

# THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS

## by Kathleen Fletcher

*“They’d say the Chili Queens made San Antonio come to life in the night, shining brighter than any star.”*

*- Allie*



Allie, a curious 4th grader, has just one week to find out about her family’s history for a heritage day presentation at school. Pester- ing her abuela (grand- mother) for family sto-

ries leads to a fascinat- ing discovery—Allie is the descendant of one of the original Chili Queens.

This group of entrepre- neurial women support- ed their families by selling chili from sun- down to sun up in the many plazas of San An- tonio during the nine- teenth and early- twentieth centuries. Word of their “fiery meat stew,” exotic Spanish heritage, and charming demeanors

spread and by the 1930’s locals and tour- ists alike flocked to meet the Chili Queens. As the city grew and modernized however, the Chili Queens were forced out of business in the early 1940’s by the health department and other restau- ranteurs jealous of their success.

In this fascinating family story Allie discovers a link to the past that just may propel her into the future.

THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS premiered on May 31, 2019 in the Boyd Vance Theatre at the George Washington Carver Mu- seum and Cultural Center.

## Creating A Hopeful Culture

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## The Texas Chili Queens



Chili Queens, Haymarket Sq, 1933

For more than 100 years, the Chili Queens would arrive at twilight to the plazas of San Antonio with

tables, chairs and pots of chili to cook over open fires. The plazas themselves were crowded with people from every walk of life—soldiers, tourists, families, business- men—all there to relax, eat, and enjoy. Singers and musicians would serenade the customers creating a festival like atmosphere.

The Chili Queens themselves would become as famous as the food they were serving because of their witty banter and savvy, entrepreneurial spirit. While the health department would force the queens out of the open air plazas in the early 1940’s

they are credited with being the forerunners of today’s nationwide Tex-Mex food industry and the urban food truck trend.



Chili Queens Juanita & Esperanza Garcia making tortillas, 1937.

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## Who's Who In THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS

Theatre is the most collaborative of art forms (which means that it takes lots of people to make a play). We are lucky to have many of the best theatre artists in Austin at Pollyanna Theatre Company. These are the talented people who helped create THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS

### JUDY MATETZSCHK-CAMPBELL, Ph.D. Director

As the Director of THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS Judy worked with the actors, designers, and crew to bring life to the playwright's words. Judy loves to work with playwrights to create brand new plays for young audiences and has worked with playwrights and directors in professional theatre companies all over the country. She has helped bring over 50 new plays to life during her 25 year career. Judy is the founding Artistic Director of Pollyanna and holds a PhD in Theatre-Text Criticism from UT-Austin.

### KATHLEEN FLETCHER

#### Playwright

Kathleen wrote the play, every single word! She is a New York-based writer, educator, historian, and performer. She has developed new shows for many cultural institutions, including the NY Transit Museum and the Tenement Museum where she combined history and storytelling in site-specific spaces. Years ago she

performed in Pollyanna Theatre plays, but more recently she penned two scripts for the company: *Sarah the Dinosaur* and *Hurry Up...And Wait!* Much of the inspiration for THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS derives from her work in teaching American (im)migration, and from growing up in Texas.

### ANDREW PERRY Stage Manager, Sound and Video Designer

Andrew is the Pollyanna Theatre Company Stage Manager which means he records everything that happens during rehearsals and controls every aspect of the show during performances. He also designed all the sounds/music you heard and the video that you saw as a part of the play. He has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from Texas State University and has been working in Austin theatre since 2004. He is delighted to have stage managed over thirty productions with Pollyanna.

### ZAC THOMAS Set and Props Designer

Zac designed the environment for the play and all the stuff that the actors interact with physically. Zac is a performer and designer who hails from Butte, Montana. He is the resident

technical director at Hyde Park Theatre, and is the founder of Rabbitrunc Design. Zac joined Pollyanna Theatre in the fall of 2018. Our audiences will remember his great design for THE MYSTERY OF THE GREEN TEETH GHOST.

### NATALIE GEORGE Lighting Designer

Natalie made sure we could see the play by designing special lighting. She is an artist based in Austin, who enjoys all things lighting and telling stories through performance.

### PAM FRIDAY Costume Designer

Pam designed all the clothing that the actors wore in the play. Pam is a middle school drama teacher by day, and costumer by night. Her costumes have been seen on stages and in museums throughout Texas, Maryland and New York City. She is particularly excited to be working again with her favorite playwright on this show!

### JOE KELLEY Actor who plays all the male role

Joe Kelley is a recent graduate from ACC and is so thrilled to be included in such a wonderful, talented group of people. He's been seen in Austin before as De Guiche in

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## Educational Objectives/TEKS

THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS and the activities in this study guide will reinforce the following objectives and student expectancies:

### TEKS 4TH Grade

#### English Language Arts and Reading

(1) Developing and sustaining foundational language skills: listening, speaking, discussion, and thinking--oral language. The student develops oral language through listening, speaking, and discussion. The student is expected to:

- (A) listen actively, ask relevant questions to clarify information, and make pertinent comments;
- (C) express an opinion supported by accurate information, employing eye contact, speaking rate, volume, enunciation, and the conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively; and
- (D) work collaboratively with others to develop a plan of shared responsibilities

(7) Response skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts. The student responds to an increasingly challenging variety of sources that are read, heard, or viewed. The student is expected to:

- (A) describe personal connections to a variety of sources, including self-selected texts;
- (B) write responses that demonstrate understanding of texts, including comparing and contrasting ideas across a variety of sources;
- (C) use text evidence to support an appropriate response;
- (D) retell, paraphrase, or summarize texts in ways that maintain meaning and logical order;
- (E) interact with sources in meaningful ways such as notetaking, annotating, freewriting, or illustrating;
- (F) respond using newly acquired vocabulary as appropriate; and
- (G) discuss specific ideas in the text that are important to the meaning.



- (11) Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--writing process. The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and uses appropriate conventions. The student is expected to:
  - (A) plan a first draft by selecting a genre for a particular topic, purpose, and audience using a range of strategies such as brainstorming, freewriting, and mapping;
  - (B) develop drafts into a focused, structured, and coherent piece of writing
  - (C) revise drafts to improve sentence structure and word choice by adding, deleting, combining, and rearranging ideas for coherence and clarity;
  - (D) edit drafts using standard English conventions
  - (E) publish written work for appropriate audiences.



## Pre-Show Discussion

Before going to see THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS you may want to discuss the following questions and engage in the activity as an introductory experience for the children in your care. The purpose of this initial discussion is to introduce the children to the world of the play.

- What is family heritage? (Family heritage refers to the practices and customs passed down from one generation to the next within a family.)
- What are some of the traditions and customs that exist in your family? (If the children have difficulty answering this question, tell them about some of your traditions around holidays and food.)
- How are such family traditions and customs passed down from one generation to the next? (Traditions are

often passed down through objects that are gifted to each generation, stories shared from grandparents and parents, and/or food recipes shared among generations.)

- Describe any heritage objects, stories, and/or recipes that have been passed down in your family.
- The play we are going to see, THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS, is about a 4th grade girl, Allie, who has to find out about her family heritage for a school project. After talking to her abuela (grandmother) she discovers she is a direct descendant of the Chili Queens. Who do you suppose the Chili Queens were? Why do you think they were called the “chili queens?” (Allow the children to brainstorm ideas about who the chili queens were and what makes them famous without giving

them the correct answer.

- As you watch the play try to find out all the information you can about the chili queens and we will share that information as a group afterwards.

### Audience Behavior

It is also important to discuss appropriate audience behavior with the children before coming to the theatre so they are prepared.

- Stay seated.
- Stay still.
- Stay quiet.

*“Keep your thoughts in your head until after the show!”*

## Pre-Show Activity: Your Story, Our Story Project

**YOUR STORY OUR STORY**

The Tenement Museum in New York City documents and shares the stories of America’s immigrants. They are sponsoring a national project called “Your Story, Our Story” which explores American immigration and migration through crowd-sourced stories of everyday objects. People are invited to participate in this project by exploring images and stories on the project website at [yourstory.tenement.org](http://yourstory.tenement.org) and to upload stories of your own.

Before seeing THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS we recommend exploring the “Your Story, Our Story” project as a way to guide the children’s thinking about family heritage. There are several ways to

navigate the site including a look at the stories shared from a particular geographic region. Try this:

- First, share the project’s goals with the class and then show them the website and explore one object story with the whole group. You can do this easily by clicking on “Explore” from the menu bar at the top of the screen. This will bring up pictures of a series of objects. Click on an object and the story associated with that object will appear. Read the story aloud and discuss.
- Next, divide the children into small groups of two or three students. Explain that each group is going to explore the stories from a particular geographic location. Assign each group a location based on the map in the upper right hand corner of the screen. (You might assign each group a

different state or you could do map coordinates such as the Northwest.) Give each group time at a computer to explore the stories from their given location. (All the children do is click on the map pins in that region and the story objects appear. Clicking on each object brings up its stories.)

- Ask each group to share their favorite object story with the whole class. After each object story is shared, ask if anyone in the class has a similar family object and allow the students to share their personal object stories with the class if they wish.
- Conclude this activity with the following instruction: In the play THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS Allie shares an object story from her family. Be sure to pay attention to her object and the story she tells about that object. We will discuss her object story afterward.



# Post-Show Discussion Questions

Discuss THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS with the children in your care using the following questions as a guide:

- Before going to see the play we explored the Your Story, Our Story project where people from across the country shared family objects and the stories associated with those objects. At the end of the play Allie shares two objects and the story of those objects with her classmates. What were the objects? (Apron and a giant chili pot.)
- What was the story Allie told about those objects? (See play summary on page 1 for details. Be sure the children discuss who the Chili Queens were, what they did, when and where

they did it, and why they were unique.)

- Why were these objects and the story associated with them important to Allie?
- At the end of the play, Allie explains that the Chili Queens were forced out of business and her friend asks, "And then what happened?" Allie responds by saying, "I don't know. It's still happening. Through me." What does Allie mean by this?
- Do we have anything like the Chili Queens today? (Food Trucks) Why are food trucks popular? What food trucks have you visited and what kind of food did you eat?
- Does your family have any food traditions like Allie's family?



Chili Queen and family, Haymarket Sq., 1902-1904

### Sample Family Heritage Questions

1. Tell me about a tradition that has been passed down in our family.
2. When did this tradition start?
3. Who passed the tradition on to you? Who have you passed it on to?
4. What is an object that could represent this tradition?

# Post-Show Activity: Family Heritage Objects & Stories

In this activity children will collect and write family heritage stories by interviewing family members and photographing an object to represent that story.

- Begin by discussing the following: "THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS is all about Allie's family story. Why are family stories important? (Stories strengthen connections between people and families, create a shared history, teach the value of listening, and help us understand the value of everyone's story.)"
- We are going to collect and share family heritage stories and objects just like Allie did by interviewing family members.
- The first step to collect family stories is to decide who to interview. "Who in your family would know some great family sto-

ries?" Have each child select one family member they will interview. For homework have the children write down the following information and then contact their interview partner to set up a time and location for the interview:

- \* Who will you interview?
- \* How old are they?
- \* Why did you choose them for your interview?
- \* When will your interview take place?
- \* Where will you conduct your interview?

These interviews will be recorded so be sure that each child has access to a recording device such as a Smartphone using either the video function or an audio recording app. If recording technology is an issue, inter-

views could take place at school using a school computer equipped with a microphone or tape recorders could be checked out and taken home.

- Next, make a plan for the interview by guiding the children to create a question list. The class could brainstorm questions or StoryCorps and Storyarts both have great lists to pull from (see resources for more). Elementary students should probably limit their list to 3-5 questions. Students should write down their questions on an index card to use during the interview. The goal is to have each child collect one family story so guide them to keep the interview questions focused. They should also ask their interview partner what ob-

## Post-Show Activity: Exploring Culture Through Food

In this activity students will explore foods of different cultures.

- Begin by asking children to write down what they had for dinner last night and the night before that. Divide the whole group into smaller groups of 4 students and have them share their dinners. Ask them to discuss why they think they ate what they did?
  - Next, have students share their ideas about why they ate what they did for dinner with the large group. Lead a discussion about why different people eat different foods. Be sure to point out the following:
    - \* People choose different types of foods to eat depending on the food available, their personal likes and dislikes, preparation time available, ability to cook, culture and religion.
- Explain that the group is going to explore foods eaten in different cultures as a way to better understand that culture.
- Pass out a labelled food picture (some dishes to consider are sushi, borscht, paella, shepherd's pie, ravioli, tamales, etc.) to each small group and ask them to research and answer the following questions about that food:

- \* What culture eats this particular food/dish?
- \* Is this dish something eaten everyday or is it served for special occasions/holidays?
- \* What are two of the reasons this culture eats this food?
- \* What are the ingredients in this dish?

Group research can take different forms depending on your unique situation. If you have access to computers, have children use the internet for research. If technology access is limited, buy or request the following book title from the library: "What's On Your Plate? Exploring Your World" by Whitney Stewart (see resources for more info.)

- Allow each group to share information about their assigned food with the large group. Create a display of the food pictures and information using a map and pins to locate the origins of each dish.
- A great homework assignment for extended learning is to ask families to select a recipe from the assigned foods, prepare it as a family, and bring it in to share with the whole class.

### Add a Story to the Mix!



As part of the Texas Chili Queens performance, we're inviting you all to share a story about a recipe or dish that's part of your cultural heritage. What do you eat on holidays? Do particular foods connect you to your family's past? Do you have a special chili recipe in the family? In partnership with "Your Story, Our Story," an online exhibit from the Tenement Museum in New York, we're collecting your stories of food and culture to explore the past and present of Texas and preserve stories for future generations. All you need is a short story about the food and a photo!

Simply go to this link and follow the instructions to upload your story: [yourstory.tenement.org/groups/the-texas-chili-queens](http://yourstory.tenement.org/groups/the-texas-chili-queens).

"Your Story, Our Story" is a national digital exhibit initiative of the Tenement Museum in New York City and its partners across the United States. We work with museums, colleges, schools, libraries, and community groups who all contribute stories from their part of the United States about objects and traditions that speak to migration and cultural identity.

"Your Story, Our Story" holds stories from 27 states and counting--join us in preserving stories for the future and exploring how we all shape American history through the objects and traditions in our lives!

## Resources Used In This Study Guide

- "The Chili Queens of San Antonio." Podcast created and produced by the Kitchen Sisters (Nikki Silva & Davia Nelson). [Kitchensisters.org](http://Kitchensisters.org). Broadcast on NPR, October 15, 2004 as a part of the "Hidden Kitchens" series.
- "Popular Chili Queens." Journal of the Life and Culture of San Antonio, Frank W. Jennings. As found at [www.uiw.edu/sanantonio/jenningschiliqueens](http://www.uiw.edu/sanantonio/jenningschiliqueens)
- "Your Story, Our Story" project of the Tenement Museum, NYC. [Yourstory.tenement.org](http://Yourstory.tenement.org).
- "The Great Thanksgiving Listen." A project of StoryCorps, Inc. Resources can be found at [storycorps.org/participate/the-great-thanksgiving-listen/lesson-plan](http://storycorps.org/participate/the-great-thanksgiving-listen/lesson-plan)
- "Collecting Family Stories." [Storyarts.org](http://Storyarts.org)
- "Food, Culture and Origin" lesson plan on Healthy Planet USA. Resource can be found at [healthyplanetusa.org/healthy-growing/resources/garden-based-lessons/lesson-7-culture-and-origin](http://healthyplanetusa.org/healthy-growing/resources/garden-based-lessons/lesson-7-culture-and-origin)
- "What's On Your Plate? Exploring Your World." Whitney Stewart, Sterling Children's Books, 2018.



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Pollyannatheatrecompany.org

The founders of Pollyanna Theatre Company believe in the power of the arts to bring much needed joy and hope into the lives of young people as well as into the life of the child that is alive inside each of us regardless of our age. And no other character we know embodies this timeless power of optimism better than Eleanor Porter's timeless little girl, Pollyanna.

.....  
**We'd like to thank our sponsors,  
 without whom we wouldn't be here!**  
 .....



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**THE TEXAS CHILI QUEENS by Kathleen Fletcher Cast and Crew Continued...**

Continued from page 4

Continued from page 2

*Cyrano de Bergerac* with the Archive Theater, with Summer Stock Austin as André in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* and as Touchstone in the City Theater's production of *As You Like It*. He'd like to thank a laundry list of people for helping him grow into the him he is today. You know who you are.

**SOFIA ROSSO BENITEZ**

**Actor who plays Mika/Francisca**

Sofia Rosso Benitez is a senior at Westlake High School. After she graduates she will pursue a degree musical theater. She has recently been seen in *Macbeth*. Sofia has attended multiple camps and classes for theatre training, and sings show tunes everywhere she goes.

**YVONNE CORTEZ FLORES**

**Actor who plays Abuela/Alicia**

Yvonne Cortez Flores is very proud and excited to be a part of the Chili Queens production. She has worked with Teatro Vivo and Different Stages Production and was notably nominated for a B. Iden Payne award for her character as Chata in the 2001 Different Stages Production of "Roosters."

**LUCKY CANTU**

**Actor who plays Allie**

Lucky is excited to make her debut with the Pollyanna Theatre in a play about heritage and family. Lucky's passion for theater started at age 3 with her first full production at 5 as the Wicked Witch in the *Wizard of Oz*. Since then, she has acted in films, commercials, and on stage with various local productions including most recently as Lise in *The Magic Fire* with Different Stages Theatre which was nominated for Best Performance by an Ensemble by the Austin Critics Table. Currently, she is Persephone in Murchison Middle School's production of *Persephone* and is a member of the Zach Pre-Professional Company.

**VIVIANA O. GARCIA**

**Actor who plays Caroline/Teresa**

Viviana graduated from St. Edward's University in 2018 with a BFA in Acting. While there she played Leah in the production of *Mouthful* and Ritu in the production of *Anonymouse*. She also directed the play *Afterwards* in the 10-Minute Play Festival held at Mary Moody Northen Theatre.

**NATHALIE DE LA CRUZ**

**Actor who plays Julie/Juana**

Nathalie De La Cruz is a Junior attending Crockett High School. She has played various roles including the Sultan in *Aladdin* dual language, and Private in *Madagascar*.

ject they can photograph to represent the story. See our sample question list on page 4.

- Once they have their questions planned, discuss the following: "One of the most important things to remember when interviewing someone is to listen carefully. How can you show your interview partner that you are truly listening?" Pair students up and have them practice their interviews by asking identified questions and using body language to indicate they are listening.
- Students will next conduct their interviews. Remind them to be sure to record the interview and photograph an object that represents the story.
- Finally, ask students to write their family story that they have collected. They should refer to the recorded interview to be sure they get all the information correct. Guide them to use proper structure (beginning, middle, end), keep the story focused on the central idea, and to include all relevant details. Allow ample time for revision.
- Share the stories by having students display the finished draft along with pictures of their objects.

