NYU Steinhardt
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

Music & Performing Arts Professions
PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE
Presents
A Teacher’s Resource Guide

Sonia Flew
By Melinda Lopez

CAST:
Melinna Bobadilla
Tyler Eccleston-Grimes
Emily Kaczmarek
John Lavigne
Rocio Lopez
Delia Meyer
Drew Petersen
Isaac Polanco
Jamie Roach
Robert Stevenson
Gabriela Tejedor
Emily Weidenbaum

DIRECTOR: Nancy Smithner
SCENE DESIGN: Andy Hall
LIGHTING DESIGN: Daryl Embry
COSTUME DESIGN: Grier Coleman
SOUND DESIGN: Blake McCarty
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: Randy Susevich
PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER: Sara Simons

The Players Theatre
115 MacDougal Street • New York City • 10012 • Office (212) 475-4445
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To speak to us personally, or to arrange a visit, please contact our office at ed.theatre@nyu.edu or 212 998 5868.

Philip Taylor, PhD
Director
Program in Educational Theatre
Director’s Notes

In *Sonia Flew* (2004) we are immersed in the intimate exchanges of two families, one in post 9/11 Minneapolis, and the other in 1961 Havana, just after the Cuban Revolution. The family members in each world grapple with hopes and aspirations, political and cultural ideals, and understanding their loyalties to country and to each other. Sonia, a mother, wife and lawyer, resists her son Zak’s decision to join the military to defend the U.S. in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks. She also struggles to come to terms with her past, when she was sent to the United States by her parents with the intent to save her from the violence they were experiencing all around them in Cuba’s painful transition from dictatorship to socialist state.

Reversing the linear notion of storytelling, the play goes back in time to reveal the true reason Sonia was sent to the United States. Also, through flashbacks and memories, the characters relay powerful textual images, which poignantly link their dilemmas across generations and countries. Through the genre of realism, playwright Melinda Lopez offers sharp and compelling dialogue, which incorporates touches of humor, offering deeply layered impressions of family and security. These thought provoking exchanges are both universal and relevant to our current time—the characters have choices to make, and they take action, often in opposition to those they love the most.

The play explores the ways in which momentous world events directly affect otherwise ordinary individuals, asking: What do we owe our families? What is our duty to our country? Can we forgive the past? Through family rituals of holidays and food, and symbols of airplanes and oceans, the playwright explores notions of what is precious to us, and how the secrets of the past can reveal hope for the future.

Our ensemble of actors and production staff (including two assistant directors, two dramaturgs, a stage manager and her two assistant stage managers) delved deeply into the historical analysis of this play. It is our hope that through a powerful understanding of the multifaceted cultural context of the play, we can effectively bring this vibrant and dynamic story to life on stage.

Dr. Nan Smithner, Director
Dear Teacher:

We have been working for many weeks to prepare this resource guide for you and we hope that you find it useful when preparing your students to understand the background of *Sonia Flew* by Melinda Lopez.

The main concept behind this guide is a series of *Historical Overviews* which have been purposefully prepared to be used as copy masters for handouts for your students if you so choose. The historical information has been synthesized from a variety of sources and is intended to provide basic and interesting information for the students—some of which they will already be aware of from their history classes and/or life experiences. These documents are intended to serve as cursory overviews and if you feel it appropriate, we encourage students to do a follow-up research project on one of the related topics in our post-show activities.

Following the *Historical Overviews* are a series of pre- and post-show activities which utilize the themes and historical information presented in the play or in the documents included here. We hope that you will review these activities and consider using the pre-show activities in your classroom before you attend the performance. It is not necessary to complete these activities in order to understand the work, but the more information the students have before they see the show, the richer their experience will be at the performance.

Please pay particular attention to the Theatre Etiquette piece on page 6 and review this information with your students before attending the performance.

We are curious to have feedback on the utility of this document and we will contact you after the performance to evaluate your use of the guide.

Thank you for volunteering to bring your students to our production and we hope that you will consider coming again in the future.

Sincerely,

The Resource Guide Planning Committee

Jonathan Jones, Chair
Melinna Bobadilla
Evelynn Harmer
Lily Winograd
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Summary

Sonia Flew is a story of immigration, generational divides, and, ultimately, of the American family. Sonia is sent to the United States by her parents to elude the rising intensity of the Communist revolution in Cuba in the early 1960s. She marries an American man whose Jewish father came to the United States to escape the Nazi occupation of Poland. Both Sonia and her husband attempt to juggle their customs from their own separate backgrounds with contemporary American culture and expectations. When Sonia learns of her son’s decision to leave college, enlist in the military and fight against terror in Afghanistan in the weeks following 9/11, memories of her own childhood overwhelm her during a time of upheaval and war.

Sonia struggles to reconcile being forced as a young girl to leave Cuba at the dawn of Fidel Castro’s rule with her own responsibilities as a mother facing uncertainty. Sonia must find a way to come to terms with her past, her lost parents, her own children and her adopted country or risk losing everything that she loves. Set between post-revolutionary Cuba and post-9/11 America, Sonia Flew telescopes the large cultural and political forces of a historic moment to examine their impact on the intimate lives of ordinary men and women. What do we owe our parents? Can we forgive the past? This poetic and urgent play bridges time and culture in a drama about the cost of forgiveness.

Theatre Etiquette

Limitations

• Turn off your cell phone.
• Pay attention to any announcements made prior to the show.
• Do not speak during the performance.
• Do not take any pictures during the performance.
• Be respectful of those around you.
• Remain seated during the performance and stay with your group.
• Use the restroom before the performance to avoid any interruption of the show.
• Do not eat or drink in the theater.
• Do not put your feet on or kick any seats.
• Do not whistle or scream at performers.

Freedoms

• Laugh when the show is funny.
• Clap at the end of the performance.
• Think of questions to ask the performers after the show.
• Enjoy the show!!
Cuban Revolution Timeline

1952  On March 10, General Fulgencio Batista overthrew Cuban President Carlos Prío Socarrás and canceled elections.

1953  Angered by Batista’s coup, young lawyer Fidel Castro organized a group of about 160 men and launched an attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago, Cuba on July 26th.

After the unsuccessful attack, Batista ordered many of the surviving rebels to be executed. Of the survivors, Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl were imprisoned and sentenced to serve 15 years at Presidio Modelo Prison.

1955  Batista released all political prisoners and the Castro brothers were exiled to Mexico, where they met the young, Argentinean doctor Ernesto “Ché” Guevara and began guerilla training with Alberto Bayo, a Spanish Civil War general.

1956  Fidel Castro and a group of some 80 insurgents, including Raúl Castro, Ché Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, set sail from Mexico for Cuba aboard a yacht called the “Granma.”

Batista’s army killed most of the rebels and those who survived fled into the Sierra Maestra Mountains where they were helped by rural peasants and farmers that eventually formed the core of Castro’s rebel army.

1957  The revolutionary movement gained strength. Many joined Castro’s guerilla forces, 26th of July Movement, and attacks were organized at several army posts including El Uvero.

1958  Revolutionary troops gained ground and support. Rebel leaders Camilo Cienfuegos, Ché Guevara, and Raúl Castro staked out posts in key Cuban cities like Yaguajay, Sierra Cristal, and Santa Clara. They continued to defeat Batista’s troops and gained their weapons.

1959  President Batista learned that the city of Santa Clara was seized by the rebel forces, resigned in fear, and fled Cuba on New Year’s Day.

Fidel Castro became Premier of Cuba on February 16th and named Manuel Urutia Lleo the new President.

1960  In April, Fidel declared Cuba a Socialist nation.

1961  CIA trained Cuban exiles invaded Cuba’s Bahía de Cochinos and launched the Bay of Pigs attack in a failed attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro.
Key Figures in the Cuban Revolution

**Fidel Castro:** A lawyer of Spanish descent, Castro was the leader of the Cuban revolution. Born on August 13, 1926, Castro served as the Premier of Cuba from 1959 to 1976 and as President from 1976 to 2008.

**Fulgencio Batista:** Former President of Cuba who came to power after staging a military coup. Resigned and fled to the Dominican Republic after the Cuban Revolution.

**Ernesto “Ché” Guevara:** Born on June 14, 1928 in Argentina where he studied medicine. Guevara became politicized after witnessing dire poverty throughout Latin America, went to Mexico, trained with Castro’s troops and became a high ranking officer in the revolutionary army. Guevara traveled to Bolivia in an attempt to train an indigenous army and spread revolution. He was captured by Bolivian troops and assassinated in the jungle by CIA operatives on October 9, 1967.

**Raúl Castro:** Brother of Fidel Castro, born on June 3, 1931. He was a high ranking officer in the revolutionary army, and became President of Cuba in February 2008.

**Camilo Cienfuegos:** Born on February 6, 1932 in Spain. He fled to Cuba with his Socialist family during the Spanish Civil War. Served as a high commander during the revolution and died in October 1959 when his plane disappeared off the coast of Cuba.

**Vilma Espín:** President of the Federation of Cuban Women and revolutionary leader in the Oriente Province. She was born on April 7, 1930, attended MIT for engineering, and was married to Raúl Castro until her death in June 2007.

**Celia Sánchez:** One of the first members of the 26th of July Movement, Celia was born on May 20, 1920 and served as an officer in charge of arranging the Granma landing and was also a messenger. She served as the Secretary to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and died in 1980.

**Terms to Know…**

- **Cuban Revolution** – Began when Fulgencio Batista’s regime was overthrown by Movimiento 26 de Julio (26th of July Movement, M-26-7) under the leadership of Fidel Castro. After the removal of Batista, a new government was established with Fidel Castro as the new head of state.

- **insurgent** – A member of a section of a political party that revolts against the methods or policies of the party.

- **mariposa** – Spanish for butterfly; also any lily of the genus Calochortus, of the western U.S. and Mexico, having tulip-like flowers of various colors. Often used as a term of endearment for women.

- **Oshún** – An Orisha deity in Santería, a syncretic West African religion with Catholic elements that is widely practiced throughout Cuba and other parts of the Caribbean and Latin America. She is the Orisha of love who brings fertility and helps the sick and the poor.

- **pasteles** – Spanish for cakes. In the play they are Cuban pastries with a flaky outer crust that are filled with fruit (guava, grapefruit, etc.), meats, or cheese.

- **Paredón!** – Literally, “to the wall!” Used as a rallying cry in the execution by firing squad of insurgents and counter-revolutionaries.
Historical Overview: Operation Pedro Pan

Just like young Sonia was sent by her parents to the United States, over 14,000 other Cuban youth were sent out of Cuba between 1960 and 1962 through Operation Pedro Pan. In December of 1960, the Catholic Welfare Bureau/CWB of Miami created a program called Pedro Pan that helped Cuban parents get their children to the United States. The CWB received the children in Miami, placed them with relatives, or cared for them until they could be re-united with their families. Cuban parents obtained falsified documents such as U.S. visas, visa waivers, and scholarship letters in order for their children to leave.

On January 3, 1961, after diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba broke, the U.S. State Department officially waived the visa requirements for Cuban children which unofficially allowed the operation to expand. Approximately 50% of the children brought to the US under Pedro Pan were reunited with family members at the airport. The others were cared for by the CWB. Those children that were not reunited with family members were eventually sent to live in foster homes, orphanages, or boarding schools around the country, in hopes of one day being re-united with their parents.

Historical Overview: Cuban Adjustment Act

In 1966, the United States Congress passed the Cuban Adjustment Act in order to provide aid for new Cuban immigrants. Under this Act, the Cuban Refugee Program provided over $1.3 billion in direct financial assistance. Cuban immigrants became eligible for many benefits not usually awarded to other immigrants. These benefits included Medicare, free English courses, low-interest college loans, and scholarships. Newly arrived Cubans, regardless of having collateral or credit, received financial assistance in the form of business loans which enabled many to secure funds and start up their own businesses.

Historical Overview: U.S. Embargo and Travel Ban

In 1960, the United States imposed a partial trade embargo on Cuba after Fidel Castro expropriated US owned properties on Cuban soil. The commercial, economic, and financial embargo was expanded to a near total embargo in 1962. In 2000, President Clinton adjusted the embargo to allow the sale of some agricultural goods and medicine to Cuba for humanitarian purposes. A travel ban on Americans traveling to Cuba was also imposed and allowed only Cubans visiting family to travel to Cuba but under very strict conditions, limiting the number of times they could travel to the island in a given time frame. President Bush vetoed several bills that included language suggesting the lift of the travel ban. In 2009, President Obama loosened the ban to allow Cuban Americans to travel freely to the island in order to visit family. The US Chamber of Commerce estimates that the embargo costs the US economy $1.2 billion per year in lost sales and exports, while the Cuban government estimates that the embargo only costs the island itself $685 million annually. Critics of the embargo say that it is responsible for contributing to malnutrition and limits the access to medical information in Cuba.
**Historical Overview: Cuban Immigration Today**

The United States grants 20,000 Visas to Cubans annually, 5,000 of which are from a lottery. Because of the close proximity between Cuba and Florida (approximately 90 miles), a large number of Cubans attempt to immigrate to the United States by boat. After an influx of Cuban immigration in 1994, Cuba and the United States agreed upon the Wet Foot/Dry Foot policy which states that if a Cuban national leaves Cuba and makes it to U.S. soil with at least one foot on land, he/she gets automatic citizenship. If, however, the person is detained by the U.S. Coast guard, he/she must return to Cuba.

**In Cuba:**
- 99.8% literacy rate
- Free education from pre-school through University
- Free healthcare for all Cubans
- Nationalization of natural resources including sugarcane and tobacco

**In Relation to the U.S.:**
- Strained diplomatic relations
- U.S. imposed economic, commercial, financial embargo placed on Cuba as an act of disagreeing and invalidating the Cuban government
- Travel ban for all U.S. citizens unless they are of Cuban origin and are going to visit family. Limited exceptions exist for students and performers who must be approved for special visas.

**Terms to Know...**

*child trafficking* — the removal, transportation, illegal reception or sale, and placement of a child into an situation where they can be taken advantage of.

*embargo* — an order of a government prohibiting the movement of merchant ships into or out of its ports; a prohibition.

*compañera* — Spanish for a female companion or friend. Could also mean a female worker or co-worker.

*G-2* — Castro’s Political Police; feared and powerful.

*Cuban Literacy Campaign* — Dramatically changed the nation's literacy levels within one year (1961) to 97% by organizing over 100,000 youth to teach classes in the rural areas of the country.

*The Sierra Maestra* — Cuba's largest mountain range and a source of great historical significance.

*visa* — A permit to enter and leave a country, normally issued by the authorities of the country to be visited.

*yanqui* — Spanish for a citizen of the United States (Yankee), as distinguished from a Latin American.
**Historical Overview: 9/11 and the War in Afghanistan**

The War in Afghanistan was launched in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The purpose of the war was to destroy the al Qaeda terrorist network, remove the repressive Taliban regime from power, and capture Osama Bin Laden (founding leader of al-Qaeda).

The U.S. and the U.K. led the aerial bombing campaign, with ground forces initially supplied by the Afghan Northern Alliance. In 2002, American, British and Canadian ground troops were committed, along with Special Forces from several allied nations. Later, NATO troops were added. The U.S. military calls the conflict Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

The initial attack removed the Taliban from power, but Taliban forces have since regained some strength. The war has failed to restrict al-Qaeda’s movements. The war continues today, with 959 U.S. casualties (as of January 29, 2010), a recent addition of 30,000 troops authorized by President Obama in December, 2009, and no clear end in sight.

**Post-9/11 Culture** is a term used to describe the current state of living in the United States or other parts of the world in reference to the many changes that have occurred due to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Some changes that occurred due to the attacks included:

- Racial profiling was seen in airports and other areas of transportation. Personnel judged if a person was likely to commit a crime based on their race and/or ethnicity.
- Several ethnic groups were wrongly perceived to be part of a “terrorist culture.” Some of these groups include Arabs, Muslims, and Sikhs.
- The 9/11 attacks lead to significant and widespread changes in U.S politics and foreign policy.
- Many Americans developed a fear of airports and airplane flights.
- Many Americans became increasingly patriotic and xenophobic following the attacks.

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**Terms to Know...**

*Al-Qaeda* – a radical Sunni Muslim organization dedicated to the elimination of a Western presence in Arab countries and militantly opposed to Western foreign policy: founded by Osama bin Laden in 1988.

*foreign policy* - a policy pursued by a nation in its dealings with other nations, designed to achieve national objectives.

*NATO* – North Atlantic Treaty Organization - an organization formed in Washington, D.C. (1949) for the purpose of collective defense against aggression. Members include the US, Canada, and 26 European nations.

*Sikhs* – a monotheistic religion founded in India around 1500 AD that forbids magic, idolatry, and pilgrimages.


*terrorism* – the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, esp. for political purposes.

*xenophobia* - an unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers or of that which is foreign or strange.
**Historical Overview:** Post 9/11 Military Enlistment

A popular misconception in post-9/11 America is that there was a rise in military enlistment as a patriotic response to the terrorist attacks. While this phenomenon was true for a number of brave soldiers, their numbers are actually considered few and statistically insignificant. There was certainly a surge in military interest, but many of those who expressed interest were ineligible to enlist due to age, disabilities, or lack of qualifications.

Among those who did enlist after the 9/11 attacks are a diverse group of individuals who chose to fight back against the fear of terror that was sweeping the nation. Joe Dwyer joined after he learned that his fear that his brother (a transit cop) had died in the attacks was unfounded; Jeff Howe joined up to fight our nation’s enemies and was later discharged when it was discovered that he was gay; Fernando Labrada, a father of three children, re-enlisted out of anger for what had been done; Sean Huze left a budding acting career in Hollywood to follow his duty to fight for his country; Justin Frey failed the military entrance exam three days after 9/11, but his determination to defend the United States pushed him to go back to school so he could pass the exam. Many were very determined. The mother of 9/11 recruit Amy Krueger told her daughter, “You can’t take on Osama Bin Laden by yourself,” to which Amy replied, “Watch me!” A number of these recruits went on to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq, and while most of them were still enlisted as of 2005, several thousand others had died and tens of thousands had been wounded.

In a 2005 study of post-9/11 military demographics by the Heritage Foundation, it was discovered that the number of new recruits coming from high income backgrounds increased from 18.6% to 22.0% and that the average education level of new recruits rose, with 2.8% enlistees joining that had already had some college experience or a college degree (compared to 1999 recruits). While these shifts in demographics are indeed significant, no correlation to 9/11 has been documented for these changes.

**Terms to Know...**

**Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell** – the policy stopping openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals from serving in the United States military, as mandated by federal law.

**enlist** – to voluntarily enroll for military service.

**flak jacket** – A form of protective clothing designed to provide protection from shrapnel and other indirect low velocity projectiles. Today it frequently refers to bulletproof vests.

**recruit** – a newly enlisted or drafted member of the armed forces.

**Basic Training** – Training in order to change the individual to suit the military organization. A significant part of the training is psychological. It also includes physical fitness, instruction in military courtesy, tradition, history and uniform care.

**Peace Corps** – Volunteers who travel overseas to provide aid to countries who need it.

**RPG** – A rocket-propelled grenade (also known rocket launcher) is any hand-held, shoulder-launched anti-tank weapon capable of firing an unguided rocket equipped with an explosive warhead.
Historical Overview: Shabbat

Shabbat is a holy day observed every week by Jewish people.

Usually at about 2PM or 3PM on Friday afternoon, observant Jews leave the office to begin Shabbat preparations. The mood is much like preparing for the arrival of a special, beloved guest: the house is cleaned, the family bathes and dresses up, the best dishes and tableware are set, a festive meal (Shabbos) is prepared.

Shabbat, like all Jewish days, begins at sunset. Two Shabbat candles (representing zakhor—remember and shamor—observe from the Biblical commandment that one must remember and observe the Sabbath—day of rest) are lit and a blessing is recited no later than 18 minutes before sunset. This ritual, performed by the woman of the house, officially marks the beginning of Shabbat. The family then attends a brief evening prayer service at Synagogue.

After services, the family comes home for a festive, leisurely dinner. Before dinner, the man of the house recites Kiddush, a prayer over wine which signifies the holiness of Shabbat. The usual prayer for eating bread is recited over two loaves of challah, a sweet, egg-bread shaped in a braid. The family then eats dinner.

Although there are no specific requirements or customs regarding what to eat, meals are generally stewed or slow cooked items, because of a prohibition against cooking during Shabbat.

After dinner, the birkat ha-mazon (grace after meals) is recited. Although this is done every day, on Shabbat, it is done in a leisurely manner with many upbeat tunes.

The next morning Shabbat services begin around 9AM and continue until about noon. After services, the family says Kiddush again and has another leisurely, festive meal. The family studies Torah for a while, talks, takes an afternoon walk, plays some checkers, or engages in other leisure activities. It is traditional to have a third meal before Shabbat is over. This is usually a light meal in the late afternoon.

Shabbat ends at nightfall, when three stars are visible, approximately 40 minutes after sunset. At the conclusion of Shabbat, the family performs a concluding ritual called Havdalah (separation, division). Blessings are recited over wine, spices and candles. Then a blessing is recited regarding the division between the sacred and the secular, between Shabbat and the working days.

Terms to Know...

Dreidle – A 4-sided spinning top played with during Hannukkah. It is a children’s gambling game.

Hannukkah – This is an 8 day Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Also known as the festival of lights.

Kugel – Jewish pudding or casserole that is most commonly made out of egg noodles or potatoes. It is usually a sweet side dish.

Rugalach – A Jewish pastry. It is a rolled up cookie that can have all different sorts of fillings inside (an example is fruit preserves.)

Kiddush translation (baruch ata...) – Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe who creates the fruit of the vine (amen.) Blessed are you Lord our God, King of the Universe who sanctified us with his commandments, has desired us and given us love and good will, his holy Shabbat as a heritage in remembrance of the work of creation; the first of the Holy festivals, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. For you have chosen us and sanctified us from among all the nations and love and good will given us your Holy Shabbat as a heritage. Blessed are you, Lord who sanctifies this Shabbat.
Q&A with Playwright Melinda Lopez

**What led you to write this play?** Four things: 1. I was working in Miami when Elian Gonzalez washed ashore on a raft. Elian was a seven-year-old boy, who had fled Cuba with his mother on a homemade raft in order to escape the political and economic repression in Cuba. His mother died, and Elian barely survived. He was taken in by his mother’s cousins, who lived in Miami. His father was still in Cuba (his parents were divorced & his dad didn’t know his mom had taken him.) His dad wanted him back home. There was a terrible battle fought between the two families, the American government, the Cuban government and the media—should Elian be sent back to Cuba (his father’s wish) when his mother had died trying to bring him to the US? The discussion really affected me. I didn’t know what was right. 2. At the same time, I found out that my cousin had been a Pedro Pan. I had never heard the term, but her mother had put her on an airplane when she was ten, alone and sent her out of Cuba to escape Castro. She spent four years in an orphanage in Boulder, Colorado waiting for her mother to get out of Cuba legally and come get her. My cousin is a great lady, and she said, “After that, I was not afraid of anything!” I wondered about that and the cost brought to a person by that kind of strength. 3. I had a baby and started wondering what it would take for me to send my child away. 4. The US went to war in Iraq and I realized people were sending their kids away every day, trying to protect our freedoms as Americans. I realized that my answer to every question was, “I don’t know what’s right. I don’t know what I would do.” I thought that would make a good play. Good plays ask hard questions. They don’t necessarily answer them.

**How did you develop this story for the stage?** I knew a few things early on: I knew that the story had to take place in two times and that it had to be told backwards historically; I knew Sonia was strong, accomplished, and everything you would hope to grow up to be, and also that she was really damaged, and her strength was also her greatest liability; I knew it was a story about mothers and children and love for your country. Then I read a lot of books—history about the 1960s in Cuba—and I read a lot of newspaper articles on young men and women who signed up with the Marines after 9/11. Then I wrote my brains out.

**What do you hope students will leave this show with?** More questions. About patriotism, duty, love, family, theatre, history—

**What do you hope teachers will leave this show with?** Time to talk about questions.

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Melinda Lopez was the first recipient of the Charlotte Woolard Award, given by the Kennedy Center to a “promising new voice in American Theatre.” She was a 2003 recipient of a Mass Cultural Council grant, and a resident playwright at the Huntington Theatre. Sonia Flew won the Elliot Norton Award for “Best New Play,” and the IRNE (Independent Reviewers of New England) for “Best Play” and “Best Production.” It has been produced at the Huntington Theatre, Coconut Grove Playhouse, the Contemporary American Theatre Festival and the Summer Playwrights Festival and was broadcast on NPR’s “The Play’s The Thing!” Her other award-winning plays include God Smells Like a Roast Pig (Women on Top Festival, Elliot Norton Award: Outstanding Solo Performance); Midnight Sandwich/ Medianoche, (Coconut Grove Playhouse); The Order of Things (CentaStage, Kennedy Center Fund for New Plays) and others. Melinda is also an actress; she has appeared at regional theatres across the country, and is featured in the movie Fever Pitch. She makes her home in Boston. (Steppenwolf Theatre Company)
Pre-Show Activity: Holiday Meal Role Drama

Ask the students to think about a family meal around the holidays. In order to foster participation, have the students work with a partner to brainstorm about the topic. Probing questions should include:

- Who is there?
- Who speaks?
- What prayers are said?
- What foods are served?
- How are the foods prepared?
- Who prepares the food?

After the students have had a few minutes to brainstorm, ask for volunteers to share some of their responses. When a variety of ideas have been expressed, explain that the class will be broken up into teams (there should be 5-8 members in a team), and each team will be responsible for creating a short play of a family holiday meal.

Guidelines

1. Everyone has to have a role.
2. Everyone has to say something at some point.
3. The food must be specific and it must be prepared or some indication of where it came from/who made it must be discussed.
4. We need to see how the family gets to the table and where everyone sits.
5. The “play” should last no more than five minutes.
6. The play is over when the meal is over.

Some of the presentations will likely relate to some religious or secular holiday, but birthdays and Thanksgiving are acceptable or any other festivity where a family congregates.

When all teams have shared their plays in front of the class, ask the students to reflect on the similarities and differences between the teams. Thereafter, distribute and discuss the Historical Overview of Shabbat (Page 13). While not a central focus of the play, the Shabbos meal is part of the first act and it is best that the students are introduced to the terminology before viewing the play so it doesn’t stop them from following the plot.

Character Descriptions
(Written by the actors)

Sonia is a Cuban-American woman, wife, and mother who is struggling with the news that her son enlisted in the Marines to go fight the war in Afghanistan. Sonia wants her son Zak to change his mind about going to war because she knows too well the hardships and misery that war brings. Although Sonia displays much anger toward her past in Cuba, she loved her family and the anger is merely a defense mechanism.

Daniel is a psychologist living in Minnesota with his wife, Sonia, and their children, Zak and Jen. He wants to keep his family together and allow everyone a space to say what they need to. Daniel is a good man but everyone needs something different from him.

Zak is a 19 year-old student at Brown University. He is an eager and strong willed young man who has decided to join the Marines. Though he wants to make his own decisions, Zak also craves his family’s approval. Not an impulsive person, Zak has thought very hard about his choice and firmly sticks to it.
**Pre-Show Activity:** Citizenship Alphabet Relay

The purpose of this activity is to activate prior knowledge regarding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in this (or any) country, a theme that comes up in a variety of ways throughout *Sonia Flew*.

Before the relay, you must either ask the students to write a journal about the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship or have a brief discussion on the topic. Unless you happen to be in the middle of a unit relating to this area, the students will need a moment or two to collect their thoughts on the topic through a brainstorming session in small groups or with the whole class.

After the prep work, divide the class into two or three teams (ideally 10-12 students per team) and have each group stand in a row. Allot a space on the board for each group and give the first person in the row a piece of chalk or a marker.

When you say go, the first student in each team runs to the board and writes a word, phrase, or idea that relates to the rights or responsibilities that we have as citizens that begins with the letter “A”. When they have finished, they run to the next person in the row, pass on the marker or chalk and go to the back of the line. The next student then runs to the board and writes something with “B” and so on. The students continue to write these words or ideas alphabetically until they reach the end (limit the time to 5 minutes or less to enhance competition). A sample list might start out with:

A: amendment  
B: bill of rights  
C: constitution  
D: democracy  
E: election  
F: freedom of speech

If the student is stuck, they can take a suggestion from a team mate, but they should try and get something different from the other teams as no points will be given for duplicated responses. If they can’t come up with anything, they can skip the letter and go on to the next one. At the end, one point is given for each unique response. The team with the most unique responses wins.

Discussion Questions:
- What are our rights as citizens?  
- What are our responsibilities as citizens?  
- Who protects and/or defends those rights?  
- What are the pros and cons of these rights and responsibilities?  
- What are the pros and cons of being one to protect or defend those rights?
Pre-Show Activity: Cuba, Pedro Pan, 9/11 and Propaganda

Divide the class into four groups. Each group will receive duplicates of one of the following Historical Overviews:

- Historical Overview of Key Figures in the Cuban Revolution (8)
- Historical Overview of Operation Pedro Pan et al. (9)
- Historical Overview of 9/11 and the War in Afghanistan (11)
- Historical Overview of Post 9/11 Military Enlistment (12)

First, each group will read the document, identifying points of confusion or lack of understanding which should then be clarified within the group.

Once everyone in the group agrees that they understand the information that they have read, the group is to either create a poster for presentation or improvise a living commercial. The purpose of the poster or commercial will be to utilize one of the following propaganda techniques to present some aspect of the information presented in the Historical Overview.

Propaganda Techniques:

- **Bandwagon**: The "bandwagon" approach encourages you to think that because everyone else is doing something, you should do it too, or you’ll be left out.

- **Glittering Generalities**: This technique uses important-sounding "glad words" that have little or no real meaning like "good," "honest," "fair," and "best."

- **Name calling**: This technique consists of attaching a negative label to a person or a thing.

- **Testimonial**: This technique is when "big name" personalities or "ordinary people" are used to endorse a product.

- **Transfer**: In this technique, an attempt is made to transfer the prestige of a positive symbol to a person or an idea. For example, the flag represents the nation, so using an image of an American flag in association with a political figure non verbally transfers the flag's prestige to that individual.

The purpose of propaganda is to spread ideas that further a political, commercial, religious or civil cause, so a variety of possibilities exist in each document. As time permits, invite the students to share the information from their Historical Overview and have them explain how they selected the information they used in their presentation.

Discussion Questions:

- What is propaganda?
- Why is propaganda relevant today?
- Who uses propaganda? Why?
- Who controls the spread of historical information? Can they be trusted?

Character Descriptions Cont...

**Young Sonia** is the teenage daughter of Orfeo and Pilar. She is a member of the Young Revolutionary Fighters. Sonia wants things to return to the way they were before her family became a target of the revolution, but she also wants to be treated like an adult. The revolution frightens Sonia, as does her impending separation from her family.

**Pilar** is a Cuban woman in her early 30's who is deeply devoted to her husband Orfeo and her teenage daughter, Sonia. Pilar is lively and graceful but also carries a lot of pain within her stemming from the loss of her mother and her passionate yet sometimes turbulent relationship with her husband. At times, Pilar seems passive and traditional, however, she rarely hides her opinions and emotions. The revolution has forced her to make tough decisions and sacrifices during a time of political uncertainty.

**Marta** is the housekeeper in the family home in Cuba in 1961. She would like things to stay as they have always been: Sonia should remain at home, girls should wear skirts instead of pants, children should not grow up too fast. She understands why her husband was arrested, though she feigns ignorance as she has seen many things in Cuba and is well aware of what is really going on.
**Post-Show Activity:** Character Interrogation

When watching this or any play, there is certain to be some disagreement among audience members about the events of the play and the reasons certain characters behaved the way they did. The purpose of this activity is to try to illuminate the spectrum of understanding that exists within the class.

A volunteer from the class is invited to sit in front of the room. He or she will play the role of one of the characters from the play. The rest of the class will ask the character questions which should relate directly to the actions, dialogue, and choices the character made within the play. If a student didn’t like or understand a choice a character made in the play, now is the perfect time to ask about it. The goal is to highlight the character’s motivations and personality, provide insight into relationships between characters, attitudes, and events, and how events affected the character or her/his attitudes, encouraging reflective awareness of human behavior.

**Post-Show Activity:** Alternate Ending

As with any good dramatic text, *Sonia Flew* does not have a predictable outcome. There are a number of possibilities that could resolve the story: Zak could have been in Nina’s place; Zak could have decided not to go to war; Sonia could have decided to support her son’s decision etc. Given the multitude of possibilities, the goal here is for the students to reflect on their understanding of the play and contemplate a spectrum of alternative outcomes that were possible in the play.

**Option A: Narrative Writing**

Each student is asked to think about a possible alternative ending to the play, and is given some time to write a narrative of their new ending.

**Option B: Improvisational Acting**

The class is broken into groups and each group is responsible for improvising (that is, making up a scene without a script) that resolves the play in a new and interesting way.

In either option, it’s best that the other students have an opportunity to comment on the new endings. Do they seem reasonable? Why or why not?

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**Character Descriptions Cont...**

**Orfeo** is Sonia’s father. He is married to Pilar and works as a university professor in science (cellular division). Orfeo wants the revolution to end but he wants his family to remain safe during this difficult time and chooses to remain silent and go with the flow as he fears being taken away. Orfeo tries to gain allies in the revolution (like Tito) so he will not be deemed suspicious, even though he doesn’t trust them. He agrees to send Sonia to the US only because of his fear of the revolution and a desire to keep her safe.

**José** is a 19-year-old revolutionary. He is very optimistic about changing Cuba and its people for the better. He is neither naïve nor assertive as he is caught up in what appears to be a wonderful revolution.

**Tito** is 35 years-old a neighbor of the Santiago family. He is a member of the Socialist Revolution with Fidel Castro, ensuring the loyalty of his neighborhood to the revolution. He wants to make a name for himself, gain a position of power in the revolution and to see the revolution succeed, as it will bring equal rights to the lower and middle classes, gaining land, education and opportunity from the upper classes. Tito has been told to spy on his neighbors, but his soft spot for Sonia clouds his judgment.
Post-Show Activity: Research Project

As presented here in the resource guide, *Sonia Flew* touches upon a variety of rich historical content:

- Cuban History
- The Cuban Revolution
- Operation Pedro Pan
- 9/11
- Military Enlistment
- The War in Afghanistan
- Cultural Traditions

Beyond what is printed here, there is an enormous amount of historical information available to students, and these subjects offer culturally relevant and high interest material which could be explored more deeply in a research project. Here are a few suggestions to extend the students’ learning beyond their viewing of the play:

**Posters**
Have the students research a particular subject that they are interested in (from the list above, or other ideas inspired by their viewing of the play). Using their research, the students should create a poster using poster board or chart paper, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, internet sources, markers, tape, glue, etc. The posters should include detailed information and images about their selected topic. When complete, they should be shared with the rest of the class. The students should be encouraged to explain how their work related to *Sonia Flew*, and how their research experience deepened their understanding of the play.

**Presentations**
Have the students work in small groups, researching a topic that relates to the play (from the list above, or other ideas inspired by their viewing of the play). Each group will then prepare a 5-10 minute presentation about their chosen topic. It could involve pictures, music, food, a series of tangible objects, or other provided that they clearly explore the dimensions of their selected topic. The students should explain how their work related to *Sonia Flew*, and how their research experience deepened their understanding of the play.

**Formal Research Paper**
The students select a topic (from the list above, or other ideas inspired by their viewing of the play) in order to write a formal research paper. The students should be encouraged to use 3-5 sources, synthesizing the information they find and rendering it into a formal paper. The students should be encouraged to highlight one or two interesting facts that appear in their paper to share with the rest of the class. They should explain how their work related to *Sonia Flew*, and how their research experience deepened their understanding of the play.

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**Operation Pierre Pan**

In the days immediately following the disastrous earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, an immediate international concern was voiced regarding what to do with the tens of thousands of young Haitians orphaned by the devastation. By the end of the first week following the event, Miami’s *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* newspaper had an answer: Whatever government and non-governmental agencies who were willing to lend their support should be enlisted to airlift these children out of their home country and bring them immediately to the United States where eager and willing adoptive parents would happily care for them.

While the need to do something to help these young people is evident, the act of removing a significant percentage of a generation of young people from a struggling nation could have disastrous impacts on their ability to develop and recover in subsequent decades and the 14,000 young people removed from Cuba as part of Operation Pedro Pan are evidence of this. For this reason, it is essential that students understand that the social and political issues raised in *Sonia Flew* are not merely influenced by historical fact, but also strongly resonate with what’s going on in the world today, from the ongoing war in Afghanistan to the devastation in Haiti in the last month.
References


## Appendix: More Terms to Know

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>7-Up Salad</strong></td>
<td>7-up, lime jell-o, mini marshmallows, cream cheese, crushed pineapples and cool whip (may be different depending on the recipe); Sometimes known as Martian Guts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Águas Frias</strong></td>
<td>A town in the southern region of Brazil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>basil leaves</strong></td>
<td>An herb usually used in cooking though believed by some to have “magical” properties that are attributed to love, wealth, protection and more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Botox</strong></td>
<td>Botulinum Toxin. This is a medicine that some claim is incredibly toxic. It can be used in small doses to treat muscle spasms or for cosmetic reasons such as tightening the face and smoothing wrinkles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cheese log</strong></td>
<td>A dish made of cream cheese, cheddar cheese, red peppers, onions, Worcestershire sauce, lemon juice, pecans, parsley and salt (may be different depending on the recipe); originated in France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compos Mentis</strong></td>
<td>This refers to a person who is of sound mind, memory and understanding; sane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corpus Delecti</strong></td>
<td>The principal that “it must be proven that a crime has occurred before a person can be convicted of committing the crime.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deforestation for Soy Beans</strong></td>
<td>Big areas of the rainforest are being cleared to make way for soy bean plantations. The Brazilian Amazon lost 10,000 square miles just last year which was 40% more than the year before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fancy Dan</strong></td>
<td>A fictional character in Marvel Comics who first appeared in Spiderman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>flies</strong></td>
<td>A term associated with fly fishing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>frijoles</strong></td>
<td>Spanish for beans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fulbright</strong></td>
<td>A prestigious program of grants for International Educational Exchange for scholars, educators, graduate students and professionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>golabki</strong></td>
<td>Traditional Polish dish made of meat and rice rolled in cabbage. In Jewish cuisine they are called holishkes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Good King Wenceslas”</strong></td>
<td>This is a Christmas carol about a King who gave money to a poor peasant on the Feast of St. Stephen (2nd day of Christmas.) During his journey, his page wanted to give up due to the frigid cold. Suddenly, heat miraculously emanated from the footsteps the King made in the snow and warmed him.</td>
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**Appendix: More Terms to Know continued**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>guayava</td>
<td>Spanish for guava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Houndstooth Suit</strong></td>
<td>A women’s two piece suit that features crossbar houndstooth design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key West</td>
<td>An Island of the south west coast of Florida; it is the southern-most point of the Florida Keys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lox</td>
<td>Salmon (typically a filet) that has been cured and cold smoked. This is a Jewish food that is typically used on bagels with cream cheese (sometimes with capers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaria</td>
<td>A mosquito-borne disease. Symptoms include high fever, chills, shaking, sweating, headache, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain; sometimes deadly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pachanga</td>
<td>A Colombian dance introduced in Cuba in 1955.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plotzing</td>
<td>A Yiddish term meaning to faint/fall down dead/explode from excitement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potsch in the tuchus</td>
<td>A swat on the rear end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radio Mambi</strong></td>
<td>A radio station broadcasting a Spanish News/Talk format. Licensed to Miami, Florida, USA, the station is currently owned by Univision Communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radio Swan</strong></td>
<td>A pirate radio station based in the Swan Islands, a group of islands in the western Caribbean Sea, near the coastline of Honduras. Under the &quot;Radio Swan&quot; and &quot;Radio Americas&quot; names, the station was in operation from 1960 to 1968.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>red star</td>
<td>The five-pointed red star, a pentagram without the inner pentagon, is a symbol of communism as well as broader socialism in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rum for Oshún</td>
<td>Rum is a common offering to Oshún. Other offerings are honey, cake, wine and tea. Offerings are made near a river or source of flowing water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Barbara</td>
<td>The Great Martyr Barbara (3rd century - December 4, 306), was a Christian saint and martyr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sedition</td>
<td>A law term meaning to inspire mutiny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sincope</td>
<td>Spanish for a fainting fit; black out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spinners</td>
<td>A fisherman’s lure. It revolves when it is drawn through the water.</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweet 15</td>
<td>Fifteenth birthday celebrations were very popular in Cuba until the late 1970s. The custom entered the country partly via Spain, but its major influence was French. Wealthy families, who could afford to rent luxurious halls at country clubs or 4/5-star hotels and to hire choreographers, were the actual pioneers of Quinceañeras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sycophant</td>
<td>A servile person who, acting in his or her own self-interest, attempts to win favor by flattering one or more influential persons, or by saying lies against a fellow citizen for gaining a kind of profit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timberwolves</td>
<td>The Minnesota Timberwolves, an NBA basketball team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Twist</td>
<td>A twelve bar blues song that gave birth to the Twist dance craze in 1959.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varadero</td>
<td>A resort town in the province of Matanzas, Cuba, and one of the largest resort areas in the Caribbean. Varadero is also called Playa Azul, which means &quot;blue beach&quot; in Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yule log</td>
<td>A large wooden log which is burned in the fireplace as a part of traditional Christmas celebrations in several European cultures. It is also a log shaped Christmas cake.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>