

↑ HOUSES ☾ ON THE MOON™

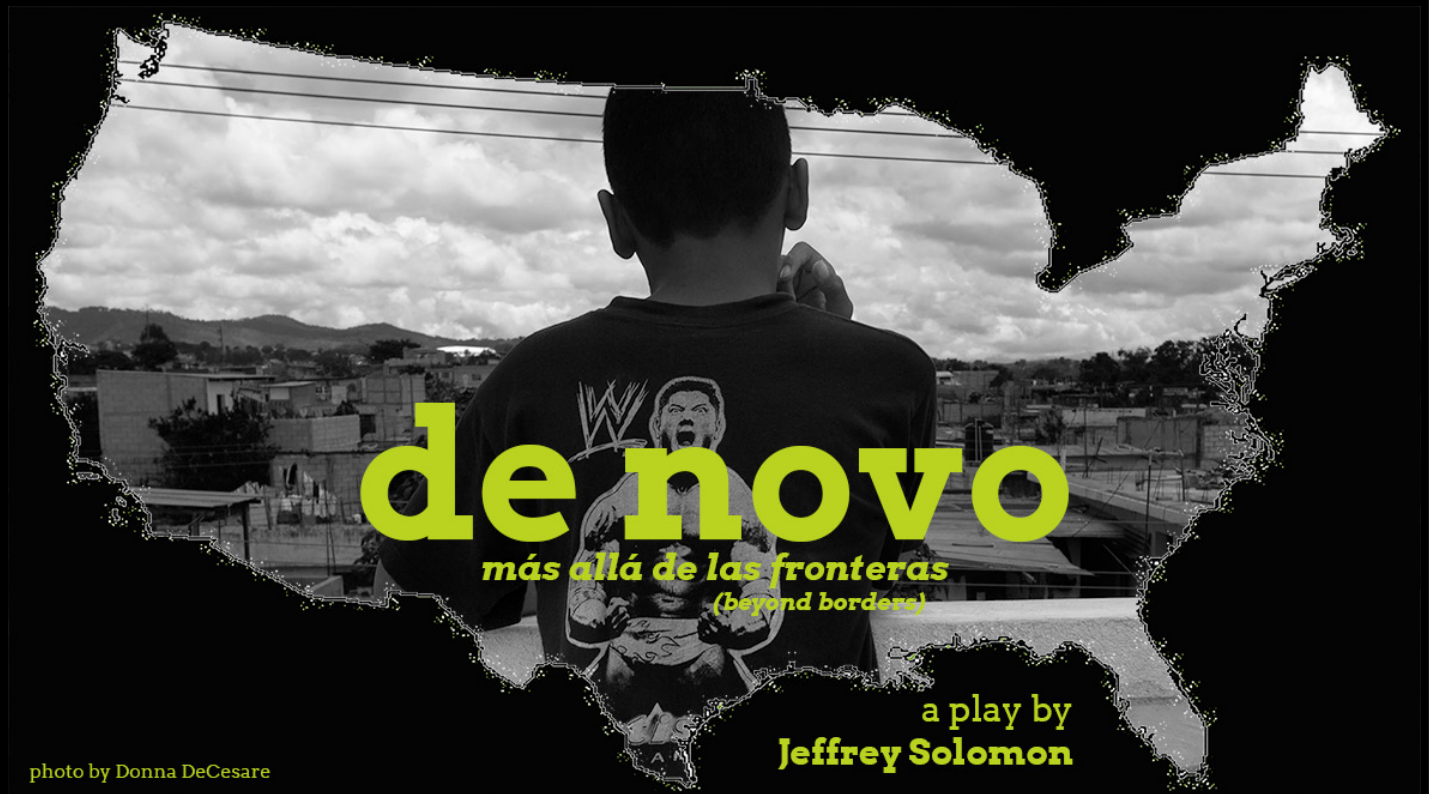


photo by Donna DeCesare

a play by
Jeffrey Solomon

INFO PACKET



@housesonthemoon



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www.housesonthemoon.org

ABOUT THE PLAY



DE NOVO. An acclaimed documentary play about a Central American youth in U.S. immigration custody.

In 2002, a fourteen-year-old boy named Edgar Chocoy fled his barrio in Guatemala City, when MS-13, the largest gang in Central America, put a hit on his life. He traveled over 3,000 miles through the desert, and across the borders of three countries in search for his mother, who had left him at the age of six months to work in the United States. Detained by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Edgar, whose nickname was Lil' Silent because of his timid demeanor, spoke clearly and loudly about his fear of being deported: "I'm afraid to go back. They'll kill me." A pro bono immigration lawyer helped Edgar argue his asylum case in front of a Federal Judge, but the judge was not persuaded and ordered Edgar to be returned to his country. He was murdered seventeen days later.

In "De Novo" Houses on the Moon Theater Company weaves together court transcripts, interviews, letters and other documentary sources to reconstruct the gripping and poignant true story of Edgar Chocoy, a case whose outcome prompted an international outcry and a fundamental reconsideration about the welfare of "alien" minors in immigration custody. The play is performed in English and Spanish by an international cast who have been lauded for their work on and off-Broadway, throughout Latin America and in film and television. The production is augmented with the harrowing images of award-winning photojournalist Donna Decesare, who is widely known for her coverage of gangs in Central America and Los Angeles. (See <http://www.destinyschildren.org>)

WORD OF MOUTH



“A **powerful** piece of political theater ... that quietly collides American ideals with the experiences of real people marked as other in this country. Deftly directed by Mr. Solomon for Houses on the Moon Theater Company, De Novo is created entirely from actual documents -- including court transcripts, interviews and letters – it makes **compelling** dialogue, which is rendered **tenderly human** by its cast.”

-The New York Times

“**Moving. Dramatically potent. It held me in its grip.** Solomon achieves one of the great strengths of documentary theater: its capacity to shake what we know or believe to be true.”

-Village Voice

“De Novo successfully humanizes a very big problem by telling us a single, simple story. **Gripping. Heart-wrenching and important** ... It rings loud and true It inspires.”

-Theatre is Easy



Photos by Donna DeCesare

PRODUCTION PHOTOS

HOUSES
ON THE MOON™



Photos by Russ Rowland

www.housesonthemoon.org

HISTORY



2007, 2008

Development Begins:
Research Trip to Arizona,
Colorado, and California to
interview undocumented youth,
and advocates for newest work,
de novo

2009

Workshop/development
performances at Rattlestick
Playwrights Theater, Queens
Theatre in the Park, and more

2010

World Premier of **de novo**
at 59 E 59 Street Theatres

Early 2011

Tours to Columbia Law School,
NYU Law, Castleton
State College, UT Austin,
Ramapo High School, Queens
College

Mid 2011

Tour of Spanish-language version
of **de novo** in El Salvador

2012, 2013

Tours to New England Law,
University of Connecticut,
American University, Rutgers Law,
University of Arizona, Arizona
State, Walnut Street Theatre,
Laguardia PAC, John Jay College,
and more.

2014, 2015, 2016

Receive grant from NYC Council
Members for annual tours of
de novo. Tours to Isaac Newton
School for Math and Science,
International High School of
Health Sciences, ID Studio
Theatre, and more. City Council
presented performance to
train its members in areas of
immigration and
unaccompanied minors.

2017

Revival of **de novo** at New York
Theatre Workshop

2018-

Continuation of tours to public
schools, community centers,
Universities, Law Schools, and
more.

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THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
DANIEL DROMM
COUNCIL MEMBER, 25TH DISTRICT, QUEENS

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Dear Colleague,

I want to tell you about a play I am thrilled to support.

DE NOVO tells the true story of Edgar Chocoy, a Guatemalan teenager who fled gang violence in Central America and came in search of his mother and a better life in the United States. The saga of a family struggling to hold together across geographic, legal and socioeconomic barriers strikes a resonant and deeply personal chord with so many of our residents here in Queens.

I saw **DE NOVO**, written by **Jeffrey Solomon** and produced by **Houses On The Moon Theater Company**, at an Off Broadway performance and was proud to co-sponsor a week long run of the play in both English and Spanish at Elmhurst Hospital Center in my district as part of Immigrant Heritage Week programming.

In addition to my sponsorship, the project is also being supported by the Kupferberg Center Performances at Queens College and the American Friends Service Committee Immigrant Rights Program. The performance moved me. I was also impressed by the post show discussion, which educated the public on immigration reform and connected many others with immigration and social service resources.

I will be co-sponsoring a special presentation of **DE NOVO** on **Thursday, April 28th at 5pm, DYCD, 2 Lafayette Street, 14th Floor**, following that day's Stated Meeting. This will be a great opportunity for council members and staff to experience this unique performance during Immigration Awareness Month.

If you are interested in having **Houses On The Moon** bring **DE NOVO** to your council district, please contact **Artistic Directors Emily Weiner and Jeffrey Solomon** with any of your questions at (646)228-2292 or HouseOnTheMoon@gmail.com. You can also view photos and read more information about the play at <http://www.housesonthemoon.org/projects/de-novo/>

Though there are thousands of foreign-born minors in U.S. custody, barriers of language, age, class, culture and law conspire to make this population invisible. Their stories of migration are poignant, heroic and painful, and deserve to be heard. Please consider offering your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Dromm".

Daniel Dromm
Council Member, 25th District Queens



THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
CITY HALL
NEW YORK, NY 10007

MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO
SPEAKER

TELEPHONE
(212) 788-7210

August 15, 2017

Emily Joy Weiner
Artistic Director
Houses on the Moon Theater Company
P.O. Box 974
New York, NY 10156

Dear Ms. Weiner:

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the Houses on the Moon Theater Company and its work to creatively chronicle, develop and present the stories of people and communities that too often go unheard.

New York City is the cultural capital of the world. In the face of growing political uncertainty, it is more important than ever to support the arts, cultural organizations, institutions, and the creative New Yorkers who capture, communicate and celebrate our city's cultural and artistic spirit.

The New York City Council is a proud Houses on the Moon supporter. Your production of *De Novo* was so well-received as part of my district's Stop the Violence Youth Peace March, I was happy to host a return engagement last June in the Bronx. I was equally happy to help bring the stories, poetry and prose of *TRANSformation* to a rapt Hunter College audience earlier this year.

Through your workshops, original performances, and post-show discussions, Houses on the Moon helps illuminate life's many challenges and connects us all to the world in which we live.

Over the years, in partnership with community and international organizations, you have become a cherished vehicle for conveying cultural heritage, standing for diversity, helping us explore our inner depths as human beings and allowing us all to share, learn and appreciate the vibrancy that makes New York City so exceptional.

Thank you. I look forward to your many projects and productions in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melissa".

MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO
Speaker



Regina Marchi, Associate Professor
Department of Journalism and Media Studies
School of Communication and Information
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
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January 3, 2018

Emily Weiner
Co-founder and Artistic Director
Houses on the Moon Theater Company

Dear Emily,

I want to express my strong support for Houses on the Moon's production *De Novo*, which I saw at the New York Theater Workshop on December 22, 2017. As someone who lived and worked as a journalist in Guatemala in the 1990s and now teaches an annual study abroad course based in Guatemala, I was extremely impressed with how accurately and vividly the play captured the socio-political, legal and psychological realities of Guatemalan youth.

Based completely on court transcripts and other real-life documents, your play conveys, far more clearly than any news coverage could, the poverty, violence and family disintegration that has followed Guatemala's 32-years civil war. Similar realities face children migrating to the US as unaccompanied minors from El Salvador and Honduras, yet most people in the United States have no knowledge of the thousands of young people being held in detention centers with no legal representation and little hope.

Thank you for inviting students from my Guatemala course to see the play for free. They LOVED it! (As did everyone else, based on the enthusiastic applause, cheers, and teary-eyed faces of the audience at the play's conclusion.) This type of community outreach is critical in helping to educate the general population on important contemporary events about which most Americans have little knowledge

I was extremely impressed with the high quality Q & A session directly following the play, in which an immigration lawyer and cast members answered questions regarding the realities of unaccompanied immigrant minors such as Edgar, the play's main character, and offered concrete ways in which interested citizens could help. I would like to try to bring *De Novo* to my university in the future.

I had not heard of Houses on the Moon prior to attending this play and, after learning that all of your plays are created to raise public awareness about contemporary social injustices, I was moved to send an unsolicited donation to the company. I wish you the best of luck with your future work and am glad that I'm now on the mailing list for upcoming Houses on the Moon productions.

Sincerely,

Regina Marchi, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Journalism and Media Studies
Affiliate Professor, Department of Latino and Caribbean Studies
Executive Committee Member, Rutgers Center for Latin American Studies

THEATRE IS EASY



De Novo

Written and Directed by Jeffrey Solomon
Produced by Houses on the Moon Theater Company

Off Off Broadway, Docu-Theatre
Runs through 12.22.17
Next Door at NYTW, 83 East 4th Street



BOTTOM LINE: Heart-wrenching and important, *De Novo* shines a light on the pain of children seeking asylum in the United States.

Edgar Chocoy-Guzman (Manny Ureña) is an ex-gang member despite only being a young teenager. He has fled Guatemala after leaving his gang to avoid the hit they put out on his life, but the U.S. has not been kind to him either. After several run-ins with the law, Edgar has found himself in immigration detention, seeking asylum and desperate to turn his life around. The only alternative is being sent back to a certain death in Guatemala. Complicating the matter, however, is an unstable family life with a mother he has spent little time growing up with and a grossly unsympathetic legal system. Although the events of *De Novo* took place in the early 2000s, Edgar's story rings just as loud and true today in our current political climate.

I cannot begin to say how thoroughly good the ensemble of *De Novo* is. Of the four, there is no weak link, and they are what makes this show so powerful and enjoyable. Camilo Almonacid is transformative as he embodies a wide array of experts, counselors, lawyers, friends, family, and gang members. Emily Joy Weiner brings the pain of Edgar's lawyer as she fights to give this child a chance to the fore. Zuleyma Guevara inspires tears when she portrays Margarita, Edgar's loving mother who struggles to help her son. Most commendable of all, however, is Ureña himself. He so perfectly captures the essence of this shy, bright-eyed but frustrated youth trapped in a judicial system in a foreign land that doesn't have his best interests at heart. Ureña's performance is heartbreaking in its honesty.

Design-wise, *De Novo* is simple but effective. Lawrence E. Moten III's wall-length set of stacks of boxes help give an idea of the sheer amount of paperwork (and accompanying hours of labor) that goes into defending a child like Edgar. The stunning projected photos by Donna DeCesare, almost all featuring kids and young teenagers in gangs, force the audience to remember that not only is Edgar's story a true one, but that it tragically applies to many, many more children throughout the U.S.

If there is any critique to level at *De Novo*, it is that this is not a story that is particularly unpredictable. Anyone with a television probably knows what is going to happen at each turn in Edgar's life, something that takes away from the ability to feel true shock. But this predictability only adds to the beautiful difficulty of watching this true story unfold.

De Novo is a gripping reminder of what some people, especially the juveniles we often don't see or think about, are going through every day in this country. It successfully humanizes a very big problem by telling us a single, simple story. It inspires.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

When Disenfranchised Lives and American Ideals Collide Onstage

By Laura Collins-Hughes

Dec. 18, 2017

“You came out to see a show,” Karma Mayet tells the audience at the top of “Race Card,” a provocative, not-quite-solo performance that is part storytelling, part game of bid whist. “I don’t know if you realize you’re in it.”

We’re in it not only because the stories Ms. Mayet tells are determined by cards that the spectators play, detaching them from our seat backs and calling them out to her (four people at a time, high card wins). But we’re also in it because those stories — anecdotes drawn from her own life, about the indignities and affronts that come with being black in the United States — will resonate with or implicate us.

Either way, if we are her fellow Americans, we are part of the society she describes. Either way, we have a stake in the ugliness she outlines, and thus in the show.

That’s true not only of “Race Card” (which ended its limited run on Saturday at Jack, in Brooklyn) but also of two other powerful pieces of political theater on New York stages — small productions that quietly collide American ideals with the experiences of real people marked as other in this country.

In Jeanne Sakata’s “Hold These Truths,” through Dec. 20 at the Sheen Center, the hero is Gordon Hirabayashi, a Japanese-American who as a young man during World War II refuses to go along when the government orders him into an internment camp. In Jeffrey Solomon’s “De Novo,” through Dec. 22 as part of New York Theater Workshop’s Next Door series, the victim is a teenager named Edgar Chocoy-Guzman, caught in a deportation system that doesn’t grasp the mortal danger that awaits him if he is sent back to his native Guatemala.



Joel de la Fuente portrays Gordon Hirabayashi, who protested the internment of Japanese-Americans, in Jeanne Sakata’s “Hold These Truths.” Lia Chang

“Hold These Truths,” elegantly directed by Lisa Rothe in a top-notch production for the company Hang a Tale, is a gripping story about a shameful chapter of our history, when the United States government looked at its own people and saw the enemy. It is also the gentlest of these three shows. That’s partly because its action (aided by all-around excellent design: set by Mikiko Suzuki MacAdams, lighting by Cat Tate Starmer, music and sound by Daniel Kluger) takes place at the greatest historical remove.

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It's also because of Joel de la Fuente's endearing solo performance, which vividly — and, more often than you'd think, comically — renders Gordon and the constellation of people around him. Ms. Sakata's deeply researched script could come off as preachy, but in Mr. de la Fuente's hands, Gordon is a sweetly steely idealist. The eldest son of immigrants in Washington State, he is an enthusiastic American. When his mother frets about the possibility of reprisals if war with Japan breaks out, Gordon promises he won't let anything happen to her.

"The Constitution protects us, 'cause we're American citizens," he says.

He is, of course, badly mistaken about that. Like almost everyone else of Japanese heritage living on the West Coast, his family members are packed off to an internment camp, forced to sell their belongings fire-sale cheap before they go. Gordon refuses to comply and fights the order as far as the Supreme Court.

Bigotry is nothing new to him, though. Before the war, as a college student, Gordon takes a trip to New York, where for the first time he experiences being able to go where he pleases without considering whether he'll be barred entry because of his race.

"Back home in Seattle," he says, "I always have to think ahead if I go out with the fellas, or if I take a gal on a date: I can go here, I can't go there, I'll get turned out of the Miramar, better avoid Pacific Street." Suddenly he is free to just be a person.

Not for long. When the government, newly at war, announces a curfew for anyone of Japanese descent, the order immediately sets him apart from friends and classmates, even foreigners from countries other than Japan. "It's embarrassing," Gordon says simply, and in those two words is a world of undeserved humiliation.



Mr. Ureña as a Guatemalan immigrant faced with deportation in "De Novo." Russ Rowland

Citizenship isn't even an illusory protection in "De Novo," deftly directed by Mr. Solomon for Houses on the Moon Theater Company. Edgar (Manny Ureña), brought to the United States by a coyote at 14, isn't an American, and neither is his mother (Zuleyma Guevara), who left him behind as a baby when she came to this country to make a living.

"We are about to construct for you a documentary theater piece about the 'undocumented,' which will be created entirely from actual documents," one of the actors says as the show starts. Those documents — including court transcripts, interviews and letters — make compelling dialogue, rendered tenderly human by a cast that includes Emily Joy Weiner and Camilo Almonacid.

As a program note spells out, "de novo" refers both to starting over and to a retrial that includes new evidence. The play reargues Edgar's deportation case, and in its tragedy demands that we consider who's allowed to make a home in this country free of intimidation, and who we as a society are willing to fight for rather than against.

Where "De Novo" is mournful, "Race Card" is furious. Laying out rules that got snaps of approval from some audience members the night I saw the show, Ms. Mayet explains that white people are not invited to come up to her after the performance to tell her about their experience of it and that she will not be explaining her cultural references. She's invoking black privilege, she says, which is fair enough.



THEATER ARCHIVES

The Documentary Play "De Novo" Faces the Murkiness of the Migration Crisis

by AVIVA STAHL

December 20, 2017





Manny Ureña plays Edgar Chocoy in “De Novo,” part of New York Theatre Workshop’s “Next Door” series.

RUSS ROWLAND

In Jeffrey Solomon’s *De Novo*, now playing at the New York Theatre Workshop’s Fourth Street Theatre, audience members confront the urgency of the migration crisis through the true story of one Edgar Chocoy, born in 1987 in Municipalidad de Villa Nueva. At fourteen, in the hope of escaping his former gang life in MS13, Edgar decided to leave his home in Guatemala and travel north, to the United States, to join a mother he barely knew. The play begins in 2004, when Edgar is sixteen and fighting in immigration court to stay in the U.S., fearful he will be killed by gang members if he is sent back home. Over the course of the 65-minute show, Solomon comes to depict Edgar (played by Manny Ureña) as someone worthy of not only our sympathy but also our protection. Edgar gives his mother a rough time and falls in with the wrong crowd in Los Angeles, but we learn enough about him to understand that trauma drives his behavior. Solomon’s decision to focus on someone who isn’t a “perfect victim” of the system — a



De Novo is a documentary play: Writer-director Solomon crafted the script entirely from immigration court transcripts, letters, and interviews conducted at a U.S. facility for detained undocumented youth. The set (by Lawrence Moten) is constructed of boxes and boxes of filing folders, which are stacked mostly to the ceiling and sometimes set askew. As we follow Edgar from Guatemala to the U.S. and through his struggle to secure asylum, we meet a host of others, including his attorney (Emily Joy Weiner), a youth worker (Camilo Almonacid), and the judge overseeing his case (Zuleyma Guevara). The plot unfolds through a series of very short scenes — quick realizations of snippets from transcripts or documents — which are distinguished from one another by sudden shifts in lighting (by Christina Watanabe). Sometimes, black-and-white images from the award-winning photojournalist Donna DeCesare are projected onto a screen to the right of the stage. In one photo, a group of Central American youth, the boys tattooed, hang out in a small, squalid room; in another, two men have just been arrested, their hands pinned to their heads as federal agents lead them away.

There are moments in *De Novo* where Solomon's drawing on primary source text proves dramatically potent — particularly when Edgar is in court. Legalese is alienating to many outside its bubble; furthermore, most of us in the audience can only begin to imagine the feeling of what it might be like to be an unaccompanied minor, and non-native English speaker, in court. When the immigration judge decides against Edgar's asylum application, the cold, constrained language of her ruling stands in sharp contrast to the humanizing tone of the rest of the script. We bristle as the obvious harm Edgar will endure if deported brushes against the calculated logic the judge employs to justify her decision. In bringing the court transcript to the stage, Solomon enables us to see the judge's words in a new light, so that her ruling seems not only inhumane but, frankly, absurd.



many artists working in this domain hope to call into question shared understanding of terms such as ‘real’ and ‘fact,’ ” writes the dramaturg and director Jules Odendahl-James in an essay for *American Theatre*, “such interrogations exist to varying degrees based on the extent to which documentary theatremakers connect their performance’s politics to its aesthetics.” If we examine some of the most successful contemporary works of documentary theater, it becomes clear that the artist’s aesthetic sensibilities matter just as much as the source material he or she was able to secure. In *Fires in the Mirror*, Anna Deavere Smith’s salient play about the August 1991 uprisings in Crown Heights, Smith performs a series of monologues derived directly from interviews she conducted with community members and leaders. As scholar Dorinne Kondo has written, in scrupulously studying and then adopting the mannerisms and affectations of her subjects — from married Hasidic women to local African American males — Smith actually destabilizes the “truth” of race; we see it as something she can manipulate, something that is *learned*.

Though *De Novo* is undoubtedly moving, I wonder how the play might have changed if Solomon had been willing to take more creative risks on the order of Smith’s work — if, perhaps, the audience could have been pushed, through the artist’s aesthetic (as opposed to archival) choices, to think more critically about what they “know” about boys like Edgar, or the nature of gang violence, or the border itself. Solomon’s “truth-telling” doesn’t broach this kind of participatory quality, a pivotal factor of the form. Somehow, *De Novo* made me feel more comfortable in my political worldview than complicit in Edgar’s suffering, and that worries me. It held me in its grip, but didn’t make the leap of forcing me to question either my assumptions about what I know or how I experience the world.

De Novo

New York Theatre Workshop

79 East 4th Street



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June 1, 2022

Dear Houses on the Moon Theater Company,

I would like to thank you for the spectacular three day theater workshop you facilitated for our 11th grade class. The play was widely appreciated by our students and staff. Students felt identified with and inspired by the experiences of Alex Sanchez. The conversations and advice provided by Mr. Sanchez were lessons that our students could use for the rest of their lives and it was shared at such a critical time in their adolescent years.

Students also appreciated how authentic and relatable Edgars story and experience was to their own. After watching the play students reflected on the ways they have also been impacted by imperialism, the immigration industrial complex and how detention centers affected their own mental health. They were moved by the tenacity of Edgars lawyer and loved the opportunity to ask her and the cast questions after the show.

Additionally the legal immigration information shared with students on the third day of the workshop was extremely helpful to our students' lives. Many students learned about laws, resources and organizations that could help them gain documentation in order to remain in the United States. This type of counsel is extremely difficult to obtain in our community, and we are endlessly grateful that you all made it accessible to all of our students.

Overall the Moon Theater Company allowed our students to explore the different conversations surrounding immigration, imperialism, gang activity, mental health, and youth support programs that are many times overlooked by our K-12 curriculum. Thank you for an inspiring, powerful, transformative theater experience. We look forward to hosting you every year, and hope students across the entire country have the privilege of attending this extraordinary performance.

Sincerely,

Cathy Rojas

Social Studies Teacher

Pan American International High School

crojas@panamericanihs.org





BOOKING

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT
BOOKING, PLEASE CONTACT
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