

Children's Theater Production Workshop: Diversifying the Classics and LA Librería

UCLA's Diversifying the Classics project (DTC) recently partnered with LA Librería, a bookstore that promotes children's literature in Spanish and holds cultural events, to present a theatrical adaptation for children of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*. As readers will no doubt remember, Lope's play presents a community of villagers who band together to overthrow their tyrannical overlord, Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, in the town of Fuente Ovejuna, near Córdoba, in 1476. For this workshop, we offered various activities in preparation for the play itself: rehearsing lines, decorating the stage and the well of Fuente Ovejuna; painting t-shirts and cardboard daggers; and learning to sing *¡O Peor!*, an original song that we composed for the play. This essay will explain how we communicated with our partner organization, the planning and execution of the workshop itself, and the overall responses from both the participants and audience members.

Finding LA Librería

When searching for a partner organization, we had three questions in mind: Is this organization a Spanish-language based community? Who are its target audiences? Are they open to inclusive, team-building activities pertaining to Spanish *comedias*? All these questions impacted our workshop. Because LA Librería is located in a neighborhood in Los Angeles that is rich with a Latinx demographic, the environment was well-suited for the Spanish-language workshop we envisioned. Moreover, LA Librería prides itself on creating a welcoming space that hosts families with Spanish-language events and activities throughout the year.

During our preparatory visit, we were shown two areas. The main room, with its rich library of Spanish-language books available for purchase, we would use for workstations involving script practice and arts and crafts as well as for the performance itself. Its dimensions—approximately 15 feet wide and 30 feet long with a height of 12 feet—offered the right amount of space for the children's performance. A back room for storage and other hands-on activities would be used for the remaining stations, which involved music, painting, costume making, and a place for the kids to decompress and enjoy a snack.

After reviewing the space, we continued to plan with the Co-Founder, Celene Navarrete. Here is the letter we sent her with our proposal:

Dear Librería,

We are grad students who are part of Diversifying the Classics group at UCLA. Diversifying the Classics has been promoting the *comedia* to L.A. audiences and beyond by attending to issues of translation and adaptation, connecting academics with practitioners, and hosting performances. We are interested in running a workshop that would expose kids to Spanish theater, in particular Spanish *comedias*. The following is our proposal for how we would put together our workshop:

We will do a reenactment of the play *Fuenteovejuna*, written by the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega in the early seventeenth century. The play took place in the year 1476 when villagers fought together to defeat Comendador Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, the tyrant in the town of Fuente Ovejuna, Castile.

We will begin by explaining the origins of Spanish Golden Age theater. Specifically, we will discuss *comedias*, because this will be the genre of theater the children will eventually perform. We will provide plenty of interactive opportunities for the children so they are more involved and experience what it would be like to put on a play production. We will start by setting up stations with different activities. One station will create props that resemble sound effects for the play. For example, to create the sound of rain, we will put together paper cups with rice inside sealed with tape. Another station will allow the children to create their own costumes made out of construction paper. We will have a few designs already drawn up so they can either reference those options or create their own. We will also include some examples of what the typical attire was worn during the play's time period so that the kids can historically contextualize the purpose of the activity. In the final station, we will assign roles to the children and go over lines. By the end of the workshop, we will put on the play for the parents to watch.

We hope that you accept our proposal for this workshop as we believe it will give kids the opportunity to learn about Spanish *comedias* and their impact on Spain's literary and cultural production. Please let us know if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions. We hope to hear from you soon.

While the execution of our workshop differed slightly from our initial proposal, this letter played an important role in eliciting interest from the partner organization and establishing communication and flexibility for changes throughout the planning process. After everything was approved and LA Librería was on board with our idea of a *comedia* theater workshop, we proceeded with the planning and organization of tasks and activities, inventory of supplies and materials, securing donations, and outreach to potential families who were interested in this educational and collaborative event.

Planning the Workshop

The Script

We started from a prose adaptation of *Fuenteovejuna* for children by Barbara Fuchs. Because the adapted text already included a lot of dialogue, it was relatively simple to transform it back to a dramatic form. As the date of the workshop approached and we contemplated the fact that we did not know how comfortable the children would be with Spanish, reading, or reading in Spanish, we pruned and pruned the text until we arrived at the very simplified version below.

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Acquiring Supplies

Considering that this workshop would include a station for making props and costumes, as well as one dedicated to arts and crafts, we needed access to affordable supplies. Fortunately, the majority of supplies for the arts and crafts station were donated through one of our members, Amed Galo Lopez, and his contact from Homeboy Industries (the largest gang prevention and rehabilitation center in the United States). Additional supplies were provided by other DTC members including Rachel Kaufman and Barbara Fuchs.

Here is what we used:

- 20 rolls of scotch tape
- 20 glue sticks
- 20 packs of colored pencils
- 20 pieces of safety scissors
- 2 packs of fabric markers
- 3 reams of colored construction paper
- 1 ream of blank white paper
- 10 bundles of assorted color pipe cleaners
- 2 packs of staplers with staples included
- 3 large bags of cotton balls
- 2 boxes of assorted color paints

Pre-making Materials

We decided to represent the town of Fuente Ovejuna with a Spanish-themed well and incorporate it into the staging of the play. The well was made of cardboard, duct tape, clothes hangers, and papier maché. A headpiece, molded into the shape of a sheep, was also added to the top of the well. Lastly, the well was painted black, so that it could become a canvas of sorts for the kids to decorate. In addition, 20 daggers and costumes were pre-made. DTC members constructed the daggers out of cardboard and duct tape, but left room for the kids to add their own decorations at the arts-and-crafts station. The costumes, designed and constructed by Barbara Fuchs' partner, Todd Lynch, included 8 villagers, 8 sheep, and 2 narrators, as well as upper-class characters including Flores, the Comendador, the king, and the queen.

The costumes involved the following pieces:

- 8 sheep ponchos
- 8 sheep headpieces
- 8 villager ponchos
- 8 villager scarves
- 8 villager headpieces
- 1 king robe
- 1 king crown
- 1 queen robe
- 1 queen crown
- 1 Flores poncho
- 1 Flores headpiece
- 1 Comendador poncho
- 1 Comendador collar
- 1 Comendador headpiece

The outfits and ponchos were constructed out of felt, utilizing different colored layers to decorate the costumes along with vibrantly colored duct tape on selected costumes to portray the character's status. We decided to have everyone dress for their parts after the decorating phases of the workshop.

Creating the Agenda

We created the following plan for the day of the workshop:

Objectives	Time
Welcome 1. Make name tags	5 min
Introduction 1. Introduction to Workshop/Play/Expectations 2. Information about <i>Fuenteovejuna</i> & Lope de Vega 3. Warm-up exercise 4. Split into stations	15 min
Station 1 – Script (Led by Barbara and Rachel) 1. Practice Script 2. Blocking 3. Dispersal of roles	20 min
Station 2 – Set-making (Led by David & Saraí) 1. Craft cutouts of birds, butterflies, and bees 2. Decorate well	20 min
Station 3 – Costume & Prop making (Led by Sofía and Todd) 1. Decorate t-shirts with fabric markers, glitter markers, and tape 2. Decorate daggers	20 min
Station 4 – Music & Sound Effects - (Led by Galo) 1. Make sound effects of rain and thunder using your own body 2. Vocalizing exercises 3. Practice ¡O Peor! Song	20 min
Break – Snack time	15 min
Final Preparations 1. Dispersal of costumes 2. Practice play and staging all together	30 min
Performance 1. Barbara gives opening remarks about DTC and the <i>comedia</i> 2. Performance of <i>Fuenteovejuna</i>	25 min
Closing Remarks and Group Photo	10 min

*All four stations took place simultaneously, with students spending 20 min at each station — while stations were active, students who finished early could practice their part in the script.

Outreach and Promoting the Workshop

The workshop was set for Saturday, May 20, 2023 from 1 to 4 pm. We spent at least a month promoting the event through not only LA Librería’s website, but multiple networks including DTC’s website, local schools, and afterschool programs. Considering this was our first time conducting this workshop with a new partner organization, we capped the registration at twenty kids from six to ten years old. A flyer describing our “Theater Workshop for Kids” was created by LA Librería and approved by DTC; the registration included a three-hour theater workshop with snacks and refreshments, and take-home souvenirs. Because we planned to have

kids personalize their outfits, parents were asked to bring them an extra light-colored t-shirt to decorate and add to their pre-made costume. The initial payment for registration was \$25, with sponsorships provided by DTC if necessary.

Execution

As families arrived at LA Librería, we greeted them warmly and invited the children to write their names on name tags. This allowed for easier communication and a more personalized experience for the kids. We made sure to schedule extra time for drop-offs so that we could speak with both the children and parents, sharing information about DTC and building a closer relationship before the workshop officially began. We encouraged parents to leave and return at the designated showtime so their children could fully immerse themselves in the activities and engage with one another.

We began the workshop by forming a circle as Barbara introduced *Fuenteovejuna* by Lope de Vega, the play chosen and adapted for this specific workshop. Barbara provided historical and literary context to help the children understand the point of the story, which allowed them to play a primary role in this theater production. Shortly thereafter, Rachel led warm-up exercises by activating their voices and bodies, enabling the children to become more comfortable with the space and get to know each other.

After the introduction, we decided to designate roles for everyone thoughtfully. Rather than directly assigning parts, we briefly described the major characters and allowed the children to choose which roles they preferred to interpret. If more than one child wanted to play a role, we found similar roles for them. We were happy the children were cooperative and respectful as we filled primary roles. The younger children and those who did not volunteer were assigned the roles of sheep, who sang the chorus and moved through the stage, actively participating in the play.

To ensure that the workshop ran smoothly and efficiently, we divided the kids into different stations. We specifically designed the stations so that the order in which the kids moved through them would not matter. However, the kids with the most significant roles in the play began with the script-reading station to become acquainted with their characters and have more time to rehearse their lines. Although we initially planned to move the kids through the stations in groups, we soon realized that everyone took different amounts of time to complete the activities. For this reason, we directed them to the next station independently, with each taking roughly twenty minutes.

At Station 1, Barbara and Rachel taught the children to read their lines, block scenes, and play different roles. At Station 2, David Chibukhchyan and Saraí Jaramillo led the children in creating an impressive stage design, as they decorated the well and the library bookshelves. Using construction paper, scissors, cotton balls, tape, pipe cleaners, colored pencils, and markers, they crafted little sheep, birds, butterflies, and bees to add to their production. At Station 3, Todd and Sofia Yazpik helped the children decorate pre-made cardboard daggers and t-shirts. The kids used paints and fabric markers to draw inspiration from Golden Age costume designs for their props and t-shirts, which they then took home as a memento of the workshop. Finally, Station 4, led by Galo, focused on music. He wrote the *¡O Peor!* song with two verses and a chorus, allowing all children (and audience members) to participate in the play. Galo also led them in the actual performance with his guitar and singing.

After the stations, the children had a short break to enjoy snacks and put the finishing touches on their decorations, props, and t-shirts. Many kids continued working on their projects,

as they were enthusiastic about showcasing their creativity. Once everyone had finished their snacks, we began organizing costumes for each character. The costumes were designed to be worn over the kids' clothes, and everyone was thrilled to have their costumes ready for the performance.

Before the grand performance, we made time for a run-through of the entire play so the kids would feel more prepared and understand how to organize and structure their performance. Fully equipped with their costumes and scripts, the kids were ready to begin their parts. David and Saraí framed the play as narrators; Rachel directed the play by ensuring that the children's timing flowed throughout; Sofia assisted on-stage by coordinating the movement of parts and reading alongside one of the children; and Galo conducted the music with the *¡O Peor!* song. As a team, we actively took part in the play to guarantee that the kids felt supported and comfortable to play their roles. The performance was a success, as parents and kids seemed delighted with the entire workshop.



Saraí demonstrates how to craft a butterfly. (Photo by LA Librería staff).



Barbara assists kids in memorizing and reciting their parts for the script. (LA Librería).



David and one of the kids add finishing touches to the well. (LA Librería).



Kids decorate their t-shirts with fabric markers and paints. (LA Librería).



Galo continues to teach kids *¡O Peor!* during their snack time. (LA Librería).



Final performance with kids in full costume in the main room of LA Librería. (LA Librería).

Reactions, Responses, and Improvements

Improvements

Our first workshop with the kids showed us some areas we could improve for future events. Although we successfully worked through all activities, we believe extending the workshop to a full-day event would be beneficial. This would give the kids more time to practice their lines and work with their props. Moreover, we also recommend setting aside a specific time for the children to revisit their favorite stations, so they can continue to explore their interests at home or elsewhere. To keep the children's creative energy flowing, we suggest providing them with costume stencils as a takeaway treat so they can make their own costumes at home. We would include instructions along with an affordable list of necessary materials to create their props and costumes.

Observations

The workshop was conducted in Spanish, given its affiliation with LA Librería. The facilitators were all bilingual adults, who were able to cater to the children's varying levels of Spanish proficiency. Depending on the child's preference and comfort, the activities were explained in both English and Spanish. This made it easier for everyone to participate and enjoy the activities. The number of sheep and peasants is flexible, but the workshop probably works best with a cap of 20-25 children, and at least 4 facilitators.

Our script is also available in English, for English-language settings. In either language, the narrator(s) are key to moving the action along. These roles can be played by adult facilitators (as in our case) but could also be played by children if there are enough strong readers in the group and/or if there is more time for preparation and rehearsal. A single narrator could also read all three narrator parts if necessary.

Responses

One child, named Rio, was initially quite shy and reserved. One of the facilitators, Galo, approached Rio playing his guitar, which was used for the *¡O Peor!* song in the play. Galo's one-on-one exchanges with Rio helped him become more engaged and comfortable participating in the activities. It was wonderful to see how the facilitators were able to connect with each child and create an inclusive space for everyone to learn.

Conclusion

We had a fruitful experience working with a talented group of young actors, ranging from six to ten years old, who were all excited to perform in Spanish. The workshop was successful, and we were thrilled to see that the kids put on a riveting performance for their proud parents. We owe a debt of gratitude to LA Librería for providing us with a great venue for the event. Moving forward, we plan to make all the materials related to the workshop available online, so that schools, libraries, and other organizations can use them to help kids discover the joys of *comedia* and explore their passion for theater.



Group photo of full children cast and DTC members. From left to right: Todd, Rachel, Sofia, Galo, Barbara, David, and Saraí. (LA Librería).

FUENTE OVEJUNA

Adaptación de Barbara Fuchs

15 de marzo de 2023

- NARRADOR 1: Había una vez un pueblo que se llamaba Fuente Ovejuna. Algunos dicen que le habían puesto ese nombre porque allí bebían las ovejas, otros porque la fuente tenía forma de oveja, toda redondita.
- NARRADOR 2: Esto era en la época de reyes y reinas y príncipes y princesas. El rey y la reina le habían encargado el pueblo al Comendador, para cuidarlo y defenderlo. Siempre trataban de elegir buenos gobernadores, pero no siempre lo lograban.
- NARRADOR 3: Este Comendador era un poco codicioso...
- COMENDADOR: Ahora este pueblo es mío, todo mío. Me lo dieron los reyes.
- FLORES: Pero no, señor Comendador, usted sólo se lo cuida a los reyes...No es suyo.
- COMENDADOR: ¡NOOO! Es mío, todo mío.
- NARRADOR 1: La gente del pueblo trataba de no prestarle demasiada atención. Estaban ocupados con sus campos, sus cosechas, sus familias y sus ovejas.
- NARRADOR 2: Laurencia y Pascuala, que eran muy buenas amigas, trabajaban duro hilando lana y haciendo queso, también de oveja.
- LAURENCIA: ¿Quién quiere trajes y carruajes? ¡Yo prefiero treparme a los árboles, nadar en el río y festejar con todos la cosecha!
- PASCUALA: ¿Quién quiere ser una gran dama? Yo me quedo con mi queso, mi fruta fresca y una buena merienda bajo los árboles. ¡Viva el pueblo!
- NARRADOR 3: Frondoso y Mengo y los demás muchachos del pueblo también trabajaban duro, cuidando las ovejas y esquilándolas, que así se dice cuando les cortan la lana.
- FRONDOSO: Oye, Frondoso, creo que estoy enamorado...
- MENGO: ¡Estamos muy ocupados para eso, Frondoso!
- FRONDOSO: Es que Laurencia es muy especial...

MENGO: Bueno, pues, invítala a pasear contigo. ¡Ay, te pusiste todo rojo!

NARRADOR 1: Cada vez que el Comendador llegaba al pueblo, la gente de Fuente Ovejuna le preparaba un gran festín, con quesos y panes y uvas y pasteles. Y le cantaban para recibirlo:

TODOS: *Sea bien venido
el Comendadore
de rendir las tierras
y matar los hombres
¡Viva muchos años,
viva Fernán Gómez!*

NARRADOR 2: Un poco sangriento, pero así era en aquella época. De todas formas él casi no los escuchaba, porque cada año se ponía más codicioso y egoísta.

COMENDADOR: ¡Mío, mío, todo mío! Qué más me han traído?

LAURENCIA (aparte): ¡Qué mala educación! Se sirve todo, y no deja nada para los demás.

NARRADOR 3: Un buen día, Frondoso por fin se animó a invitar a Laurencia a dar un paseo con él por el campo, diciéndole:

FRONDOSO:

*Mira que toda la villa
ya casados nos quiere
y de cómo nos tardamos,
la villa se maravilla.*

LAURENCIA: ¡Pero sí, con todo gusto! Yo traigo una merienda, llena de golosinas.

NARRADOR 1: Ya cuando estaban en lo más bello del bosque, se toparon ...
... con el Comendador, que saltó desde unas matas, y Flores, su secretario.

COMENDADOR: ¿Para quién son esas golosinas? Esa canasta es mía, mía, toda mía!

FLORES: No, señor, deje, ¡eso no es suyo!

COMENDADOR: Y esta muchacha también. ¡Mía, mía, toda mía!

FLORES: Pero no, señor, ¡la muchacha menos que menos!

LAURENCIA: ¡Déjeme!

FRONDOSO: ¡Suéltela ya!

NARRADOR 2: Laurencia se escapó y corrió hasta llegar al pueblo, dando voces para que todos se reunieran en la plaza.

LAURENCIA: ¡Así no podemos más! Este gobernador no sabe gobernarse. Recién me atacó en el bosque.

PASCUALA: Es verdad. A mí también hace rato que me molesta. ¡A todos les quita lo suyo!

NARRADOR 3: Pero sus padres y sus abuelos y sus tíos y sus vecinos daban veinte vueltas: que el gobernador era el gobernador, que lo habían puesto los reyes, que patatín y que patatán.

LAURENCIA: ¿Acaso es poca cosa, cómo nos acosa? No nos deja a sol ni a sombra. Si no hacemos algo, pues ¡le dejan las ovejas al lobo, como cobardes pastores!

¡O peor! *Ovejas son, bien lo dice de Fuente Ovejuna el nombre.*

Sigan así, si quieren, dando vueltas. ¡Nosotras, las muchachas, vamos a detenerlo!

TODOS: Es verdad lo que dice. ¡Laurencia tiene razón! ¡No podemos seguir así!

NARRADOR 1: Entonces salieron todos juntos camino a la casa del comendador, cantando y gritando, cada vez más furiosos. Lo buscaron por toda la casa, gritando:

TODOS: ¿Dónde estás, Comendador? ¡Serás nuestro, todo nuestro!

NARRADOR 2: Lo corrieron y lo corrieron hasta muy lejos del pueblo. Y de ese gobernador que no sabía gobernarse nunca más se supo.

NARRADOR 3: Flores también salió corriendo, y no paró hasta llegar al palacio de los reyes.

FLORES: ¡Justicia, justicia! ¡Han quitado a mi señor, el Comendador!

REINA: ¿Cómo? ¡Esto no puede ser!

REY:
Allá vamos.
*Estar puedes confiado
que sin castigo no queden.*

NARRADOR 1: Cuando los de Fuente Ovejuna supieron que venían los reyes para castigarlos, se reunieron para pensar juntos.

FRONDOSO: Van a querer saber quién sacó al Comendador. ¡Nos cortarán la cabeza! ¿Qué les vamos a decir?

LAURENCIA:

*Digamos Fuente Ovejuna
y a nadie saquen de aquí.*

PASCUALA:

*Es el camino derecho
Fuente Ovejuna lo ha hecho.*

MENGO:

¿Quieren responder así?

TODOS: ¡Sí! ¡Todos juntos lo hicimos!

NARRADOR 2: Se pusieron a ensayar, preguntándose unos a otros con las voces más terribles:

LAURENCIA: ¿Quién sacó al Comendador?

FRONDOSO: ¡Fuente Ovejuna lo hizo!

LAURENCIA: ¡Confiesa ya!

FRONDOSO: Confieso.

PASCUALA: Pues, ¿quién fue?

FRONDOSO: ¡Fuente Ovejuna, señor!

NARRADOR 3: En eso llegaron los reyes, con sus jueces y sus soldados. ¡Por suerte en Fuente Ovejuna ya habían ensayado!

REY: ¿Quién sacó al Comendador?

PASCUALA ¡Fuente Ovejuna lo hizo!

REINA ¡Confiesa ya!

FRONDOSO Confieso.

REINA Pues, ¿quién fue?

FRONDOSO ¡Fuente Ovejuna!

NARRADOR 1: Tenían miedo de que Mengo no aguantara de los nervios.

REY: ¡Tú, muchacho, tienes que decirnos la verdad!

MENGO: Ay, no sé, señor...

REINA: ¡Ahora mismo, y sin vueltas!

MENGO: Está bien, se los diré...

TODOS: ¡O no!

MENGO: Es que fue...

REY: Sí, dinos...

MENGO: Es que fue...

REINA: Dinos de una vez...

MENGO: ¡Fuente Ovejunita!

REINA: ¿Cómo que "Fuente Ovejunita"? ¡Esto no puede ser!

REY: ¿No saben decir otra cosa? ¿No nos dirán la verdad?

LAURENCIA Disculpen, reyes. La verdad, con todo respeto, es que ese Comendador no sabía gobernarse, y menos a todo este pueblo. Mil insultos hacía, la comida nos robaba y a todos acosaba.

REY:
Hmmm... Lo hicieron todos juntos.
*Aunque fue grave el delito,
por fuerza ha de perdonarse.*

REINA: Hmmm... ¡Ya sé! Quede Fuente Ovejuna como villa de los reyes, sin otro señor. Así esperamos que todo marche mejor.

NARRADOR 2: Y así fue. Volvieron todos a sus trabajos y a sus festejos, aunque a veces bromeaban, cuando faltaba un pastel o alguien se había terminado el queso:

PASCUALA: ¿Quién lo hizo?

MENGO: ¡Fuente Ovejuna, señor!

FIN DE LA OBRA

Nota:

El pueblo de Fuente Ovejuna (lo escriben así, con b larga) existe de verdad. Queda en Andalucía, a unos 100 km de la ciudad de Córdoba. La obra que escribió Lope de Vega allá por 1614 y que hemos contado aquí se basa en hechos que ocurrieron allí en 1476. Hoy en día, en el pueblo de Fuente Ovejuna se presenta todos los años, y todos van a verla.

Lope de Vega (1562-1635) escribió cientos de obras de teatro, cada una con sus personajes y sus enredos. De él se decía que era “el fénix de los ingenios” o, cuando le tenían más envidia, un “monstruo de la naturaleza.” La gente se moría por sus obras. Ni bien terminaban de ver una en los corrales, como se llamaban los teatros de entonces, ya querían otra. Por eso Lope escribía tantas, a veces en unos pocos días. Cuando algo era muy pero muy bueno, la gente decía “¡Es de Lope!”

A Lope le gustaban mucho las actrices—a veces hasta se enamoraba de ellas. Por eso escribió grandes papeles para sus protagonistas mujeres, como Laurencia en *Fuente Ovejuna*. Muchas veces, ellas son los personajes más importantes de la obra.

Si pasas por Madrid, puedes visitar la Casa Museo Lope de Vega en la calle Cervantes y ver la sala donde él se inventaba tantos enredos.