

Discussion Guide for the Short Documentary ***Las Reinas de los Cuentos (The Queens of the Stories)***

Written, Produced and Directed by Paul Detwiler

Running time: 12:45 (in English, with CC in English and Spanish)

The film is also available with subtitles in Spanish.

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Key terms: *Drag, Drag Queen, Drag Queen Reading Program, Activism, Latinx, LGBTQ, LGBTQ Youth, Gender, Children's Literature, Children's Literacy, Self-acceptance, Queer, Gender Nonconforming, Gender Expression, Coming Out, Bicultural, Cross-border Issues*

How to Utilize This Discussion Guide:

This guide seeks to facilitate conversations in which discussion participants listen actively and share their viewpoints. After screening the film to your group, choose several of the discussion prompts that best meet the needs and interests of the group. The prompts are designed to help participants think more deeply about the issues in the film, and can spark conversations and engagement. GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, provides helpful [Guidelines for Respectful Conversations](#) to keep in mind during the discussion.

Synopsis:

The film profiles two Latinx drag queens on a mission to educate and empower children through the magic of storytelling. The film exposes audiences to elements of both drag and Latinx culture, and may serve to challenge audience preconceptions about those cultures. The film touches on many themes, and does so with both explicit and metaphorical messages about community, identity, coming out, healing the inner child, transformation and growth, and self-acceptance; these are universal issues that must be navigated by individuals as they grow up in society, but are made more difficult for LGBTQ+ people who can also experience homophobia, racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination.

Letter from the Filmmaker:

In September of 2019, I read about a protest that occurred at the Chula Vista Main Library organized by an anti-LGBTQ hate group from Boston, MA. The group had demanded the cancellation of the library's upcoming drag queen reading event. Soon after, I learned that drag queens have been reading stories to children in public libraries throughout the USA (and in

several other countries) since 2015, and have been subjected to many such protests in cities throughout the USA.

As a filmmaker who has produced and directed several documentaries examining different facets of the LGBTQ experience, I felt this story was especially important to tell. The subject was extremely polarizing among adults: some saw the reading hour as inappropriate and dangerous, while for others it was a celebration of reading, imagination, and pride.

After spending time with the two queens profiled in the film, I saw their commitment to children's education, and to community building. Through their stories and the art of drag, they demonstrate the importance of self-acceptance and being true to yourself, which is a message all children need to hear frequently.

I made this film to tell Jaime and Francisco's story and share their view that exposing children and their families to drag and LGBTQ people through reading events is a positive experience, and an important one to build bridges and understanding between the LGBTQ community and the larger society. It's a story for parents who are unfamiliar with, and may have reservations about, such reading events. It's a story to inspire Latinx and LGBTQ youth, and a story to share with LGBTQ allies.

To the facilitator using this guide: thank you for screening the film and facilitating its discussion. I hope that its lasting impact will lead to increased understanding of diversity in your group, and will encourage any young person who feels different to accept themselves, live their truth, and become an agent of change in their world.

Target Audience:

Las Reinas de los Cuentos is well-suited for outreach in a variety of settings, and is especially recommended for use by:

- High school Gay-Straight Alliances, youth groups, and diversity clubs
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community groups and social service providers that work with LGBTQ youth
- Faith-based organizations and institutions supportive of LGBTQ issues
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, nonprofit institutions, and museums
- Organizations with a mission to promote cross-cultural education and learning, such as local libraries.

Objectives:

I. Audiences will understand the intentions of the drag queens in regards to championing literacy, cultural diversity, and social acceptance of different forms of gender expression.

2. Audiences will discuss traditional gender norms and talk about their perceptions about drag in an atmosphere of learning, reflection, and respect.
3. Audience will recognize some of the difficulties experienced by Queer Latinx people who challenge traditional views of gender expression.
4. Audiences will be able to understand the concept of intersectionality as it is commonly defined in cultural studies, and recognize examples of it as it applies to certain communities.

Background:

The idea of drag queens reading to children in libraries first emerged in San Francisco in 2015. Soon after, the organization called Drag Queen Story Hour was formed, and currently has a network of chapters in 28 states and Puerto Rico, as well as chapters in Mexico, Canada, Japan, and Europe.

A Gallup survey of the Gen Z generation in the USA shows that up to 1 in 6 Gen Z adults identify themselves as non-straight. Given that young people feel freer to adopt more fluid gender identities and are more accepting of sexual minorities, it is likely that their children will be raised with those values, and this will drive an increased demand for children's literature that acknowledges and validates those identities to support young people in the process of identity formation.

Increasing societal tolerance and acceptance of different gender identities is critical in helping LGBTQ youth develop in emotionally and psychologically healthy ways. According to the Trevor Project, suicide is the second leading cause of death in youth (ages 13-24) in the USA, and LGBTQ youth are 4 times as likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers. It is estimated that in the USA, one LGBTQ youth attempts suicide every 45 seconds. These alarming statistics show how important it is that the experiences of LGBTQ people and their cultures need to be normalized in society, and thus positive, empowering representations (such as those seen in this film) can help in that effort.

Definitions:

Drag: The act and art form of dressing and performing as a persona of the opposite sex, for the purpose of entertainment.

Drag queen: A male entertainer who performs as a female character, often with an exaggerated femininity.

Gender fluid: Refers to people who do not want to strictly identify with a single gender, and/or whose gender identity may change over time. Similar to *Genderqueer*.

Gender nonconforming: Dressing and behaving in ways that do not conform to socially defined standards and characteristics typically associated as being either feminine or masculine.

Intersectionality: The complex manner in which forms of discrimination such as sexism, racism, and classism overlap/intersect with each other in the experiences of marginalized people.

Latinx: A gender-neutral word for describing people of Latin American descent.

LGBTQ+: An acronym collectively referring to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning their identity). The (+) sign refers to other groups (intersex, asexual, allies).

Machista: Displaying male chauvinism and an exaggerated masculinity.

Queer: Refers to someone who does not identify with the labels of homosexuality or heterosexuality, considering them too limiting. Can be used to celebrate people of all gender identities, and all the ways people love each other. *Note:* this word is controversial because some find it an offensive slur, while others see it is a more inclusive term to reclaim.

Xingona (variant of *Chingona*): In Mexican/Chicano slang, once a derogatory term for a Latina seen as difficult and hard-headed, but now increasingly being reclaimed as a feminist term of empowerment.

Suggested Discussion Prompts:

1. Describe how the film made you feel. Were you surprised by anything?
2. Was there anything in the film that you've seen reflected in your own life experience?
3. Which part of the film did you find particularly memorable or inspiring? What about that particular section made it compelling for you?
4. What do you think would be one of the film's major themes?
5. The woman at the beginning of the film was worried about how the drag queen reading event would affect children, and said "I don't want them (*the children*) to be destroyed..." Why do you think the idea of a drag queen reading event is threatening to some people?
6. Would you take a child of yours to a drag queen story hour? Why or why not?
7. Jaime said that when he transforms into Raquel Ita, "I'm inspired to speak my truth" and he's more comfortable in speaking out. Why do you think that is so? (Makeup can reveal as well as conceal. Is drag makeup a type of mask that conceals something about a person, or could it act to help reveal something about the person wearing it?) What might it reveal?

8. Francisco said when they grew up in San Diego, “we didn’t have any role models that would help us embrace ourselves”. Is there someone who is a role model for you? If so, how do they make you feel about yourself?
9. What were the earliest messages you received about LGBTQ people and where did they come from? Were they positive, negative or neutral?
10. What are some issues that people face who are LGBTQ+ and/or gender nonconforming? Do you think these issues are harder for Latinx people? Why?
11. How does the term *intersectionality* apply to the life experiences of the two drag queens profiled in the film? Are you aware of a current issue in the news that exemplifies intersectionality in regards to race, gender, class and socio-economic status?
12. What was your reaction in seeing the little boy dressed in the princess costume?
13. What can people do at a personal level to help make gender nonconforming children feel validated and safe?
14. Every culture has traditional gender stereotypes that say people should act or dress a certain way. What are some gender stereotypes that you know of? Are there any ways that you break gender stereotypes by doing things differently from what’s expected of your gender?
15. Francisco said that “growing up, my father was very machista with me, and didn’t let me do anything that was feminine”. Is there any way that we as a society could reconsider masculinity in a way that is less restrictive, and more liberating?
16. Did you notice any symbolic elements used in the film? (*Note:* throughout the film, butterflies were a recurring visual motif) What do you think they represent? How do you think they relate to any ideas or themes in the film?
17. What does the *Yo Existo* butterfly man represent to you?
18. Jaime said early in the film that “it’s important to redefine the way our community is seen” and then later, “it’s important...that we can be seen as positive role models and educators, activists, and agents of change”. Why do you think this is important? Could you be an agent of change in your community? If so, what could you do, and what would you want to change?

Closing prompts:

19. Did you have any preconceptions about drag queens that changed, or did you gain any new insights after watching the film?
20. What would you tell a friend if you were describing the film?
21. If you met Raquelita and Barbie-Q, what would you say? What questions would you ask them?

22. How could this film benefit children? How could this film benefit adults? Who are some types of people who would benefit from its messages? What would you want their main takeaway to be?

Resources:

- *Drag Queen Story Hour* (dragqueenstoryhour.org; Twitter: #/dragqueenstoryhour) This national organization has its mission to create “diverse, accessible, and cultural inclusive family programming where kids can express their authentic selves and become bright lights of change in their communities.”
- *Rainbow! A Round Table of the American Library Association* (ala.org/rt/rtrt/tools) provides a set of resources for librarians and teachers, including guidelines for reading events, book reviews and bibliographies of LGBTQ-themed literature for children and teens.
- *Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays* (pflag.org) is the largest organization providing support for LGBTQ+ people, their parents and families, and allies. Provides resources on how to accept and support gender nonconforming children.
- *The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network* (glsen.org) is the leading national education organization working to end discrimination and bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in K-12 schools, and to support LGBTQ cultural inclusion and awareness. Has resources for teachers and students.
- *The Trevor Project* (thetrevorproject.org) The Trevor Project is the leading organization in the USA providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning (LGBTQ) young people under 25. Toll free helpline: 1-866-488-7386.

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