

Study Guide



Play Summary & About Flint Repertory Theatre

Play Summary: Mateo, a 14-year-old boy with brown skin, and Diane, his white adoptive mother, take a road trip from their home in Ohio to his birthplace in San Diego. Throughout the journey, they are forced to reconcile their differing identities and what it means to be a family. Developed in Flint Rep's 2023 New Works Festival.

About Flint Repertory Theatre: The FIM Flint Repertory Theatre, commonly known as Flint Rep, is a professional, not-for-profit theater located in the heart of Flint, Michigan. Established in 2018, the Flint Rep provides the Flint community and surrounding areas with innovative, high-quality professional theatre. The theatre is committed to producing world-premiere plays and musicals, as well as innovative interpretations of classical works. Its productions have received national critical acclaim and numerous awards. The Flint Rep is housed at the FIM Elgood Theatre, a 150-seat thrust stage located in the Flint Cultural Center. The theater's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion ensures a welcoming environment where all artists, audiences, staff, and volunteers feel valued and respected, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or identity, religion, age, education, or disability.



Theatre Etiquette

Welcome to a production of FIM Flint Repertory Theatre. We are excited to connect your classroom with a performance that entertains and educates. When you are with us, keep the following in mind so that you and those around you may fully enjoy the performance:

- Please arrive promptly so that the show may begin on time.
- Silence or turn off all cell phones and/or electronic devices.
- There is no recording or flash photography.
- Reacting to the show (clapping, laughing, gasping, crying) is encouraged!

Playwright Bio

Jordan Ramirez Puckett (Playwright) is a Chicax writer from the San Francisco Bay Area. Their other plays include *A Sapphic Family Christmas*, *Transitional Love Stories*, *Untitled Dad Play*, *Huelga*, *En Las Sombras*, *To Saints and Stars*, *Las Pajaritas*, *Restore*, and *Inevitable*. These works have been produced and/or developed by Abingdon Theatre Company, Creede Repertory Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Intar Theatre, New Harmony Project, Playwrights Realm, San Diego Repertory Theatre, San Francisco Playhouse, and TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, among others. Jordan was named a finalist for the prestigious Yale Drama Series Prize and is a 2024 graduate of the Juilliard School's Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program. They are a current fellow of WP Theater's Lab.

Playwright Interview

Q: What inspired you to write *A Driving Beat*?

In the summer of 2017, I drove the reverse of the road trip in the play from California to Ohio with my then-partner. Without giving anything away, a lot of the things that happen in the play, the good and the bad, happened on our road trip in real life.

Q: What was the development process for the play? Has it changed a lot since the 2023 New Works Festival

I heard once that it takes about 7 years for most plays to go from first draft to first production. I wrote the first draft of *A Driving Beat* in January of 2018, so it's almost right on target. A lot of the world has changed in the past seven years, so naturally, the script has grown and developed a lot as well. That being said, I don't think there are too many big changes since the reading we did in Flint in 2023. I hope that the changes feel so natural that someone who saw the reading wouldn't even be able to pinpoint what exactly is different.

Playwright Interview

Q: Mateo's character shines through the beats and raps he creates throughout the play. What went into writing the lyrics for *A Driving Beat*?

I knew early on that I wanted to show Mateo and Diane traveling great distances over several days in a theatrical way. When I reflected back on the road trip we took, I remembered there being a lot of times when we couldn't get a radio signal and had to listen to static or silence. So, I thought it would be interesting if Mateo made a beat with the radio, and we used those moments to give a window into what this teenager is thinking and also demonstrate the passage of time.

Q: What do you hope audiences walk away with after seeing this piece?

My goal is that by watching a specific relationship on stage, audience members think about the loved ones who have impacted their lives. It's my dream that this play makes audiences want to call up a family member and express their love for them.

Pre-Show Discussion

Based on what you've learned about the play, the Flint Repertory Theatre, and the playwright of *A Driving Beat*, what do you expect to experience when you attend the play? What do you anticipate will happen during Mateo and his mother's journey?

Pre-Show Activities & Discussion Questions

Each of these topics and activities are meant to take one class period or less. You can adapt these activities to either work on your own, with a partner, or in a small group.

Exploring Identity

Discussion Questions

- What shapes our identities (e.g., culture, upbringing, experiences)?
- Can someone have multiple identities? How can they conflict?
- What does it mean to “reconcile” conflicting parts of your identity?

Activity

List elements of your identity (e.g., culture, hobbies, family traditions) and discuss how these elements shape your self-view and how others see you.

Art & Expression in the Play

Discussion Questions

- Mateo uses beats and poetry to share his thoughts. How can art help express feelings that are hard to put into words?
- How can creative expression help us understand identity and emotions?
- How might Mateo's art shape his relationship with his adoptive mom, Diane, and help him process family and identity?

Activity

Reflect on a time you used art (music, writing, drawing, etc.) to express emotions. How did it help you understand or share your feelings?

The Journey as a Metaphor

Discussion Questions

- What does a journey often symbolize in stories? How can physical trips reflect emotional growth?
- How might a road trip represent family and self-discovery?
- Have you ever taken a journey that taught you something about yourself or others?

Activity

Reflect on a trip you took and what you learned about yourself, your relationships, or your surroundings.

Post-Show Activities & Discussion Questions

The following slides contain a variety of activities, discussions and projects meant for after viewing the play. They can be adapted to individual assignments, partner work, or small group assignments.

Identity Mapping (1-2 class periods)

Objective

Explore how identity is shaped by background, experiences, and relationships.

Activity

Create a visual “identity map” (on paper or digitally) of your own identity — including race, culture, family, values, etc. Then, compare your map with Mateo and Diane’s identities from the play (or imagine new characters). How might your maps differ or overlap?

Follow-Up:

Write a brief reflection on how identity forms and evolves through life-changing experiences.

Soundtrack for the Journey (1-2 class periods)

Objective

Connect emotional moments in the play to music and sound.

Activity

Pick songs that you think would fit different parts of the play's journey. For example, which song would represent Mateo's feelings of uncertainty, or Diane's efforts to understand her son's identity? Create a playlist of songs you think fits the narrative arc and share your choices with the class.

Discussion

Discuss how music can evoke emotional responses and complement the narrative of the play. Reflect on the role of music in storytelling.

Beat & Poetry Analysis (1-3 class periods)

Objective

Engage with the deeper emotional and thematic layers of Mateo's character through analysis.

Activity

Select a scene or poem from the play where Mateo expresses his inner thoughts through spoken word and beats. Carefully read the words, analyzing how they enhance the themes of the play (such as identity, family, or cultural belonging) and reveal Mateo's inner struggles.

Write an analysis that addresses the following questions

- What emotions does Mateo express through his poetry and beats?
- How does the spoken word poetry reflect the internal conflict or journey Mateo is experiencing in the play?
- What themes of the play are explored in this poem and what are we meant to understand about those themes?

Create Your Own Spoken Word Poem & Beat (3-5 class periods)

Objective

Explore self-expression through spoken word poetry and music, just like Mateo.

Activity

Spoken Word Writing: Write your own spoken word poem that reflects an important aspect of your own identity or personal journey. Think about the themes of the play—identity, family, and self-discovery—and how these might relate to your own experiences or emotions.

Beat Creation: After writing the poem, pair it with a beat. You can either create a simple beat using an online beat-making tool, or you can tap out rhythms using your hands, desks, or even work in small groups to create layered sounds using body percussion. If access to music-making software is available, you can use programs like GarageBand or online beat makers to create your sounds.

Performance: Perform your spoken word poem along with your beat in front of the class. You can experiment with rhythm, pace, and tone to convey the emotion and message of the poem.

Create Your Own Spoken Word Poem & Beat (3-5 class periods)

Discussion

After performances, discuss how it felt to express yourself through both words and music. How did combining the beat and poem enhance your message? What did you discover about the role of rhythm and sound in communication?

Reflection

Reflect on how Mateo used spoken word and beats to process his emotions and how art can help people navigate complex feelings and situations.

Writing Assignment (3-4 class periods)

Writing a Critical Review of the Play

A critical review of a play is an analysis and evaluation of a theatrical production. It goes beyond just saying whether the play was good or bad — it explores the play's themes, performances, direction, design elements, and the overall impact of the production. The following slides contain instructions for writing your own critical review of *A Driving Beat*. Your teacher also has a separate handout to guide your writing.

Pre-Writing Discussion (50 minutes)

Before diving into writing, discuss and takes notes on the following:

- **Plot Summary:** A brief summary of the play's central conflict and story without giving away spoilers.
- **Character Development:** Which characters stood out the most? How did they evolve throughout the play?
- **Themes:** What central themes (family, identity, belonging, reconciliation) were explored in the play?
- **Performances:** How did the actors portray the characters? Did any performances stand out as particularly powerful?
- **Directorial Choices:** Were there specific production choices (like the use of music, lighting, set design) that influenced the experience?
- **Emotional Impact:** How did the play make the you? Did it resonate with you emotionally, intellectually, or both?

Preparing to Write (30 minutes)

Critical Review Template: You should have received a separate document that contains a template or guide for writing your critical review. Let's go over that template:

Introduction: A brief introduction to the play (name, playwright, and a one-sentence summary of the plot or central theme). This should also include a brief thesis statement that expresses the overall opinion of the play.

Summary of the Play: A concise summary of the plot without giving away any spoilers. Focus on the central conflict and key themes.

Analysis

- Character Analysis
- Themes
- Performances
- Production Design

Personal Reflection

Conclusion

Writing Your Review (1 class period)

Using the template as a guide, create your critical review of *A Driving Beat*. Here are some tips:

- Be specific in your analysis. For example, rather than saying “The acting was good,” describe what made the acting stand out.
- Use specific scenes or quotes to back up your analysis.
- The review should reflect your own opinions but must be supported with evidence from the play.
- The review should be professional in tone, but you are allowed to express your personal reactions to the play.

A DRIVING BEAT

**Thank you for attending *A Driving Beat*
at FIM Flint Repertory Theatre!**

**For more information about our school-day shows,
please visit our website at www.thefim.org**