

# La Maleta de Maebelle (Maebelle's Suitcase)

Created by

**Glass Half Full Theatre from Austin, Texas**

In this presentation, you'll:

- Experience a **bilingual adaptation** of the picture book "Maebelle's Suitcase" by Tricia Tusa.
- Learn about **migration**, which is when people and animals make a long journey to a new home.
- Follow different characters as they prepare for a big event in their town: a **hat-making contest** that only happens once a year.
- Examine the way the art form of **hatmaking**, or millinery, can be used as a form of self-expression.
- Think about how the **things** we see and use every day are important and make our lives special.
- You'll see how people use **social rules**, called social contracts, to get along even when they don't always agree. \*You'll see how the characters in the play use these rules to be respectful and stay friends, even when they have different ideas.

## Program Description:

A bilingual adaptation of the celebrated & beloved Reading Rainbow picture book Maebelle's Suitcase by Tricia Tusa.

Maebelle lives in her treehouse and is an incredible hat maker. She's been working hard ahead of the town's annual hat contest when she befriends Binkle, a bird with a migration dilemma. He's trying to carry too much on his flight south for the winter! As Maebelle generously offers her cherished suitcase from her own migration from Colombia, they delve into profound reflections on the significance of our possessions and memories. Through laughter and tears, Maebelle and Binkle help each other discover the beauty of remembrance and the liberating power of letting go.

## Characters:

In the play, puppets represent most of the humans and all of the birds.

Maebelle	an Afro-Colombian woman, born in the 1900s, who lives in a treehouse and makes hats.
Binkle	a bird who's trying to fly south to Colombia on his migration
Blanche	a white lady, wearing pointy glasses and a hummingbird on her wide-brimmed hat
Sofia	a Latina with curly red hair with a pink hat and blue ribbon.
Dorothy	a white lady with a long face and long nose, in an orange hat with a sunflower.
Rosa	an Afro-Latina with graying coiled hair and red roses on her hat.
Various birds from Mexico, Peru, and Colombia.	

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## **THE STUDY GUIDE:**

### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:**

- Fine Arts:  
Performance, Puppetry, Music (including Colombian Flute and traditional Colombian music)
- Language Arts:  
Adapting a Book into a Play, Spanish, English, Bilingualism, Translanguaging, Reading, Writing
- Science/Social Studies:  
Animal Migration, Human migration, Latine heritage
- Social/Emotional Learning / Character Development:  
Bravery, Resilience, Imagination, believing in yourself, and helping others. Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self Management, and Relationship Skills.

### **COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE BOOK AND THE PLAY:**

The artistic team at Glass Half Full Theatre was inspired by the story, drawings, and the characters in the book by Tricia Tusa. Our company values sharing stories in a blend of Spanish and English and because the original book doesn't specifically say where Maebelle was from, we saw an opportunity to explore more about this interesting character and imagine where she might be from. We picked Colombia (a Spanish-speaking country in South America) because it is a known destination for migrating birds, it has a style of hat that is famous around the world, and because of the many types of music that can be found in the different parts of that country. We were also very interested in the other ladies in the book who participate in the hat contest (who only appear on one page!) and see what they might learn from Maebelle and Binkle's story.

## SCIENCE CONNECTIONS:

### MIGRATION

When birds migrate, they are flying between their summer home and their winter homes. They leave places that have cold winters, and fly off to warmer places to spend the winters. They usually return in the springtime. But when people migrate, they are usually leaving one home forever and moving to a place that is brand new to them. They might migrate in search of better jobs or opportunities, or because they are experiencing difficulties in the place they have been living.

In the play, Maebelle explains that her family left Colombia because of a hurricane that destroyed their home. As the planet experiences changes in climate, hurricanes are becoming more frequent. Some people migrate because of climate-related issues like hurricanes or changes in rainfall patterns (not enough rain, or too much all at once).

#### Discussion Questions:

Binkle wants to fly south for the winter to Colombia, but he doesn't want to part with his favorite things, and he can't carry them with him.

- What would you have a hard time leaving behind?
- If you flew away for the winter, where would you go? Why?

## SOCIAL SCIENCE CONNECTIONS:

### COLOMBIA

A Spanish-speaking nation in the north part of South America. It touches the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, and is to Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador. Colombia is home to more kinds of birds than any other country in the world, including many that migrate to and from the United States.



Map of Colombia: Florida is the pink finger pointing off the bottom of the US straight through Cuba at Colombia. Trace the flock of white birds with your finger to see that path Binkle will take to Colombia.

## CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

### MUSIC

In the play, Maebelle talks about her father, who was an Afro-Colombian musician from Palenque on the northern (Caribbean) coast. He traveled all over Colombia playing his songs and learning the different styles of music that you hear in the show. Colombia is known as the "land of a thousand rhythms" because its music varies by region and is influenced by Indigenous, African, and Spanish cultures. The types of music in the show include Ranchera, Vallenato, and Cumbia.

In the play, Maebelle is reminded how to make a sombrero vueltiao when she remembers the song her father would play about how her mother made hats. The song was written by Kiko Villamizar in Spanish for the play:

*Trabaja la hoja palma, y hazlo con alegría.  
Que yo sigo dando vueltas, y si no, acabáis la vida.  
Nadie está delante y nadie está atrás.  
Nadie es más importante, todos tienen su lugar.  
Y siempre damos vueltas la vida es como un vueltiao  
Y nadie está adelante, todos estamos a lado  
Pero nadie está atrás porque todos estamos a lado*

Here is the English translation we came up with for this study guide. Sometimes meanings change when words are translated from one language to another. Do you note any differences? If you are bilingual, can you think of other words or phrases that could work?

*Work the palm leaves, and do it with joy  
I keep on going round and round, because if you stop, well, that's the end  
Nobody is out in front, and nobody is falling behind.  
Nobody is more important than anyone else, everyone has their own place.  
We're always making circles, life is always turning  
Nobody is ahead; we are all side-by-side  
Nobody is behind, we are all side-by-side-by side.*

### BINKLE'S VOICE (The Gaita, a type of Colombian Flute)

In the play, unlike in the book, Binkle doesn't speak in words. Instead, his voice is performed by Kiko Villamizar, who plays a special flute called a gaita. The Colombian gaita is an ancestral instrument that comes from the Cuna, Kogui and Zenue Indians that have habited the northern coast of Colombia for hundreds of years. The gaita is used to imitate the sounds of birds and nature. Kiko recorded many different chirps and tweets to make all of Binkle's dialogue.

Link to: [Playwrights and Composer talk about making La Maleta de Maebelle](#)

## LANGUAGE

This play is bilingual, which means that there are words in English and Spanish.

### SPANISH VOCABULARY WORDS

Ruana (ROO-ah-na)

a kind of clothing similar to a shawl or poncho, that is worn over the shoulders to keep warm.

Sombrero Vueltiao (Sohm-BRER-oh bwehl-TEE-ah-oh)

A traditional Colombian hat made of grasses woven in a circle pattern, usually striped black and cream-colored.

Caña flecha (CAH-nyah FLEH-chah)

A kind of long wild grass that grows in Colombia. It is used to weave hats and baskets.

Guacharaca (wah-chah-RAH-cah)

A percussion instrument that imitates the call of the Guacharaca bird. It is played by scraping a wired fork along the ridged (bumpy) wooden tube to make a scratching sound.

Balero de copa (bah-LEH-roh deh COH-pah)

A toy, shaped like a stick with a cup on top, attached to a ball on a string.

### DICHOS (DEE-chos)

A dicho is a saying or proverb. It is a short sentence that offers a wise message or lesson about life. They are often passed down from grandparents and parents to children. Dichos are very important in Latino culture and you hear them often in Colombia. Maebelle says several dichos in the play: Try to interpret what they mean:

1. "A buen entendedor, pocas palabras bastan." - A good listener needs few words.
2. "El viajero se conoce por la maleta." - You can tell who the traveler is; they're the one with the suitcase.
3. Nadie sabe para quién trabaja" – You never know who you're really working for.

Have you learned any dichos or sayings from your culture?

### VOCABULARY

In Maebelle's town, everyone knows some English, but only some of her neighbors speak Spanish. Rosa is Afro-Caribbean and Sofia is Mexican. They grew up speaking Spanish, and have learned English, which makes them bilingual. Dorothy and Blanche grew up speaking only English, but Blanche is learning Spanish and trying to become bilingual. She practices the following Spanish words and phrases with Maebelle. Find the English translation for each Spanish word or phrase and trace a line between them.

CAFECITO

birds

HASTA LUEGO

hammock

HAMACA

supermarket

SUPERMERCADO

See you soon

PÁJAROS

See You then

HASTA LA VISTA

coffee

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## PROCESSING THE PLAY:

- Binkle is having a hard time leaving on his migration. What is making his flight so hard?
- What memories does Maebelle share about her home in Colombia? How do the objects she brought with her from Colombia help her to remember?
- Why did Maebelle decide to put her finished yellow hat away and start over to make a new hat from Binkle's treasures?
- The Hat Contest has three rules: Don't be too big, Don't be too weird, and Don't be late. Why did the contestants decide to change the rules for next year's contest?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION:

- Are there rules you have to follow that you'd like to change? Would your changes make things more or less fair for others?
- Have you ever joined a contest simply to participate? Would you have more or less fun if you knew there wasn't a first, second, third place?
- Both Maebelle and Binkle had to leave things behind in order to complete their journey. What would you have a hard time leaving behind?

## ACTIVITIES:

### SOMBREROS VUELTIAOS ("Turned" Hats)

Maebelle's mother was a hat-maker from the Zenu people from Tuchín in the northern part of Colombia, who are famous for the special hats they make. They are called sombreros vueltiaos, which means "turned hats." Can you guess why? The hats are made by weaving caña flecha (long grasses) into braids, and then turning the hat to wrap the braided grasses in circles to make a hat shape. As Maebelle describes in the play, it takes many weeks to make just one sombrero vueltiao. The hats are made from natural materials that can be found nearby, such as wild grasses called caña flecha, which are soaked in rainwater and mud before being left in the sunshine before the hats are woven, looped, and sewn together.

### HANDS ON PROJECT

To make a hat out of materials that you might have near you, collect some construction paper\*, clear tape, and scissors. You need about 6 pieces of construction paper per hat, preferably of at least two colors.

To make the "Crown" (the part of the hat that wraps around your head):

1. Cut the paper into long strips of at least two different colors.
2. Tape the strips together end to end.
3. Find the circumference of your head by wrapping the strip around it, and cut the strip to that size.
4. Tape one end of the strip to the other end so it can sit on your head like a crown.
5. Take it off your head, and add another strip along the top of the first strip and tape them together. Continue wrapping and taping until you have finished the crown of the hat.
6. Cut and tape strips along the top of the hat so the sun won't burn the top of your head.

To make the “Brim” (the flat part of the hat that shades your face) and attach it to the Crown.

7. Lay two pieces of construction paper side by side and tape the long ends together.
8. Draw as big a circle as will fit inside the edges of the paper and cut it out.
9. Lay the crown of your hat down in the middle of the circle and trace the outline onto your circle.
10. Cut out the inside circle, and tape the crown of your hat onto the brim of your hat.
11. Decorate the brim with your remaining strips of construction paper.

\*To make this project ZERO WASTE, use recycled paper, newspaper, old magazines, or cardboard from shipping boxes.

### **DRAW A PICTURE**

Both Maebelle and Binkle had to leave things behind in order to complete their journey. What would you have a hard time leaving behind? Draw your object(s)/treasure(s) below! Share with a friend.

### **DESIGN YOUR OWN SOMBRERO VUELTIAO**

What parts of your culture can you add to make it your own?

