



Dear students,

We are pleased that you are coming to see our adaptation of T. C. Boyle's novel THE TORTILLA CURTAIN. In our play we have condensed the story to its core and focused on the main conflicts and issues. We present the four main characters and two incidental characters.

Who is the play about? Where does it happen? What happens?



**Delaney** Age: middle aged man. Grew up in New York. At first he seems to be a liberal, open minded person. He loves and knows a lot about nature and he worries about issues such as pollution and population displacement. He earns money writing articles for a nature magazine. He is particularly interested in coyotes and has been married once before. He likes cooking, goes shopping and helps look after his step-son, Jordan. He is a loner, somewhat introverted. He doesn't really have close friends.

**Kyra** Age: early thirties. Grew up in Los Angeles. Politically, more conservative than Delaney. A successful and dedicated real estate agent who works in a small firm. Her son, Jordan, is from a previous marriage. Kyra loves domestic animals. She has two dogs and a cat. She is diet conscious, likes to keep fit, swims, jogs and has a circle of women friends. She feels threatened by the illegal Mexican immigrants, "the invasion from the south", but employs Mexican labourers to work on her own fence or on the houses she is trying to sell.

**Cándido** Age: early thirties. Comes from the small town of Tepotzlán, Southern Mexico. He has been to the U.S.A before to work as a labourer. Back then, he earned enough money to live off, and enough to send back home to his family and wife. Cándido is a down to earth man, honest but rough. He loves to work and believes that men should work and women should stay at home. He is very clever, inventive and street-wise. Dangerous when drunk and not always gentle with América. He is Catholic, deeply religious. A fighter who never gives up, a survivor. His theme song: I get knocked down but I get up again (Chumbawumba).

**América** Age: almost twenty. Also from Tepotzlán. Comes from a good family. Has never really worked but she helped her mother and father around the house. Brought up Catholic, but she is not deeply religious. She arrives in the U.S.A pregnant and full of hope. She dreams of a little house with chickens running around in the garden. She is somewhat naïve. Faces many challenges in her new life in the U.S.A and the hardship of her situation causes her to grow up fast. She is adaptable.

**José** Age: early thirties. South American, also an illegal immigrant and also camping in the National Park, close to América and Cándidos' camp. Arrogant, aloof, aggressive - a pretty nasty guy and very nasty to América. Has no respect for the environment.



**Mary** Age: early thirties. White American, out of work and down on luck. Meets América at the labour exchange and makes friends with her.

## LANGUAGE OF THE CHARACTERS

In real life Cándido and América would speak Spanish with each other and very little English, but in our play they speak English, so that the audience can understand what they are saying. We can't presume that everyone who comes to the play can speak Spanish. It is difficult for us to show the effects of the language barrier on Cándido and América. Their lack of English isolates them from the mainstream American society.

## WHERE?

The play is set in Southern California, in an area west of Los Angeles. Look for the place called Topanga. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topanga, California](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topanga,_California). You may also find photos of the Topanga National Park in the internet. Cándido, América and José are all camping here, but in separate places. The warm climate in California makes it possible to live outside for many months of the year. The National Park is very big, Delaney loves to go hiking there.

To get into the U.S.A Cándido and América had to cross the border between Mexico and California. Can you imagine what this would be like? Have a look at some of these photos. It is difficult for people like Cándido and América to cross the border into the U.S.A but it is also very difficult for them to re-enter Mexico if they decide that they want to go back home.

You may also like to read a related article "Auf der richtigen Seite," which was written by a journalist who lives in Berlin, Philipp Lichterbeck.

<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/geschichte/auf-der-richtigen-seite/1722530.html>

Kyra and Delaney live in a modern housing estate. It's a very different living situation to what we European city dwellers know. They have more space. The community, in which Delaney and Kyra live, tries to protect itself from unwanted outside elements. First they build a guarded gate. To enter the housing estate you would have to show your identity card to a guard. Can you imagine that? This irritates Delaney.

When the gate doesn't succeed in keeping the "unwanted elements" out, they build a wall, 2.2 meters high, around the entire housing estate. Kyra and Delaney live on the edge of the estate. Their block of land opens out into the countryside but they have a fence. When the coyotes jump the fence and take one of the dogs they build a taller fence. In our play we have a scene in which Cándido makes Kyra's fence higher. (You can find this scene at the end of this document.)

## WHAT HAPPENS IN THE PLAY?

América and Cándido illegally cross the border into the U.S.A. They set up camp in a canyon in Topanga National Park, near Los Angeles. They want to work and start a new life. They have no Green Card, hardly any cash and hardly any food. They hope that their



situation will improve. Cándido is hit by a car. Delaney Mossbacher, the driver of the car, doesn't report the accident to the police. Delaney tries to forget about the accident, but it haunts him. Cándido is badly injured and cannot work. He doesn't want América to work but she must. América finds a low paid cleaning job. She and her colleague Mary have to use toxic cleaning liquid. América is robbed of her earnings and raped by José. She doesn't tell Cándido what happened. He orders her to stay in the camp and, having physically recovered from his accident, tries to find work himself.

Delaney lives in a modern housing estate on the western outskirts of Los Angeles with his wife Kyra and Kyra's son Jordan. There are plans to install a guarded gate at the entrance of their housing estate to keep out unwanted people. Delaney doesn't want this gate, but Kyra and the majority of the people living in the housing estate do. Delaney interrupts the community meeting about the gate, to announce that Kyra's beloved pet dog has been "taken" by a coyote and that the residents shouldn't be feeding the coyotes. Delaney hikes in the National Park, he's angry that people are camping in the National Park and leaving their rubbish lying around. He meets José. He returns from his hike to find that his car has been stolen.

Cándido recovers and finds work. He digs holes and makes Kyra's back fence higher to keep the coyotes out. Cándido is happy to be earning money but his boss prefers to work with a legal Mexican, one with a green card, and Cándido loses his job. Frustrated, angry and feeling as if the whole world is against him, Cándido gets drunk. América, still depressed after the rape and bored with staying at the camp persuades Cándido to take her to the big city. They go, but are robbed of their precious savings. Cándido is forced to scavenge in rubbish bins to find food.

The community decide that a gate at the entrance of the housing estate is not enough security. They want a high wall to be built around the whole estate. Kyra is in favour of the wall, Delaney is against it. Kyra is scared of intruders. Delaney feels locked in but he doesn't have the courage to fight against the wall. He doesn't want to risk his relationship with Kyra. They prepare for Thanksgiving celebrations. Kyra has managed to get rid of the Mexicans who were standing on street corners, looking for work, and thereby spoiling the image of a "nice" neighbourhood.

Cándido is given a turkey at the supermarket by two complete strangers. He can't believe his luck. His hopes are raised and he returns to celebrate with América at their camp. The fire, on which Cándido wants to roast the turkey, gets out of control and starts a huge bushfire. Cándido and América have to flee for their life.

As a result of the bushfire, the community Thanksgiving party comes to a sudden end. Delaney, Kyra and the whole community have to evacuate their houses. The danger is averted however. None of the homes on the housing estate are burned down. Delaney sees José and blames him for starting the fire. One of the houses outside the gated community however, which Kyra was trying to sell, the Da Ros place, is burned down. This was her dream house. Kyra's motivation for selling houses fades. It's hard to sell houses in an area which has been affected by bushfires.

Cándido and América flee from the fire and hide in a garage inside the gated, walled-in community. There, América gives birth to her daughter, Socorro. Soon afterwards they leave here. Cándido constructs a shelter for his family in the hills in the vicinity of the housing estate. He climbs the newly built wall to steal food and material for the shack. The



baby is blind, perhaps as a result of the rape, or the poisonous fumes that América inhaled whilst working.

Graffiti appears on the new housing estate wall. Delaney sets up security cameras to catch the graffiti culprits. He suspects José, but when one of the photos reveals the face of Cándido, Delaney then suspects Cándido of starting the fire. He sees Cándido one day on the street, tries to stop him, but Cándido runs away. Armed with a gun, Delaney hunts Cándido down and confronts him and his family in their shack. He wants to bring Cándido to the police. Suddenly there's a landslide. Everyone's life is endangered. Socorro dies, swept away by the flood waters. Cándido and América manage to survive and ironically Cándido saves Delaney's life.

## LIFESTYLE

There is a huge contrast between the lifestyle of the two couples. Kyra and Delaney live in a beautiful modern house with a swimming pool, garden and garage. They have two cars. They always drive to where they are going. They eat very well and are very aware about what it is they are eating.

Delaney stays at home and earns some money with his writing but Kyra is the main breadwinner. Both Kyra and Delaney are happy with this situation. We get the impression that they are both "well educated" and they have probably been to University.

Cándido and América on the other hand have no house. Think of what this means, no running water, no electricity, no refrigerator, no C.D. player etc. Think of how different your day would be if you had to live without these things.

They are happy to eat whatever they can afford and are forced sometimes to eat what the rich Americans throw away.

They have no car, not even a bicycle. They either walk or catch buses.

They do not have a University education. We don't know how long they went to school but we can presume they didn't go to 12<sup>th</sup> year.

When they work they earn very little. \$ 3.25 an hour would be equivalent to roughly € 3.

## RELATED SONGS

If you're a music fan you may like to listen to some songs about themes in the book.

Related songs: "I need a dollar": How to make it in America, Aloie Blacc. (Youtube)

"In your Hand": Charlie Winston (Youtube)

"Walls": Tommy Emmanuel (Youtube)

We don't use these songs in the show. We have our own original music.

## THE TORTILLA CURTAIN

Based on the T. C. Boyle novel.

Text: Peter Scollin, Director: Anja Scollin, Assistant Director: Fingal Pollock



Actors: Louise Watts, Andrea Pani Laura, Kenneth Phillips, Peter Scollin

Music und Sound: Leo Auri

Set: Konrad Schaller

Costumes: Imke Sturm

Props: Emily Scollin

Lights: Marius Adam

Video-Images: Jörg Metzner

If you have managed to read and work through all of this you will be very well prepared for our play. We hope you enjoy it. You can send us feedback about the play once you have seen it: [mail@platypus-theater.de](mailto:mail@platypus-theater.de)

*Peter Scollin and the Platypus Team*



Here is a scene to try out in the classroom

### **CÁNDIDO WORKS FOR KYRA**

*Enter Cándido. Both facing audience. They don't speak with each other. They say their thoughts out loud.*

Cándido I've been waiting here for hours.

Kyra They're all Mexicans.

Cándido I just want work.

Kyra There's too many of them.

Cándido There's no work in Mexico.

Kyra They're death for business.

Cándido In Mexico only the rich have enough to eat.

Kyra They breed like rabbits.

Cándido Is it a crime to want to work?

Kyra My customers see these people, it troubles their consciences.

Cándido These gringos have so much and we have so little.

Kyra Poverty exists but who wants to see it?

Cándido I hate the thought of America working.

Kyra It makes me angry.

Cándido It's me who should be working not America.

Kyra It's like an invasion.

Cándido I don't want to be begging.

Kyra Ironically, it was great for business at first. When the Hispanics moved into L.A. city, the rich people moved out, they bought houses here. I sold a lot of property in this area.

Cándido I'll do any job.

Kyra Now the Mexicans are living here too, in seedy little flats, forming ghettos, they're dragging the prices down.

Cándido *plays seeing Lopez*



Ah, Senor Lopez, Buenos dias. Trabajo? Hoy Dia? Serio? Cinque dolares? Yes of course I want a job. I can work just as long as you like Mr. Lopez. You know me, I'm a workhorse.

Kyra Ah Mr. Lopez, this is the guy you organized, thank you.

Cándido The house has white walls, an orange tiled roof, a double garage, a swimming pool and there's a dog running around in the big garden.

Kyra He's limping.

Cándido I'm thinking about the house that América and I can have.

Kyra His face is bruised.

Cándido I don't need a house as big as this, just a shelter.

Kyra Could this be the guy Delaney ran over?

Cándido The lady's staring at me, I wonder what she's thinking.

Kyra Suddenly I feel so empty.

Cándido She's probably thinking she's better go and lock up her doors and windows.

Kyra I can't talk to him. What would I say? Hey, do you want to buy a house? Did you get hit by a car? My husband was driving that car.

Cándido I'm digging new holes for the fence posts.

Kyra The fence is not high enough.

Cándido I love working.

Kyra The coyotes can get over it, the snakes can get under it. I don't want to lose another dog or cat.

Cándido I'm earning money.

Kyra I've got to check on the Da Ros place, make sure everything's okay.  
*exit*

Cándido I dig the holes and I make the fence. After this Mr. Lopez picks me up and takes me to a different house. I paint the walls. I finish at ten o'clock. I'm thinking of América, I love her. I want to buy her a present but the shops are closed. I walk home. I look up at the stars. I like living outside. It'll be okay until the rains come. I don't want to live in the city, it's dirty and dangerous.