, doubting (p. 61)

Enema - Medical procedure involving injecting fluid into the rectum (p. 30)

Neologism - A newly coined word or expression (p. 15)

Ocular - Related to the eyes or vision (p. 44)

Precipitous - Steep; sudden (p. 70)

Propitious - Favorable (p. 9)

Subversives - People challenging a government (p. 108)

Undulate - Move with a wave-like motion (p. 30)

Unorthodox - Not following traditionally acceptable ways (p. 35)

Walkman - Portable audio player first released by Sony in 1979 (p. 26)

Western Union - Financial services company specializing in money transfers (p. 80)

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