

## 44 Theater from the Heart



A common piece of advice offered to writers is "Write what you know about." Playwright Luis Valdez followed this advice to create important dramas about the Mexican-American community that he grew up in.

Valdez, the son of migrant workers, began writing plays in college. Soon after graduating in 1964 he founded a group called El Teatro Campesino, of which he became resident playwright, and originally wrote and helped the group produce brief, one-act plays about the need for a farm workers' union. These short plays, known as *actos*, employed comedy and farce to drive home political points.

Soon, however, El Teatro Campesino broadened its literary and political base. Valdez wanted to dramatize the entire Mexican American experience, and he wanted to approach it from many perspectives. The first play he authored that reflected this new mindset was *Dark Root of a Scream*. Its setting is a wake for a Chicano who had fought unwillingly in the Vietnam War. *Bernabé*, another play from this period, portrays the earth symbolically as a woman who supported the troops during the Mexican Revolution. Valdez labeled both of these plays *mitos*, or myths; their general purpose was to stand back and take a long view of Chicano viewpoints in areas like art, religion, and science. Valdez also began developing dramas he called *corridos*, in which traditional Mexican ballads were sung on stage while actors acted out their meaning.

Valdez continues to write and to find new ways to present Chicano life on the stage. In two well-known works—*The Tent of the Underdogs*, about the struggles of a Mexican immigrant, and *Zoot Suit*, based on the true story of a 1942 murder trial in Los Angeles—he combined elements of *actos*, *mitos*, and *corridos* to create dramas of both artistic strength and strong political message.

Main Idea

1

Mark the *main idea*

Answer

Score

☒ M

15

Mark the statement that is *too broad*

☐ B

5

Mark the statement that is *too narrow*

☐ N

5

a. Luis Valdez's plays present various aspects of Chicano life.

☐

\_\_\_\_\_

b. Luis Valdez has written many plays over the years.

☐

\_\_\_\_\_

c. An *acto* is a short, farcical play.

☐

\_\_\_\_\_

what  
where  
where - our society

Score 15 points for each correct answer.

Score

Subject Matter 2 This passage is mostly about

- ☐ a. Luis Valdez's life.
- ☐ b. features of Luis Valdez's plays.
- ☐ c. El Teatro Campesino.
- ☐ d. the Mexican-American experience.

Supporting Details 3 In this passage a *mito* is a

- ☐ a. foolish character in a play.
- ☐ b. type of play.
- ☐ c. young, inexperienced playwright.
- ☐ d. farm worker.

Conclusion 4 Valdez was interested in

- ☐ a. getting justice for wrongs done to him.
- ☐ b. returning to work in the fields.
- ☐ c. producing plays by various Chicano writers.
- ☐ d. creating dramas with new and unique elements.

Clarifying Devices 5 The expression *drive home* in the second paragraph is used to mean

- ☐ a. get in a car and travel.
- ☐ b. return to Mexico.
- ☐ c. strongly emphasize.
- ☐ d. hit with a hammer.

Vocabulary in Context 6 In this passage base means

- ☐ a. having little value.
- ☐ b. a low singing voice.
- ☐ c. quarreled over.
- ☐ d. supporting part or foundation.

Add your scores for questions 1-6. Enter the total here and on the graph on page 215.

Total  
Score