

THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS

by

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The Texas Chili Queens was first produced by Pollyanna Theatre Company in Austin TX at the Long Center for the Performing Arts' Rollins Studio Theatre in June 2019. The original cast and crew were as follows:

ALLIE: Genevieve Schroeder-Arce

ABUELA, ALICIA: Yvonne Cortez Flores

CAROLINE, TERESA: Madison Palomo

MIKA, FRANCISCA: Gina Palacio

JULIE, JUANA: Eva McQuade

DAVID, ALL MALE ROLES: William Swift

DIRECTOR: Judy Matetzschk-Campbell

STAGE MANAGER: Andrew Perry

SCENIC DESIGNER: Zac Thomas

COSTUME DESIGNER: Pamela Friday

LIGHTING DESIGNER: Natalie George &
Sadie Langenkamp

SOUND DESIGNER: Andrew Perry

SCENIC ASSISTANT: Eamon Fossi

Cast of Characters

<u>ALLIE:</u>	A modern day 4th grader full of curiosity. She is outgoing, funny, and eager to learn all about her family history and the Chili Queens.
<u>CAROLINE:</u>	ALLIE's best friend from school. Grandmother was a civil rights activist during the March on Washington.
<u>DAVID:</u>	ALLIE's Friend at school. Family is from Poland.
<u>MIKA:</u>	ALLIE's friend at school. Her mother is from Argentina, visits in the summer.
<u>JULIE:</u>	ALLIE's friend at school. Family that's been here "forever". Learns and reveals that an ancestor fought at the battle of the Alamo.
<u>ABUELA:</u>	Grandmother to ALLIE and is raising her. Comes from a family that's worked to "blend in" so she doesn't speak Spanish fluently, and doesn't think of her family history as "history".
<u>CONTEMPORARY VENDOR:</u>	A modern street vendor selling churros
<u>MR. MARTIN:</u>	ABUELA's employer
<u>ALICIA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1860s. Mother to JUANA.
<u>JUANA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1860s. The ancestral lineage of ABUELA and ALLIE.
<u>TERESA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1860s
<u>FRANCISCA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1860s

Cast of Characters (Cont.)

<u>CUSTOMERS:</u>	Numerous individuals of different time periods and nationalities
<u>SILVIA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1890s. The ancestral lineage of ABUELA and ALLIE.
<u>MARIA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1890s
<u>JOSEFINA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1890s
<u>AUDIENCE MEMBER:</u>	A hungry theatre goer of the 1890s
<u>NEWSPAPER REPORTER:</u>	Of the 1890s
<u>O. HENRY:</u>	A famous writer
<u>ALEJANDRA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1930s. The ancestral lineage of ABUELA and ALLIE.
<u>GUADALUPE:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1930s
<u>LETICIA:</u>	A Chili Queen of the 1930s
<u>CITY OFFICIAL:</u>	Of the 1930s
<u>POLICE OFFICER:</u>	A modern-day Police Officer

The Texas Chili Queens may be performed with as few as six actors. The recommended breakdown of doubling roles is as follows:

Actor #1: ALLIE

Actor #2: ABUELA, ALICIA

Actor #3: CAROLINE, TERESA, MARIA, GUADALUPE

Actor #4: MIKA, FRANCISCA, JOSEFINA,
LETICIA, POLICE OFFICER

Actor #5: JULIE, JUANA, SILVIA, ALEJANDRA,
CONTEMPORARY VENDOR

Actor #6: DAVID, MR. MARTIN, ALL
CUSTOMERS, AUDIENCE MEMBER,
NEWSPAPER REPORTER, O. HENRY,
CITY OFFICIAL

Many roles, including all of the Chili Queens in all time periods, are bi-lingual and speak Spanish throughout the play.

Actor #6 should feel empowered to make bold choices to distinguish each character as there are several and some only have a couple of lines.

Scene

The exterior, cafeteria, & classroom of an elementary school, ABUELA's kitchen, and the plazas of San Antonio

Time

1860s, 1890s, 1930s, and modern day

Scene One

SETTING: Outside a modern school

AT RISE: A school bell rings and the lights come up. There are projections of food trucks and audio that indicates an outdoor setting. Sounds can include ambient birds, bicyclists, kids playing, cars. CONTEMPORARY VENDOR is on stage, selling churros. The VENDOR is played by the same actress who plays JUANA- the same lineage as ALLIE. The vendor has a simple cart with minimal decorations and a sign that reads "Tamales, churros, and elotes." This is just outside of ALLIE's school, near where ABUELA works. ALLIE, CAROLINE, MIKA, and DAVID are leaving school and enter onto the stage. DAVID is playing an ocarina.

ALLIE

(lovingly teasing)

Did that just land from outer space?

DAVID

No, it's an ocarina. And it came from my ancestors.

ALLIE

You have family from Jupiter!?

CAROLINE

Humans can't survive on Jupiter. However, on Mars...

DAVID

My family is from Poland. That's in Europe. My ancestors moved to Texas more than 70 years ago.

MIKA

Is that something from your family heritage?

DAVID

(nodding)

The ocarina is an instrument my ancestors used to play, and my uncle sometimes plays it at family dinners.

ALLIE

Is that the thing Link plays in Zelda? Is your uncle Link!?

DAVID

Ha! I wish!

CAROLINE

He does wear a lot of green...

MIKA

I've met David's uncle. He's nice, but he's not Link.

DAVID

I'm going to play the ocarina for my heritage presentation later this week.

(He looks across to the other side of the stage.)

My mom's across the street, guess I should get home and start practicing. See y'all tomorrow!

(He crosses to exit but stops quickly to buy a churro from CONTEMPORARY VENDOR.)

ALLIE

(to CAROLINE and MIKA)

Do you know what you're doing for the heritage presentation?

MIKA

Not yet. I don't even know what all counts as heritage.

ALLIE

Me neither. David is bringing in an instrument, but I'm not sure what that has to do with his family.

CAROLINE

Heritage is like family culture. It's the stuff passed down from your great-grandparents to you.

MIKA

So, like holidays, art, money, clothes—

ALLIE

You got those jeans from your great grandma?

CAROLINE

Well, you do get G-E-N-E-S genes from your grandparents, but not jeans like the ones I'm wearing. More like when people wear hijabs. That's part of their heritage.

MIKA

My mom is an immigrant from Argentina. She came for college, but the rest of her family is still in South America. She practices Spanish with me. Does that count as heritage?

CAROLINE

I think so. Maybe put language into your outline for the presentation.

ALLIE

Which is due tomorrow.

MIKA

(to both)

Do you want to come over, and we can work on our outlines together?

CAROLINE

Sure!

(pulls out phone)

I'll text my mom.

MIKA

Great! What about you, Allie?

ALLIE

Not tonight, my abuela is making chili and I don't want to miss it.

MIKA

(looks across to the other
side of the stage)

Well, I see my dad across the street. Allie, you want us to wait with you?

ALLIE

No, it's ok. Abuela works nearby at the hospital and should be here soon.

(MIKA and CAROLINE cross the stage. CONTEMPORARY VENDOR gestures to sell them a churro, but both girls don't notice.)

CAROLINE
Bye, Allie!

MIKA
Bye!

(ALLIE idles around on stage for a couple of beats, hands in pockets, kicking "dirt", whistling, etc. She also does not notice CONTEMPORARY VENDOR. After two beats, CONTEMPORARY VENDOR exits with cart. ALLIE is now alone on stage and sits down. Another beat. ABUELA runs onto the stage, speaking her first line.)

ABUELA
Mija!

(ALLIE perks up at the sound of her voice.)

Allie, I'm so sorry I'm late, but I couldn't leave work any earlier. Two people quit yesterday. Plus the lunch rush at the hospital was longer than usual. There was no way we could finish on time.

ALLIE
That's ok.

(ABUELA takes a beat to look at ALLIE. She knows that picking up a kid late isn't the worst thing in the world, but still she feels a bit of guilt. ABUELA's boss, MR. MARTIN, enters the stage. He's not malicious,

but he is part of the
 "machine". He crosses to a
 food truck but doesn't
 initially see ABUELA.)

ABUELA

Hello, Mr. Martin.

MR. MARTIN

(to ABUELA)

Ah, hello.

(nods to ALLIE)

Is this your granddaughter?

ABUELA

(nodding)

This is Allie. Allie this is my boss, Mr. Martin.

MR. MARTIN

Nice to meet you, Allie. I'm sorry we kept your grandmother
 so late this afternoon.

ALLIE

(not really sure what to
 say)

That's ok.

ABUELA

Well I couldn't leave everyone while we were still so busy.

MR. MARTIN

That's the team attitude we need.

(ABUELA is a touch nervous
 to ask the next question,
 but she also knows she's
 worth it.)

ABUELA

Do you think we could find some time to talk about my
 promotion later this week.

MR. MARTIN

Maybe. We're just so short staffed in the serving line...

ABUELA

I'd still be working with everyone

MR. MARTIN

I'd hate to lose you where you're really needed.

ABUELA

How about when we hire more people?

MR. MARTIN

We'll see... Ah, you know, I should probably head home now.

(to ALLIE)

Nice to meet you, Allie.

(to ABUELA)

I'll see you tomorrow. Y'all have a good night.

(MR. MARTIN exits.)

ABUELA

Ok. How about we go home, yeah?

(ALLIE nods and ABUELA puts her arm around ALLIE's shoulder. The next lines are spoken as they exit the stage.)

ABUELA

How was your day?

ALLIE

Fine.

ABUELA

Did you learn a lot?

ALLIE

I guess.

(END OF SCENE)

Scene Two

SETTING: Inside ABUELA's kitchen

AT RISE: ABUELA and ALLIE enter the kitchen with rejuvenated energy. No hard feelings of ABUELA being late, and no residual weirdness from the exchange with MR. MARTIN. Projections can show change of setting. During the scene ALLIE and ABUELA can exit slightly offstage to access the "pantry" where they'll pull ingredients from.

ALLIE

Then in math class we had a pop-quiz on division. And David pulled out a pair of glasses-

ABUELA

I didn't know he wore glasses.

ALLIE

He doesn't, but he said he wore them because it "improves division". Get it? Improves de-vision!

ABUELA

(chuckling)

Sounds like you had a good day.

ALLIE

(shrugs, and looks down)

Abuela, there's something I need to ask you.

ABUELA

Yes, my love?

ALLIE

Where did I come from?

ABUELA

Are you learning about this in school?

(ALLIE nods.)

Well, uh, when two people love each other...

ALLIE

That's not what I mean. How long have we been here?

ABUELA

(with dawning understanding
and relief)

Oh. How long have we been here? Hmm... Let me think... We moved into our home a little more than three years ago, when you were in the first grade.

ALLIE

(searchingly)

Uh-huh.

ABUELA

Oh, you've grown so much since then! I remember when you used to stand on a stool to reach the sink, how you'd splash water everywhere. Such a mess! A soapy mess, but still a mess! Oh, and at bath time--

ALLIE

(interrupting)

That's not what I mean. School heritage day is in three days, our outline is due tomorrow. I need to learn about our heritage. Fast. How long has our family been here? In Texas.

ABUELA

I don't know that answer... hmmm... our family... has been here a long time.

ALLIE

Like since the dinosaurs?

ABUELA

You're extra curious today. While you pepper me with questions, how about you help me chop these peppers for the chili.

ALLIE

My stomach is already rumbling, I can't wait to eat it.

ABUELA

(teasing in an exaggerated
way)

I know! You'll have me working all day and all night to make you chili.

ALLIE

I'm sorry, Abuela.

ABUELA

I'm teasing you, mija. I work all day cooking food for other people. I make food from a menu decided by someone else. But it doesn't feel like work when I decide what to cook, especially when I get to cook for you.

(ALLIE understands ABUELA cooking is her way of expressing love. ALLIE can hug ABUELA if it feels natural during the next line.)

ALLIE

You cook for me every single day.

ABUELA

Because I love you every single day.

ALLIE

What exactly do you put in your chili?

ABUELA

(nonchalantly)

Oh a pinch of this and a handful of that. This chili recipe is our family's best kept secret.

(ABUELA passes ALLIE some peppers and a knife to cut.)

ALLIE

What kind of secret? Is it a secret our family brought here?! Like from where they are from?

ABUELA

I'm not really sure. My grandmother once said that her family came here before the United States did. So, I suppose that means her recipe is from here.

(ALLIE begins to chop and is reflecting on another way to ask what she's curious about.)

ALLIE

That was your grandmother, what about everyone else? Where does the rest of our family come from?

ABUELA

We're all mostly from here. Be sure to scoop out all those seeds.

ALLIE

But like are we Mexican? English? Italian?

ABUELA

Oh, we're a pinch of this and a handful of that- like chili.

(thinking a touch more)

I had a brother who lived in Italy for three years, and that's where he met his wife. That doesn't mean he's Italian, but his children are.

ALLIE

(Finally making progress!)

So I'm Italian!

ABUELA

It doesn't work like that, mija.

ALLIE

Can we get a DNA test? To find out where we come from, and exactly how much of us is from where?

ABUELA

Are you studying DNA in school? How do you know about those tests?

ALLIE

TV. Commercials say it's easy to find out who you are! We can take a test or go on Ancestry.com. All we have to do is spit in a cup, put some information in, and they'll tell us who we are.

ABUELA

No, mija, they can't tell us who we are.

(referencing the peppers)

Now chop those extra pieces. But be careful not to add too much, we don't want the chili to be too spicy for you.

ALLIE

(amused)

Too spicy? I can handle it.

ABUELA

Remember last time? Sweat poured down your face from the heat!

ALLIE

I can handle the spice. I'm old enough.

(ABUELA observes ALLIE with significance. Is she indeed old enough for what this chili has inside?)

ABUELA

If you think you're ready...

ALLIE

I am.

(ALLIE tosses the extra spice into the chili pot.)

ABUELA

Where are these questions coming from?

ALLIE

We've got heritage day at school this week, and I've got three days to come up with some heritage! A DNA test is my only hope!

ABUELA

We won't be able to get DNA results back by then, and those tests aren't free.

ALLIE

Well then what's our family heritage? Like what kind of music do we like?

ABUELA

Well, I like Billie Eilish.

(Playwright's note: can supplement another popular artist here. Whatever)

popular artist is here
should be used any time the
name "Billie Eilish"
appears.)

ALLIE
But what do "Our People" like?

ABUELA
(a little teary)
Most people like Billie Eilish.

ALLIE
Abuela, are you crying?

ABUELA
It's just the onion.

ALLIE
What about language? We speak English, but we don't speak
much Spanish.

ABUELA
I didn't really grow up speaking Spanish, either. My dad
was from Mexico, but even he never spoke it.

ALLIE
What about your mom?

ABUELA
My mother only spoke Spanish with her mother. We were proud
to sound like everyone else.

ALLIE
But she didn't speak Spanish with you and your brother and
sisters?

ABUELA
My parents didn't want us to speak Spanish.

ALLIE
Why?

ABUELA
They did everything they could to make sure we'd fit in,
that we'd belong. They worked so hard to make sure my
sisters, brother, and me had everything we'd need-

(instructing ALLIE in the
chili prep)

ABUELA (Cont.)

Now put the peppers in the pot and grab the broth.

(The ingredients are added,
and the preparations
continue in reflection for
a beat.)

Maybe my parents thought if we spoke Spanish, things would be harder. Or maybe they wanted to make sure my father could be included in conversations, and he didn't speak any Spanish. I don't know.

ALLIE

Why don't you know?

ABUELA

I don't know why I don't know. We never really talked about it when I was young. No one asked questions, or wrote it down. If they were still alive I'd ask them, but they're gone. And all of that is behind us.

ALLIE

I like that I can ask you.

ABUELA

Me too, mija.

(They hug. ABUELA ladles some chili into a bowl for ALLIE. Staging note: this will be the "chili" ALLIE eats during the next scene. Then ABUELA packs up the pot of chili. The last two lines of the scene are spoken as ABUELA exits and CAROLINE, MIKA, DAVID, and JULIE enter carrying their lunches, ocarina, and whatever props will be used soon for the first Chili Queens flashback.)

ALLIE

So if I can't bring in a DNA test for school heritage day,
what should I bring?

ABUELA

Maybe you should bring in my Billie Eilish album! That is
your family music.

(ABUELA sings a snippet of
a hit song by the popular
artist. Can adlib lyrics to
the melody that are
relevant to the scene.)

(END OF SCENE)

SAMPLE

Scene Three

SETTING: Interior of a modern school cafeteria

AT RISE: School bell rings. The classmates are all eating their lunches during the scene below and are congenial in their talking.

CAROLINE

When I got home last night, I Facetimed my grandma. She told me about the March on Washington. My grandma went to it over 50 years ago and was one of the people fighting for jobs and freedom. Not fighting like wrestlers, but protesting.

DAVID

That was like the Climate March, right?

CAROLINE

Sort of... yeah. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke there. That's when he talked about "having a dream".

DAVID

I think I know that! It was the speech he gave and he talked about justice for all, right?

CAROLINE

That was part of it, but it's a lot more than that, too. My grandma is coming over tonight to share her photo album from that time.

JULIE

She has a real photo album? Like not on her phone?

CAROLINE

Yeah, she says there are all these pictures of her when she was younger. They're printed out and put into a book. She says it's like snapchat, but without cat ears.

JULIE

So like Instagram.

CAROLINE

Exactly! I think.

MIKA

I called my family in Argentina last night, too! We spoke Spanish the whole time! Me gusta hablar en español! They said I sound great.

DAVID

I have some family that speaks Yiddish! I'm learning how to read Hebrew for when I have my Bar Mitzvah.

CAROLINE

Your families all speak so many different languages.

JULIE

Yo tambien! I found out my ancestors spoke Spanish, too! My parents always told me that my family has been here forever, but it turns out my great great great great great great-

DAVID

Great great-

JULIE

Grandfather fought at the Alamo!

CAROLINE

We all "remember" that history!

ALLIE

(in an effort to join the conversation, but unsure how)

I found out lots of cool things about my family, too.

MIKA

Yeah? Like what?

ALLIE

(trying to sound impressive, but uncertain where the sentence will go)

My ancestors were... extremely important to... the entire community... because they were the great... and wonderful... and very impressive... San Antonio...

(in Spanish)

Vaqueros de Gatos...

MIKA

Cat wranglers?

ALLIE

Uh huh. The Great and Wonderful-

DAVID

And impressive...

ALLIE

San Antonio Cat Wranglers. As the gringos would say.

CAROLINE

What does that even mean?

ALLIE

They brought all the cats to North America.

MIKA

All of them?

(ALLIE nods earnestly. The friends look to each other and start their good-natured joking.)

JULIE

Think of that boat ride!

CAROLINE

They probably ate all the rats on the boat-

DAVID

And all the fish in the sea!

JULIE

Imagine them seasick!

(impersonating a dizzy cat)

Meow meeow meoooooow!

(DAVID, CAROLINE, and MIKA join in meowing.)

MIKA

Cat wranglers! Allie, you're hilarious!

ALLIE

Heh. Heh. Yeah, cat wranglers. Pretty funny, right? I definitely know about my ancestors...

(CAROLINE, DAVID, JULIE,
and MIKA pantomime talking
while ALLIE takes her first
bite of lunch—chili!! And
it's spicy but delicious!
ALLIE closes her eyes,
savoring the flavor.)

(END OF SCENE)

SAMPLE

Scene Four

SETTING: A plaza of San Antonio in the 1860s

AT RISE: Music cue to start here that sets the tone for a different time. The music is tejano music, and possible recordings of ambient night noises and the sounds of people talking, bubbling coffee, etc. With that first bite the actress playing ABUELA enters as a Chili Queen. She is dressed with a few period piece components, petticoat, rebozo, etc. She rolls out—on a table or a cart—her chili goodies: her pot, decorations, plates, etc. ALLIE opens her eyes, taking several more bites of chili with her eyes focused on her bowl. The actors playing CAROLINE, JULIE, and MIKA make their own transformation into becoming Chili Queens. They pull out props from under the table some walk off stage to grab a few mobile pieces, period pieces are adorned. The actor playing DAVID will take on the role of CUSTOMER 1 & 2 through this scene. The Chili Queens are selling their chili, doling out bowls and plates full of food. ALLIE finishes her chili and looks up for the first time. She is surprised to see that her school cafeteria is no longer there, but is instead the Military Plaza in 19th c San Antonio. When ALLIE stands up, the sounds of the scene are activated.)

FRANCISCA

(curtsying and coquettish
she waves to someone
offstage)

Gracias, señor! Buenas noches!

TERESA

(tallying up a total, and
directed to CUSTOMER 1)

Three plates of beans, chili, tortillas and three hot
chocolates. 30 cents, por favor.

CUSTOMER 1

(holding a tray of food and
drinks)

Gee! 30 cents? That's all?

TERESA

That's all.

CUSTOMER 1

Thank you, ma'am. It smells delicious. The fellas and I
can't wait to fill our bellies!

TERESA

Disfruta!

CUSTOMER 1

(not wanting to miss this
moment)

We came a long way to see you all. You're even prettier in
person.

(Exits offstage to make the
slightest costume change,
so he can come on as
another CUSTOMER.)

JUANA

(to ALICIA)

Do we need any more kindling, mama?

ALICIA

No, the sun should be up soon. We've almost seen the last
of our customers.

JUANA

How is that possible? Our pot is still half-full of chili.

ALICIA

We can keep what's left to eat today, those flavors only
get better.

(CUSTOMER 2 enters. The Chili Queens focus on him, trying to attract his business. All of them are charming in their approach. CUSTOMER 2 physically responds to the Chili Queens enticements, pulled to their tables with their words and food.)

TERESA

Good evening! You look hungry.

CUSTOMER 2

I am!

ALICIA

Try some of our chili-

JUANA

You'll never know a better taste!

CUSTOMER 2

It looks delicious!

FRANCISCA

You've got a handsome face, I'll give you an extra serving of tortillas.

CUSTOMER 2

An extra serving of tortillas?

FRANCISCA

Mmm-hmm.

CUSTOMER 2

Yes, please!

JUANA

There were hardly any customers tonight.

ALICIA

We did ok, Juana.

JUANA

Well, there were some...

TERESA

(to the CUSTOMER)

Can I tempt you with a cup of coffee?

CUSTOMER 2

Certainly!

JUANA

...Just not any that came to our table.

(CUSTOMER 2 is served food
and coffee and exits.
TERESA and FRANCISCA engage
with each other, they are
playful and openly
boastful.)

FRANCISCA

Customers only go to you for your coffee.

TERESA

No es verdad!

FRANCISCA

It's true! Look inside your chili pot, the sun will soon
rise and it's not empty.

TERESA

Customers love my chili.

FRANCISCA

Sure they do.

TERESA

They love it because it is hot, hot, hot!

FRANCISCA

Sí es muy picante, pero no te importa nada el sabor!

(CUSTOMER 1 walks across
the stage with a bowl of
chili in hand, takes a bite
and yelps.)

CUSTOMER 1

Yowza! That's spicy chili!

TERESA

(proudly)

That customer knows my chili bites like a serpent.

FRANCISCA

Loco! He doesn't know what's good!

JUANA

(to ALICIA)

Everyday we work so hard making the tamales, tortillas, chili, and coffee for our stand. Every night we come out here to the plaza to sell what we make.

ALICIA

Yes, and we do it for our family. Your father only gets a little work here and there, and the family needs me- needs us to bring in more money. It's good work.

JUANA

But it wouldn't hurt if we got a little more attention...

ALICIA

Maybe someday.

JUANA

If we were as popular as FRANCISCA or Teresa we could be true Chili Queens.

ALICIA

For now we should go home, Juana. Your father will be waking up soon, and we'll need to have breakfast ready for him.

(They start to pack up their wares and exit. The stage looks mostly like ABUELA's kitchen. The only items left are being packed up and cleared away during the below dialogue.)

TERESA

(yawns)

Estoy cansada.

FRANCISCA

Yo, tambien.

TERESA

Tuviste una buena noche?

FRANCISCA

Sí. Y tu?

TERESA

Sí. Yo hice mucho dinero. Porque soy la reina del chili!

(They laugh and exit taking the rest of the "chili queen" props with them. Compelled to hear more, ALLIE follows them offstage. The stage is now set for ABUELA's kitchen.)

FRANCISCA

Hasta mañana, Teresa?

TERESA

No, Francisca, hasta la noche.

(END OF SCENE)