HERSTORY NOW: CELEBRATING THE POWER OF THE EVERYDAY WOMAN

MOSQUITAY MARI
A FILM BY AURORA GUERRERO

EDUCATOR GUIDE

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TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES®
An earnest coming of age story about the friendship between two 15-year-old Latinas growing up in the predominantly Mexican neighborhood of Huntington Park, Los Angeles, Mosquita y Mari, explores the growing bond between college-bound Yolanda (Finessa Pineda), and Mari (Venecia Troncoso), a street-savvy, undocumented teen who moves in across the street. Despite their contrasting realities, the girls are brought together after an incident thrusts them into a delicate dance of adolescent self-discovery and sexual awakening. Capturing intersecting issues of gender, sexuality, race, class, and migration, Mosquita y Mari has been recognized internationally for its exploration of urban queer Latina identities. A semi-autobiographical movie written and directed by Aurora Guerrero, Mosquita y Mari premiered at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

AURORA GUERRERO

Aurora Guerrero is a Xicana female filmmaker, LGBT director, and screenwriter from San Francisco, California. Identifying as activist first and filmmaker second, Guerrero focuses on collaborative work with her communities by creating art forms that offer opportunities for dialogue and education. Based on the strength of her debut feature script for Mosquita y Mari, Guerrero was awarded the 2005 Sundance/Ford Fellowship, the 2005 Paul Robeson Development Grant, and was selected to participate in the 2005 Sundance Native/Indigenous Lab; the 2006 Tribeca All Access Filmmaker Program; and the 2009 Film Independent Producer’s Lab. She has also directed short narrative films including Pura Lengua (2005 Sundance Film Festival) and Viernes Girl (winner of the 2005 HBO/NYLIFF short film competition).
Aurora Guerrero’s debut feature is inspired by her personal experiences with complex same-sex friendships she had while growing up, as well as the themes of migration and loss that permeated her childhood. Guerrero writes: “When looking back, long before I identified as queer, I realized my first love was one of my best friends. It was the type of friendship that was really tender and sweet but also sexually charged. Despite the fact that we had the makings of a beautiful teen romance we never crossed that line. The beginnings of Mosquita y Mari was reflecting back on that time and asking myself the questions, why didn’t we cross that line and what kept us in ‘our place’?” Guerrero notes that although she did not grow up under the explicit threat of disownment for coming out as gay, silences around sex and desire, along with societal expectations prompted her to censor her burgeoning affections.

Growing up the daughter of immigrant parents in a working class household in San Francisco, CA, Guerrero struggled with the pressure to live up to family expectations. Perceiving the sacrifices made by her parents after their migration to the United States from Mexico, Guerrero reflects that her sense of familial obligation spurred her motivation to achieve: “When I look at my parents, I see their journey to the U.S. has come at a huge cost. How do I ignore that? Children of immigrants often feel like we have to deliver on the American Dream so our parents’ actions aren’t in vain.” This conflict resonates throughout Mosquita y Mari, as the characters struggle to discover what lies beyond their family obligations.

By embarking on a process of self-exploration while writing the script, Guerrero was able to position this unique story of first love within the immigrant experience. Mosquita y Mari captures a world where intersecting identities of age, race, class and sexual orientation allow her protagonists to locate new pathways for themselves and their families.

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

**FAMILY**

Both Yolanda and Mari are growing up in immigrant households where they are expected to maintain a sense of loyalty and obligation to their families. Yolanda, who is an only child, is expected to get good grades and pursue a college education; while Mari, the eldest, helps her widowed, single mother make ends meet by handing out fliers on the street. How do Yolanda and Mari support and assist their families? What is expected of them? What do they expect of themselves? How do their family loyalties and obligations interfere with their own hopes and dreams? How does Yolanda and Mari’s friendship affect their familial obligations?

**SEXUALITY**

Although the words “lesbian” or “queer” are never used in the movie, there are moments between Yolanda and Mari that reveal an undercurrent of sexual attraction. At a loss for words, the girls do not acknowledge this attraction and move on with their friendship. How do Yolanda and Mari change as their friendship grows more intimate? How do their obligations prevent them from acting on their desires? How do their desires distract them from fulfilling their obligations? How do Yolanda and Mari’s parents react to their friendship? How does their friendship spark neighborhood gossip? What does this reveal about expectations regarding same-sex friendships in the Huntington Park community?

**INTERSECTING IDENTITIES**

Yolanda and Mari and the other teens featured in the film are at an age where they are struggling to develop a clear sense of self. We see the teens experimenting with different roles at home, school, and other social settings. How do the teens in the film define their own identities? How do they react to the pressure to “fit in?” What forces in Huntington Park, Los Angeles help define who the teens are? How do they rebel against those forces? How do they conform to those forces?

**MUSIC**

According to director Aurora Guerrero, “In Mosquita y Mari...music interacts with my characters and their story.” How does Yolanda’s relationship with music relate to her quest for self-expression and sexual awakening? We often see Mari wearing headphones and listening to her walkman. How does Mari’s relationship with music differ from Yolanda’s? What role does music play in Yolanda and Mari’s friendship? How does the director use music to capture a sense of what it is like to live in Huntington Park?

**UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

According to the National Immigration Law Center, there are approximately 1.1 million undocumented children under the age of 18 living in the United States. While the United States provides an education for all students between grades K-12, there are financial barriers for undocumented youth who wish to attend college. In the film, we discover that Mari came to Los Angeles from Mexico and lacks legal status. How does Mari’s undocumented status shape her attitude and identity? How does it shape her relationship with her mother? How do her hopes and aspirations for the future differ from Yolanda’s?

**VIDEO MODULES**

1. “Pinche Mosquita” (00:09:35–00:11:59)
2. “Mosquita y Mari” (00:21:49–00:24:25)
3. “Daydream” (00:35:52–00:37:41)
4. “I Won’t Lose Sight” (00:54:20–00:57:22)
5. “We’re Here” (00:57:23–01:05:50)
6. “Mi Mejor Amiga" (01:12:54–01:18:10)
LESSON 1: EXPLORING IDENTITY

Time: 50 minutes
Tools: Loose-leaf paper, pencils, magazines, scissors, glue, Mosquita y Mari Silhouette worksheet, video module one: “Pinche Mosquita” (00:09:35–00:11:59), video module two: “Mosquita y Mari” (00:21:49–00:24:25), video module four: “I Won’t Lose Sight” (00:54:20–00:57:22), video module five: “We’re Here” (00:57:23–01:05:50).

In this lesson, students will explore how factors such as race, religion, and family shape Yolanda and Mari’s identities. They will then create collages made up of objects, symbols and/or imagery that represent various aspects of the character’s identities.

PART A:
As a warm-up, ask students to respond for a few minutes in writing to the question “Who am I?” Ask volunteers to share their responses. Encourage students to think about multiple factors of their identities that play a key role in shaping how they see themselves, such as race, family, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, education, social class, attitudes, interests, passions, responsibilities, beliefs, concerns, etc.

PART B:
Using the Mosquita y Mari Silhouette worksheet, ask students to create a collage made up of objects, symbols and/or imagery that represent key elements of Yolanda and Mari’s identities. Students should create these collages by filling in the silhouettes with magazine cut-outs of images and/or words.

PART C:
After students have created their collages, ask them to complete written artist statements that explain why they choose the images, symbols, and/or words they did to represent Yolanda and Mari.

Discuss:
- Which aspects of Yolanda and Mari’s identities are most essential to their senses of self?
- Why are certain aspects more influential than others?
- What aspects do you think may increase or decrease in importance to them as they grow into adulthood?
- Do any aspects of their identities conflict with others? (For example, does Yolanda’s role as the daughter of hard-working immigrants conflict with her role as a teenager interested in exploring her sexuality?)
- How do Yolanda and Mari navigate those conflicts and stay true to themselves?
- How do their identities change, depending on the environment and situation?
- How much control do Yolanda and Mari have over their own identities?

CLASSROOM GUIDE

LESSON 2: INSIDE THE BOX

Time: 40 minutes
Tools: Chart paper, markers, Inside The Box worksheet. video module three: “Daydream” (00:35:52–00:37:41), video module four: “I Won’t Lose Sight” (00:54:20–00:57:22).

Mosquita y Mari subtly explores how prevailing attitudes about gender are reinforced by family members, peers, and cultural values. This lesson explores how dominant ideas of gender may work to limit the full expression of one’s identity.

PART A:
On a chalkboard, whiteboard, or large piece of paper, draw two figures inside boxes and write “Yolanda” and “Mari” at the top of each of them. Ask students to brainstorm a list of things that Yolanda and Mari’s family tell them they “should” be (i.e.: studious, college-bound, straight, uncomplaining, contributing to the household, loyal to the family). Write their suggestions inside of the boxes.

Discuss:
- How are these messages helpful?
- How are they harmful?
- How did Yolanda and Mari reject or embrace these messages?

PART B:
Outside of the boxes, ask students to share what each girl is told that they “shouldn’t” be (i.e.: hanging out with boys, sexually active, failing school.) Write their suggestions on the area outside of the boxes.

Discuss:
- How are these messages helpful?
- How are they harmful?
- How did Yolanda and Mari reject or embrace these messages?

You may also wish to include a discussion around the intersections of race, class, and culture: What messages are Yolanda and Mari receiving about what a Latina teen should be? What are they told a second-generation immigrant should be? A working class teen? In addition, you can also ask where else Yolanda and Mari would get messages that go in the boxes, outside of their families? (i.e: media, peers)

PART C:
Explain to students that Yolanda and Mari are expected to live inside of these boxes 24-7.

Discuss:
- What are the characteristics of a box? How hard is it to live inside of a box?
- What parts of Yolanda and Mari don’t fit inside of the box?
- What happens to them when they step outside of the box?
- Who pressures you to be in the box?
- Who supports you being out of the box?
LESSON 3: MOSQUITA Y MARI SOLILOQUIES

Time: 60 minutes

The intimacy between Yolanda and Mari is expressed throughout the film by their silent actions, depicted as small and awkward gestures, longing looks, and subtle touches. In this lesson, students will explore the unspoken desires of Yolanda and Mari by developing soliloquies.

PART A:
Explain to students that a soliloquy is a device often used in drama when a character expresses unspoken thoughts and reflections aloud to him or herself, unaware of any audience. Begin the activity by discussing the unspoken feelings and thoughts that surround the central relationship in the film.

Discuss:
• Yolanda and Mari never verbally express their affection for one another, yet the audience is aware that their friendship is sexually charged. How do we know this? What techniques does the filmmaker use to visualize their desire without using dialogue?
• What remains unspoken between Yolanda and Mari? What do you think they want to say, but are unable to?

PART B:
To help students choose material from the film and transform it into a soliloquy that expresses, at least in part, silences around desire and affection, brainstorm as a whole-class answers to the following prompts:

• Something that makes Yolanda and/or Mari angry.
• An experience that transformed Yolanda and/or Mari.
• Something that confuses Yolanda and/or Mari about their identity.
• Something Yolanda and/or Mari always wanted to be able to tell someone or talk about, but haven’t.
• What Yolanda and/or Mari would like people to know about who they are and where they come from.

PART C:
Ask students to choose one of the prompts brainstormed in Part B—and do a freewrite where they select a perspective—Yolanda’s or Mari’s—and fill a page with everything that comes into their head when thinking about their prompt. When students finish their freewrite, have them read their soliloquies to one another in small groups. Debrief by asking students to reflect on what they learned about the characters by writing a soliloquy. What did they learn from classmate’s soliloquies?

LESSON 4: COMMUNITY ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

Time: 60 minutes
Tools: Pens, paper, Community Assets and Challenges worksheet, video module one: “Pinche Mosquita” (00:09:35–00:11:59), video module four: “I Won’t Lose Sight” (00:54:20–00:57:32).

Huntington Park is a community just south of downtown Los Angeles, whose strong identity plays a major role in the film. Predominantly Mexican, its young residents incorporate many of Mexico’s cultural trends, especially music and fashion, into the fabric of the youth culture, making this urban area a vibrant blend of Mexican immigrant and American identity. We also see the harsh realities affecting this working class community, including poverty and educational inequalities. In this lesson, students will discover the assets and challenges existing in their communities/neighborhoods.

PART A:
Remind students that throughout the film, we often see Yolanda and Mari walking through their neighborhood of Huntington Park, as they commute to and from school. Ask them to share what they notice about Huntington Park. Their responses may include the presence of single family homes, a vibrant commercial district, train tracks, abandoned lots, people living in poverty, the limited availability of jobs for young people, or the community feel of the local grocery store. Then, ask students to share out facts about the community/neighborhood in which they live. Record their responses on chart paper under two columns (one for positive facts, another for negative) without revealing to students how you are grouping their responses. Once students are done sharing, ask them to speculate what each column has in common and what an appropriate column heading should be.

Discuss:
• Are there more positives or negatives? Why might this be?
• Why might it be problematic to only see a community from the perspective of its problems and challenges?

PART B:
Explain to students that in trying to solve community problems local leaders and citizens often begin by focusing on the various problems and concerns existing in the community, sometimes forgetting to identify the strengths of the community. Have students chart the assets and challenges in their neighborhood on the Community Assets and Challenges worksheet. They can complete the worksheet on their commute to/from school. Alternatively, you may wish to complete the worksheet as a class by taking a walking field trip.

Discuss:
• What resources or assets does your community have?
• What about your community could be improved?
• How do you think these problems could be improved?
• How can community members use the community’s assets to make improvements?
• How has this activity influenced the way you see your community? Did you discover assets or challenges that you were previously unaware of?
Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza
by Gloria Anzaldúa
This groundbreaking text offers a series of essays and poetry that deals with the concept of the “borderland” as both a physical place located at the U.S./Mexico border, and as a spiritual divide. Rooted in the author’s experience as a Chicana, lesbian, activist, and writer, it profoundly challenges mainstream notions of identity.

What Night Brings
by Carla Trujillo
What Night Brings bravely addresses some of the Chicano community’s most intimate secrets. Growing up in 1960s Northern California, Marci is smart, feisty and funny. She tells the story as she determines to defy her family and God in order to find her identity, sexuality and freedom.

The House on Mango Street
by Sandra Cisneros
The House on Mango Street is a series of vignettes that reveal the joys and pains experienced by young girls approaching womanhood. The novel follows Esperanza Cordero, a Mexican-American girl growing up in a Latino enclave in Chicago; as she learns about sexuality, female friendships, and negotiating familial obligations.

The Line Between Us: Teaching About the Border and Mexican Immigration
by Bill Bigelow
The Line Between Us explores the history of U.S.-Mexican relations and the roots of Mexican immigration, all in the context of the global economy. Using various interactive exercises, veteran teacher Bill Bigelow demonstrates how to combine lively teaching with critical analysis so students understand the immigrant experience and border life.

United We Dream
unitedwedream.org
Founded in 1978, Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) is a social justice organization that provides residents in brightened and heavily polluted urban communities in Northern and Southern California with organizing skills, leadership training and legal, scientific and technical assistance, to successfully confront threats to their health and well-being.

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Papers the Movie: Stories of Undocumented Youth (2011)
Papers the Movie: Stories of Undocumented Youth delivers the poignant stories of five undocumented students. The challenges they face and their organized efforts to pass the DREAM ACT are brought to light in this feature-length documentary chronicling one of the most critical civil rights struggles of our time.

Circumstance
(2011)
Maryam Keshavarz’s Circumstance captures a love affair between two 16-year-old Iranian girls. The film provides a provocative glimpse at the underground world of Iranian youth culture, as experienced by two friends struggling to reconcile their desires with the limits placed upon them by the world they were born into.

Pariah
(2011)
Alike (Adépero Oduye) is a 17-year-old African-American teen who lives with her parents and younger sister in Brooklyn. She is quietly but firmly embracing her identity as a lesbian, and strives to get through adolescence by staying true to herself.

Gun Hill Road
(2011)
After three years in prison, Enrique returns home to discover his wife estranged and his teenage son exploring a sexual transformation that will put the fragile bonds of their family to the test.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

Resolutions: Earning Our Place in the World
by Terri G. Miller
This book is a guide to the U.S. citizenship process and American democracy for immigrants. Miller discusses the legal process of obtaining U.S. citizenship and brings it to life with stories of immigrants who have successfully navigated the path to naturalization.

Hitting Ground: A Memoir of Undocumented Life
by Women of Color Network
This memoir by a group of women of color who have navigated the legal and social challenges of being undocumented in the United States offers a powerful and personal account of their experiences.

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IN YOUR OWN WORDS:
Describe your experience as a Latine/a young person. How do you see the struggles of our community manifest themselves in our daily lives? What role does education play in your future? What are your hopes for the Latino/a future? What are your values that you hold dear? How do you see your values manifesting themselves in your relationships with others?

GET INVOLVED CRAVING MORE HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE? CHECK OUT THESE ORGANIZATIONS.

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Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network
glsen.org
The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

Unión=Fuerza
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Unión=Fuerza is the first ever Latino institute at Creating Change, the premier annual organizing and skills-building event for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community and their allies. By bringing together diverse groups of LGBT Latinos, they aim to strengthen and unify the LGBT Latino community’s voice.
DIRECTIONS:
Using the Mosquita y Mari Silhouette worksheet, ask students to create a collage made up of objects, symbols and/or imagery that represent key elements of Yolanda and Mari’s identities. Students should create these collages by filling in the silhouettes with magazine cut-outs of images and/or words.

SILHOUETTE WORKSHEET: YOLANDA

DIRECTIONS:
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SILHOUETTE WORKSHEET: MARI
DIRECTIONS:
Brainstorm a list of things that Yolanda and Mari's family tell them they "should" be (i.e.: studious, college-bound, straight, uncomplaining, contributing to the household, loyal to the family.) Write their suggestions inside of the box. Outside of the box, ask students to share what each girl is told that they “shouldn’t” be (i.e.: hanging out with boys, sexually active, failing school.) Write their suggestions on the area outside of the boxes.

INSIDE THE BOX WORKSHEET: YOLANDA

YOLANDA

INSIDE THE BOX WORKSHEET: MARI

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TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES® STAFF

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ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES®

Tribeca Youth Screening Series® is a media literacy program begun in 2006 by the Tribeca Film Institute®. The academic year is divided into two series, screened from September through June in partnership with national and neighborhood partners. These screenings are augmented by in-class sessions led by a Tribeca Teaching Artist, who works with a film-specific curriculum written and edited by a team formed through Tribeca Film Institute®. Schools are selected based on relationship, location, and need; in 2012 we will be working in eight schools in New York and New Jersey. Connect and download free curricula at TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG

Additional program support provided by:

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Honorable Margaret S. Chin,
New York City Council

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The Tribeca Film Institute® (TFI) is a year-round nonprofit arts organization that empowers working filmmakers through grants, professional development and resources, while also helping New York City students discover independent film and filmmaking.