

Center for Puerto Rican Studies  
Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassador Program

Course 1: Part 1- *AmeRican Poet TATO LAVIERA*  
Teaching Guide

*AmeRican Poet TATO LAVIERA* is a 57 minute documentary that explores the life and legacy of Jesus Abraham “Tato” Laviera with an emphasis on his deep roots in community activism. Tato was a renowned Nuyorican poet and playwright and his creative works, both published as well as theatrical productions, explore the positives and protests of bi-culturalism and the trans-cultural lives of Puerto Ricans living in the continental U.S.. Tato’s art and story is brought to life through words, images, and music as we learn about Tato through his own words and from the testimonials of people who worked with, admired, and celebrated him.

The documentary is available at <https://drive.google.com/open?id=16r544-M679TgTAHDVoGHHqUAP4GQYhqV>

Two essential questions guide this teaching guide:

- 1) How does studying the work of Tato Laviera help us to better understand the Puerto Rican community in the United States?
- 2) What does the work of Tato Laviera question, convey, and celebrate?

This guide contains:

- Discussion Questions
- Centro Teaching Resources
- Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Social Studies
- Selected Resources

**Discussion Questions**



### **While Viewing *AmeRican Poet TATO LAVIERA***

1. Instruct the student to take notes on the images, the music, and who speaks during the first 90 seconds of the documentary. Then, have a discussion based on the following questions:
  - How does the introduction set the tone for the documentary?
  - What do the students expect from this documentary?
2. Share some of the topics that will be touched upon in the documentary. Ask the students to pick one of the following topics and to take notes on this topic during their viewing of the documentary:

process

colorism/racism

Tato Laviera

spanglish

community organizing

After viewing the documentary invite the students to share their thoughts on how their topic was addressed. Also, have the students share aspects about their topic that they wish had been discussed or needs further exploration.

### **After Viewing *AmeRican Poet TATO LAVIERA***

1. What does Tato try to accomplish with his poetry? Why?
2. What role does music play in Tato's work?
3. What was the importance of the poem *AmeRícan*? What does it affirm?
4. Why was Tato so successful as a playwright?
5. What was the name of the movement that Tato helped to found? What did this movement stand for? What were the two main issues that this movement focused on?
6. Why did Tato pushed to designate the Puerto Rican neighborhood in the Lower East Side as *Loisaida*? What did this result in?
7. Who were two poets that strongly influenced Tato?
8. Who was Clemente Soto Vález? Why was he important to Tato and his work?
9. Who was Jorge Brandon "The Coco That Talks"? Tato called Jorge Brandon a *declamador* and a *troubadour* and described him as someone who practices

- “community declamation.” What does this mean? Why was he important to Tato and his work? How did Brandon influence Nuyorican poets and poetry?
10. Who discovered Tato at Rutgers University? What did this person hire Tato to do?
  11. What style does Tato use in the poem “Lady Liberty”? Why?
  12. What is a *latero*? Why did Tato Laviera write the play “The King of Cans”? What does “20th Century slave” mean?
  13. What examples does Tato give of how he dealt with his experience as being a Black Puerto Rican?
  14. Why was the relationship between Tato and Juan Flores important?
  15. How did Tato describe his different collections of poetry? How do these books show his development as a poet?
  16. What is Spanglish? What is the importance of Spanglish? What was Tato’s relationship with the development of Spanglish? How did Tato use Spanglish? Why is this important?

## **Activities**

### **Many Voices**

A large number of people were interviewed for this documentary. Invite the students to research one of the people interviewed and share with the class this person's background. Then, ask the students to explain why they believe this person’s voice was used for a documentary on Tato Laviera and how this person helps to contextualize Tato’s life and work?

### **Papote**

Have the students read the poem **Even then He Knew**. (a copy of the poem is included at the end of this module). As a class discuss the poem, who Papote is, and what Papote represents. Have a conversation on the line:

- “so he decided to go nowhere.”

Then ask students to research the poet Jesús Papoleto Meléndez and write an essay about the poem **Even then He Knew** or the poet Jesús Papoleto Meléndez.

### **A Taste of Tato**

Have the students select and read one of Tato's poem listed below.

#### **lady liberty**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58195/lady-liberty>

#### **latero story**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58196/latero-story>

#### **Spanglish**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58198/spanglish>

#### **the new rumbón**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58194/the-new-rumbon>

Then, as a class, discuss the following:

- Why is this a poem?
- What is the poem about?
- Why do I like / dislike this poem?
- What could be added / taken away from this poem?

### **A Poem for Tato**

Tato wrote a number of poems celebration his personal heroes. Have the student watch and listen to a poem written by either La Bruja or Noel Quiñones, who were featured in the documentary, celebrating Tato's work:

La Bruja: [a tribute to tato laviera by la bruja](https://youtu.be/RqKUh5ABG0w)

<https://youtu.be/RqKUh5ABG0w>

Noel Quiñones - "For Tato Laviera (Bomba)

<https://youtu.be/2Mgo4p6CPsw>

Then invite the students to write a poem for or about Tato. Encourage them to share their work with the class

### **Centro Teaching Resources**

#### **The Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series**

<http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/research-education/education/puerto-rican-heritage-poster-series>

#### **Timeline of Puerto Rican History Booklet**

The Centro Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series documents the history of Puerto Rican migration and the experiences and contributions of Puerto Ricans to U.S. society.  
[centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/events\\_2015/ChronologicBrochure\\_2015.pdf](http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/events_2015/ChronologicBrochure_2015.pdf)

#### **Tato Laviera Tribute**

<http://centroweb.hunter.cuny.edu/about/events/tato-laviera-tribute>

#### **The Legacy of Tato Laviera: The AmeRícan Poet**

<https://youtu.be/LctiMgOYjQ0>

A conversation on the legacy of beloved Nuyorican poet Tato Laviera for the April 29 launch of Centro's newest publication *The AmeRícan Poet: Essays on the Work of Tato Laviera*, edited by Stephanie Alvarez and William Luis. This conversation features some of the most accomplished writers in the field, who help shine new light on Laviera's literary and social importance

#### **Famed Nuyorican Poet's Collection in Centro Archives**

Offer students choices to learn more about the life and accomplishments of Tato Laviera through exposure to a variety of print and visual texts that form part of the Tato Laviera papers. Information about Tato's collection can be found at:

<http://centroweb.hunter.cuny.edu/about/centro-news/famed-nuyorican-poets-collection>

Finding Aid for the Tato Laviera Papers can be found at:

<https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/digitalarchive/index.php/Detail/collections/501>

## **Guide to the Tato Laviera Papers - Centro de Estudios ...**

### **CENTRO Journal**

Aparicio, Francis R. "Tato Laviera y Alurista: hacia una poética bilingüe." Centro Journal Volume II - no. 3 (Spring 1988): 7-15

"!¿Qué. Qué?! Transculturación and Tato Laviera's Spanglish poetics"

Centro Journal, Vol.XVIII, no. 2, fall, 2006, pp. 25-47

<https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/377/37718202.pdf>

### **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)**

For K-12 teachers, this teaching guide responds to the following Common Core State Standards (CCSS):

Craft and Structure:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.5

Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

### **Selected Sources**

#### **Section I: Texts by Tato Laviera**

Laviera, T. (2017). *Mayanito's New Friends / Los nuevo amigos de Mayanito*. Houston: Piñata Books.

Laviera, T. (2014). *Bendición: The Complete Poetry of Tato Laviera*. Introduction by Laura Lomas. Preface by Nicolás Kanellos. Houston: Arte Público Press.

Laviera, T. (2008-2009). *Mixturao and Other Poems*. Houston: Arte Público Press.

Laviera, T. (1999). *AmeRican*. Houston: Arte Público Press.

Laviera, T. (1988). *Mainstream Ethic (ética corriente)*. Houston: Arte Público Press.

Laviera, T. (1985). *Enclave*. Houston: Arte Público Press.

Laviera, T. (1979). *La Carreta Made a U-Turn*. Houston: Arte Público Press.

## Section II: Web-based & Audiovisual Resources on Tato Laviera

Center for Puerto Rican Studies (Producer). (2018). *AmeRican Poet TATO LAVIERA* [DVD]. Available from <http://hunter.cuny.edu/centropr>

“Guide to the Tato Laviera Papers.” Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College.

<https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/digitalarchive/index.php/Detail/collections/501>

Latino Rebels. “An Interview with Tato Laviera, the King of Nuyorican Poetical Migrations.” Posted on July 11, 2012. <http://www.latinorebels.com/2012/07/11/an-interview-with-tato-laviera-the-king-of-nuyorican-poetical-migrations/>.

Online description of the Tato Laviera

Papers <http://centroweb.hunter.cuny.edu/about/centro-news/famed-nuyorican-poets-collection>

Poetry Out Loud

<https://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/poets/detail/tato-laviera>

## Section III: Print Sources on Tato Laviera’s Life and Work

Bird-Soto, Nancy. “The Playful “i” in Tato Laviera’s Poetry: An *Arte Poética*.” *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*. Midwest Modern Language Association v. 46, Núm. 1, (spring 2013) pp. 1-14

González, David. (2013). "Poet Spans Two Worlds, but Has a Home in Neither." *The New York Times*. Published: November 5

González, David. (2010). "Tato Laviera, 63, Poet of Nuyorican School.." *The New York Times*. Published: February 12

#### Section IV: Archival Materials on Tato Laviera

CENTRO Library and Archives, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY. The Tato Laviera Papers.

Laviera, Tato. (1950). *Tato Laviera Papers*. (Mixed materials). Center for Puerto Rican Studies.

#### **CDs**

Bronx Music Heritage Center, Declamadores: Sery Colón, Prisionera, Tato Laviera, 2012 December 1 [15 audio tracks]

*King of Cans*, Red Carpet Theatre Rehearsals, George Malave, 2012 [51 photographs]

#### **DVDs**

*Eyes of the Storm*, National Nurses United RN Response Network, 2011 [12 min.]

*From Zero to 60 at Warped Speed: A Newyoric Dream*, Ray Serrano, 2010 June [100 min.]

*The King of Cans*, Roberto Cricket Productions, 2012 July 29 [94 min.]

Local 237 Hispanic Heritage Celebration: Tato Laviera, Anderson Productions, 2008, September 25

University of Texas - Pan American, "Writing for Performance," Tato Laviera and Emmy Pérez, 2009 spring

*Visiones* #14, "Poetry in Motion: Tato Laviera" 1981 June 20

Teaching resources were compiled by Raquel M. Ortiz, PhD on 2/28/19.

