

NOT GOING ANYWHERE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Emma Fonseca Halverson



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

In *Not Going Anywhere*, a Mexican family struggles to get by while ICE attempts to tear them apart.

Playwright Bio

Emma Fonseca Halverson (she/they) is a student based in Portland, Oregon. She is a member of the Young Professionals Company at Oregon Children's Theatre, where she recently worked on their annual improvisational troupe, Impulse! Much of Emma's writing is influenced by their intersecting identities as a young, indigenous, Latina, queer person. When she isn't being a theatre nerd, Emma loves hiking, reading YA fiction, making ceramics, and building with their father.

Synopsis

The Mexican family of Ale, Miguel, and Mami are struggling to get by. They wait daily for news of Papá being able to return to the US after being deported many years ago. Miguel wants nothing more than to stay where he is and help Mami, whereas Ale is desperate to leave and pursue theatre. This works out while Miguel works and helps out at home, and Ale goes to class and rehearsals, but when Miguel isn't there anymore, Ale must choose between her future and her family.

Characters

ALE: An ambitious and driven high school girl who dreams of making it as an actor. Younger sister to MIGUEL. Age 17.

CARLY: ALE's best friend, who shares and supports ALE's dream. Fairly wealthy, and white. Same grade and age as ALE.

MIGUEL: A hardworking guy, immigrated to the United States at a young age. MAMI is his first priority. Constantly working. Older brother to ALE. Age 22.

MAMI: The mother of ALE and MIGUEL struggling to support her kids without PAPÁ around, who wants her children to have an easier life than she had. In her 40s.

PAPÁ: The father of ALE and MIGUEL, husband to MAMI. Lives in Mexico, In his 40s.

Themes

Family, Race, Overcoming Odds, Personal Responsibility, Friendship

Spanish Language Note

There is some Spanish in the play and the text does not offer a translation (we have section translations at TheatreFolk) because as the author states, "It is very important that the actors playing ALE, MIGUEL, MAMI, and PAPÁ be Latino/a/e/x or Hispanic actors for representation, and actors who speak Spanish to some degree to be able to pronounce the Spanish sections correctly." There are a couple of activities in this study guide that deal with language, but be aware that if you're studying the play in class and your students do not speak Spanish, there will be some sections they don't understand. It's a great place to start a discussion about feeling like an outsider, or that you don't belong, when you're trying to fit in.

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ Do you think people deserve to be deported? Why or why not?
- ★ What is your relationship with your family?
- ★ What family expectations do you have?
- ★ Do you feel you have any personal responsibility to your family? Why or why not?
- ★ What future do you see for yourself?
- ★ Is there anything that could change that future?
- ★ Have you ever been made to feel like an outsider? Or that you don't belong?

Pre-Read Activities

Family Portrait Tableau

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will discuss the concept of family and what it means to them, specifically with regard to the status of family members. Is there a “man of the house”? Is it parents against kids? Are there siblings you get along with? Don't get along with? Is there an extended family in the house?
- ★ Each group will discuss and decide how to visualize this concept in a tableau series.
 - » Tableau one will show the incident in which the first person requires help.
 - » Tableau two will show the sacrifice in action.
 - » Tableau three will show the sacrifice being passed forward.
- ★ Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?

Family Reflection

- ★ Students will write a one-paragraph reflection on their relationship with their family. Are they in a close family or are there circumstances that keep the family from communicating? Are there traditions that keep the family together? Are there traditions that cause tension in the family?

Family Traditions Monologue

- ★ Students will write a monologue about a teen (doesn't have to be them) who is confronting a family member about a family tradition that they don't want to be a part of. They must give a reason why. For example, a 15-year-old girl who does not want a Quinceañera.

Family Relationships Moment

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will discuss the concept of family relationships. When do family relationships work? When is there tension? Does culture factor into your family relationships?

- ★ Based on their discussion, each group will create their own one-minute theatrical moment that visualizes their discussion on family relationships.
- ★ Groups will choose a form for their moment: tableaux, spoken word, movement piece, original scene, song, or film.

Research Project: Deportation

- ★ Divide students into groups.
- ★ Each group will research deportation. For example, what is deportation, what is the history of deportation, what it means to be deported, who gets deported and why, problems with deportation, resistance against deportation.
- ★ After completing their research, students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene theatricalizing their findings
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

Gibberish Activity

- ★ Divide students into groups.
- ★ Groups will create a scene in which everyone speaks gibberish except for one person. In the world of the scene, those who speak gibberish speak the common language of the area. The person who speaks English is an outsider and no one understands them. In fact, those who speak gibberish look down on the English speaker. They treat this person poorly.
- ★ The English language speaker in the scene is trying to find out information about a family member.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward. What was it like to treat someone poorly just because you don't understand them? What was it like to try to communicate when no one could understand you?

Language Activity

- ★ Divide students into groups. They will each create a one-minute scene that includes at least three of the following lines:
 - » Thank you, son.
 - » Of course, mom.
 - » What happened?
 - » Everything will be okay.
 - » I promise.
 - » Calm down.
 - » Obviously!
 - » Good night!

- ★ Have them rehearse their scenes. When they are ready to present, tell them that they are to replace their chosen sentences with the Spanish version:
 - » Gracias, Mijo. (Thank you, son.)
 - » Por supuesto, Mamita. (Of course, mom.)
 - » ¿Que paso? (What happened?)
 - » Todo va a estar bien. (Everything will be okay.)
 - » Te lo prometo. (I promise.)
 - » Calmate, (Calm down.)
 - » Obviamente! (Obviously!)
 - » Buenas noches. (Good night.)

- ★ Groups will present and discuss afterward: What was it like to combine the two languages? How did it affect the pace of the scene? Do the students who had to say those lines know Spanish? How did it change the characters to give them another language?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Not Going Anywhere*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. What Shakespeare play is Ale learning a monologue from?
3. How do you say Easter in Spanish?
4. What does Mami learn in the letter about Papá's possible return to the US?
5. Based on the context, what do you think "Tengo fé" means?
6. What does Miguel need Ale to do on Thursday?
7. What does Ale miss?

8. Who has Ale never met?
9. Who says, "Family matters to real Latinos"?
10. What lie is Miguel telling?
11. What happens to Miguel?
12. What does Ale do at the end of the play?
13. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In your opinion, what is the impact of having characters speak Spanish in the play?
2. Look up the English translations of the following words and phrases:
 - a. Mijo/Mija
 - b. Abrelo
 - c. Cuídate
 - d. Te quiero mucho
 - e. Tu obra
 - f. Se llevaron a tu hermano
3. Analyze Ale's use of language. What kind of words does she use? What can you infer about her character based on her vocabulary and word choice?
4. Compare and contrast Ale's and Carly's use of language. What are their similarities and differences?
5. What is the significance of the line, "This is my future, it's all I even have for my future. I have to look ahead"?
6. What is the significance of the line, "I know he wants to be here now, but if he just waits his turn, I'm sure they'll get to him soon"?

7. What is the significance of the line, “Do not let what has happened to your Papá and Miguel change your plans”?
8. How would you costume Mami? Use the text to support your answer.
9. What is the significance of the final moment in the play? In your opinion, why did the author choose to end the play this way?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *Not Going Anywhere*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about family? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about personal responsibility? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with your family with what happens in the play.
5. How does the author want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Which scene stood out to you the most? Why?
- ★ How have the characters changed by the end of the play?

Post-Read Activities

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Poster Design

- ★ Based on what you've read, design a poster for the play. How would you visualize it in a single image that would attract an audience? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

Line Tableau

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a line from the play, such as, "I'm not going anywhere."
- ★ Each group will discuss and decide how they will visualize this line in a tableau.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?

Family Original Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will discuss the concept of family in connection to what they read in the play.
- ★ Based on their discussion and what they read in the play, have each group create their own theatrical moment on the concept of family.
- ★ How does this moment differ from what students presented in the pre-read activities?

Playwright Process

Playwright Emma Fonseca Halverson talks about her process writing Not Going Anywhere. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

1. What was the originating idea for the play? Where did you start?

I had a short scene writing assignment where I wrote the first almost-draft of this play. My instructor recommended me to keep working on it, so I started creating more of a plot than the original five pages that I had. A lot of the inspiration came from my family and background as Latinos with experience with the immigration system, and thinking about the great sacrifices my own family makes for one another.

2. What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

The ending was the hardest part for me to write, and it took me a long time to decide what Ale would choose. I knew neither decision would result in a happy ending, but I wanted it to feel authentic.

3. As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play?

My favorite moment of the play is when Ale finds out she was accepted. She and Mami are so excited and close in that moment. It is such a high, right before the low of Mami getting the phone call.

4. Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

The rewrites are more difficult for me, as the pressure feels far lower on a first draft for it to be "good," and I can just write without that expectation on myself.

5. What is your writing process like?

I usually start with a broad theme that interests me, and in the beginning, just start writing. A little way in I can usually tell my plot and characters need more of a trajectory, and write an outline and keep working from there. Through the process I find it very helpful to talk through my ideas with someone; articulating it verbally really helps me work out some of the more confusing

parts. When I am drafting, I try to write alone every day, and I feel as though I am the most motivated and productive right when I wake up and late at night.

6. What engages you about playwriting?

I love having the ability to tell a story. Creating a world, people with lives of their own, relationships and conflict, all the endless possibilities that only you can choose — they all excite me so much.