

# **COSTA MESA PLAYHOUSE**



## **STUDY GUIDE**

ages 12 and up  
contains strong language

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**directed by Sara Guerrero  
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## ***REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES STUDY GUIDE***

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### ***Playwright's Biography***

Josefina López was born in Mexico in 1969. At the tender age of five she was brought to this country illegally settling with her family in Boyle Heights, East of Los Angeles. She started grammar school the following year and thus began the process of “Chicani-zation” in the school system and in this society. From her first day in school, López knew that although her parents had green cards, she was undocumented and therefore lived in constant fear of being deported. But she used her vivid imagination to get her through, living a kind of shadow existence for several years until she became a Temporary Resident through the Amnesty Program in 1987. The threat of deportation would inform several of her plays, becoming a kind of leitmotif in the lives of her characters. According to López, she “became a Chicana” at the age of twenty, ostensibly when she no longer feared Deportation.

López first started writing plays in the fifth grade. However, her major influences were the televised version of the Teatro Campesino’s *La gran carpa de los Rasquachis*, retitled “*El corrido*,” and the live production of Luis Valdez’s *I Don’t Have to Show You No Stinking Badges*. She had seen “*El corrido*” when she was in the 9th grade. “*El corrido*” was taped in part as a stage performance and López could see the possibilities in the live, staged version. Watching the program, the impressionable and imaginative author felt liberated from the constrictions of realism: “I thought, wow, I didn’t know that theatre could be this way. . .that’s how I think. . . .that’s what I loved about it, that one moment you’re in Mexico and the next [you’re in the US]. . .

.transitions and transformation-- that's how I think; that it could be an epic, adventuresome. . .it doesn't have to stay in one place".

While attending the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts López saw I *Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Badges*, written and directed by Luis Valdez at the Los Angeles Theater Center in 1986. Yet, while Valdez's play was an inspiration to the young playwright, it also inspired her emerging feminism. As she searched Luis Valdez's works for a monologue to perform, López discovered that Valdez's female characters

"were very flat--all mothers and girlfriends." It is important to remember that López was studying acting in high school with the intention of becoming an actress. Like many female actors who become playwrights, López decided to create her own vehicles to perform. If the male dominated, sexist Chicano Theater Movement was not going to satisfy López's desire to act, she would take matters into her own hands....to create theatre that is relevant for all audiences, especially women.

**Source:** *"REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES & Other Plays"* by Josefina López

### ***Real Women Have Curves: Character Break Down***

- ANA: 18, plump and pretty, sister of Estela, daughter of Carmen. She is a recent high school graduate and a young feminist who wants to go to college but is stuck in the factory helping out her sister.
- ESTELA: 34, plump, plain-looking, owner of the “Garcia Sewing Factory”, a hopeless romantic at heart, but a hard worker.
- CARMEN: 50, a short, large woman, mother of Ana and Estela. She has a talent for storytelling and gossip.
- PANCHA: 32, a huge woman who is very mellow in her ways, but quick with her tongue, very Catholic and traditional at times.
- ROSALI: 29, thin, sweet, and easygoing, but has a secret and is insecure about her sexual appeal.

**Source:** *“REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES”* by Josefina López

### **Summary**

Real Women Have Curves is an autobiographical piece written by Josefina López, centering on the character of Ana, a young Chicana who is working in her sister Estela's small sewing factory in East Los Angeles. The play takes place over a period of five days during which the women work to finish an order of dresses. The dramatic action is pushed forward by the women's desire to save the financially strapped business, despite various setbacks, and the situation is given comic life by the conversations between the women about life, love, husbands, boyfriends or would-be suitors, and, of course, their bodies. The women finish the order on time, Estela decides to open her own boutique and in the process the women discover and empower themselves as women and creators.

**Source:** *"REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES & Other Plays"* by Josefina López

## ***THEMES***

In Virginia McFerran's words, the women discover "that traditional reality and its norms for women are actually completely unrealistic." This is a play about expectations--what society, especially Mechicano culture--expects of its women and how women might negate those expectations on a path towards liberation from the patriarchy. In the epilogue, Ana addresses the audience directly for the first time and concludes the play with a call for women's unity. She then relates how she did, indeed, attend NYU and when she came back her sister had opened her own boutique.

As the title suggests, *Real Women Have Curves* debates and exposes issues of the female body, especially "fat," "large," "plump" or "voluptuous" bodies, depending upon the gaze of the beholder. Based on her actual experiences, both with her body weight and working in her sister's sewing factory, López places her character at the center of the story as narrator and unhappy teenager who would rather be at NYU studying writing. In her analysis, Maria Teresa Marrero conflates the two prevalent issues in this play, body weight and immigrant status: "The fat body, like the immigrant, requires fundamental alteration in order to 'fit,' to be assimilated into the dominant, circulating norms (be they aesthetic or cultural)." Marrero widens the topography of her discussion to include all Latinas struggling to survive in low paying jobs in this country. "To be a woman, undocumented and overweight places these characters as a target in the very center of a three-pronged U.S. cultural bias" Marrero reminds us (Marrero, "Real Women," p. 67). In other words, "three strikes and you're out."

**Source:** *"REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES & Other Plays"* by Josefina López

## IMPORTANT FACT / TERMS

1. **Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA):** Public Law 99-603 (Act of 11/6/86), which was passed in order to control and deter illegal immigration to the United States. Its major provisions stipulate legalization of undocumented aliens who had been continuously unlawfully present since 1982, legalization of certain agricultural workers, sanctions for employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers, and increased enforcement at U.S. borders.
2. **Sweatshops:** A "sweatshop" is defined by the US Department of Labor as a factory that violates 2 or more labor laws. Sweatshops often have poor working conditions, unfair wages, unreasonable hours...and a lack of benefits for workers. America has stronger labor laws than most undeveloped countries, but it is not free of sweatshop conditions. Products that commonly come from sweatshops are garments. Women make up 85-90% of sweatshop workers.
3. **College Residency:** Ana is unable to apply to college right after high school because she is undocumented and does not qualify for financial aid. She must wait a year in order to qualify for in state residency within the United States. "The authority to determine whether a student qualifies may have been delegated to the college. In such situations the school will want to see a preponderance of evidence that the family established state residency (both physical presence and intent), and that this residency was not merely incidental to the college attendance."

**Sources:** (1) *U.S Citizen and Immigration Services*; (2) "11 Facts About Sweatshops," *DoSomething.org*; (3) *FinAid.org*



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Anna is a writer who finds comfort in writing in her journal. The time she spends writing is an escape from her “real” world. What types of things do you do when “real” life is too stressful? Why do you think you choose this activity? What is it that provides you comfort or relaxation?
2. Body image is an important theme in *Real Women Have Curves*. Contemporary music, movies, and television have expanded the popular conversation about body image. What are some body positive media examples you have seen or heard? How would you evaluate Meghan Trainor’s song “All About the Bass” in terms of body positive representation?
3. Are the women in the play family to each other? Is family something that only exists between blood relations? Does the time the women spend working together in Estella’s sewing factory turn them into a family? What do they do for each other, or to each other, that defines them as a family?

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
A trabajar	To work it is
Abraza(r) -	to hug
Abuelita	grandmother, granny
Adios	good-bye
Aguas	look out
Ahora si	okay, now
Alli esta en el cajon	It's there in the drawer
Amá	mama
¡Andenle!	Come on!
Apá	papa
Aqui huele a pura cuchupeta y a pedo	It smells like pussy and fart
Así es que	therefore/so
Asi hazlo -	Do it this way
¡Ave Maria Purissima!	Oh holy Mary of God!

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
Aver	Let's see, to have
Aver cuentanos	Come on tell us
¡Aver dime, condenada!	Damn you, tell me!
¡Ayy!	Ahh!, Oh!
¡Ayy que buenote!	He's so fine
bañate	take a shower
Barrio	neighborhood
Basta	enough
Besa(r)	to kiss
Blusas	blouses
Bola de viejos cochinos	bunch of dirty old men
Bueno	well, good
Buenos días	good morning
Callense	be quiet
Chafas	tacky
Chicharron	pork rinds

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
Chichis	boobs, titties
Chisme	to gossip
Chismosa	gossip monger
Claro	of course
Cochinadas	junk
Como es	see how you are
¿Cómo estas?	How are you?
¿Como puede ser?	How can it be?
Coyote	someone who brings people across the border illegally for a price
Corazón	heart
Cumbia	Latin music from the Caribbean
¿de qué te apuras?	Why worry?
Desgraciada	ungrateful
Dios mio, ya mero acabamos	Oh, God, we're almost finished.

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
Diosito	God
¿Dónde los escondo?	Where shall I hide them?
¡Echame la culpa!	Blame me!
El Tormento	the heartthrob, or "crush"; or tormentor
Enojona	grouch
Entonces a la fuerza	then by force
¿Entonces que quiere?	Then do you want?
¡Entonces todas a trabajar!	Then to work it is!
¡Esa perra!	That bitch!
Eso	that
¡Esta cochina no sirve!	This piece of junk doesn't work!
Está loquita	she's a little crazy
Estamos odidas	We are screwed
Fresas	Strawberries, snooty upper class Mexican people
Gringa	Anglo-Saxon woman
Hasta mañana	until tomorrow

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
Hijole	Short for 'son of a bitch'
¡Hora si que estamos bien jodidas!	Now we're really messed up!
Horita te lo coso	I'll sew it for you right now
Hoye	listen
Huevona	lazy, good for nothing
La migra	US Immigration and Naturalization Service officials, border patrol
Las pobrecitas	the poor women
Listos para chupar	delicious enough to suck
Lonchera	the lunch mobile
Loquita	a little crazy
Maldita	goddamned woman
Maquinita	little sewing machine
¡Mendiga vieja!	Damn witch!
¡Mentirosa!	Liars!
Metiche	nosy
Mi viejo	my husband, my old man

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
M'ija	my daughter
Mira(r)	to look, Look!
Mira que inteligente	look how smart
Mira que paresco	see what I look like
¡Miren!	Look!
¡Miren cómo coquetea!	Look how she flirts!
Mole	a sauce made of chocolate and chili
Nada	nothing
Nalgas	buttocks
Ni lo mande dios	god forbid
No le da verguenza	she's not ashamed
No mas mira que paresco	Just look what I look like
No mas ven a ver	Just come take a look
¡No puedo!	I can't
No que no te quiero	And you say I don't love you
No se	I don't know

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
¡No se peleen!	don't fight
No seas mensa	don't be dumb
No seas terca	don't be stubborn
No te hagas de rogar	don't make us beg
No te va hacer daño	It won't do you any harm
N'ombre	no way
Nopal	cactus
¡Otra!	Another one!
¿Pa que?	For what?
Panza	stomach, belly
Panzonas	pregnant
Parele	stop it
Parsen de elefante	they look like they belong on an elephant
Patrona	boss
Pegame	hit me
Pero	but



## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
¿Pero cómo?	But how?
Pero no puede ser	but it can't be
Pero que bien se siente	but it feels so good
Pero que loqura	what insanity
Pero tu	but you
Pinche	damn
¡Pinche rata!	Damn rat!
Pobre mujer	poor woman
Pobrecita	poor baby
Por favor	please
Por fin	finally
¿Pos cómo le hiciste?	Well, how did you do it?
Pos no nos queda otra	well we have no choice
Pos no se	Well, I don't know
¿Pos qué paso?	Well, what happened?
Pos yo ya no veo	I can't see a thing

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
Pues	Well
Pues por que no	well why not
Puro lomo	all back
Que bonito	how pretty
Que bonito viento	what beautiful wind
¡Que buena es!	How good you are!
¡Que calor!	It's so hot!
¿Qué hiciste?	What did you do?
¿Que le pico?	What bit you?
Que locura	What madness
Que metiches	how nosey
¿Qué páso?	What happened?
¡Que susto!	What scare!
¿Que te dijo la vieja?	What did the old hag tell you?
Rapido	quickly
¿Saben qué?	You know what?

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
"Se prohíbe chismear!"	"Gossiping is Prohibited!"
Se te seca allí abajo	it gets dried down there
Se ve	It shows
Señor	mister, Mr., Sir
Sí, ya se fue	Yes, he's already left.
Tambien	also
Tan pequeña	so young
Tanto pedo y para nada	all this fuss/worrying and for nothing
'Tas flaca	You're skinny
Tengo fe	I have faith
Tulle	"tul", a synthetic material used for petticoats
Vago	loser, lazy, good for nothing
Valgame	oh my
Vamonos	let's go
Vamos a estar como gallinas enjauladas	we're going to be like caged chickens
Vas a verlo	you'll see

## SPANISH GLOSSARY

*Source: "REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES" by Josefina López*

Spanish Term	English Translation
Venganse	Come you all
¿Verá que sí?	Isn't it true?
¿Y por qué no me habias dicho?	Why hadn't you told me?
Y los...	And the...
¿Y tu?	And you?
Ya basta	enough already
Ya llego mi viejo	my husband is here
¡Ya ni la friegas!	You blew it