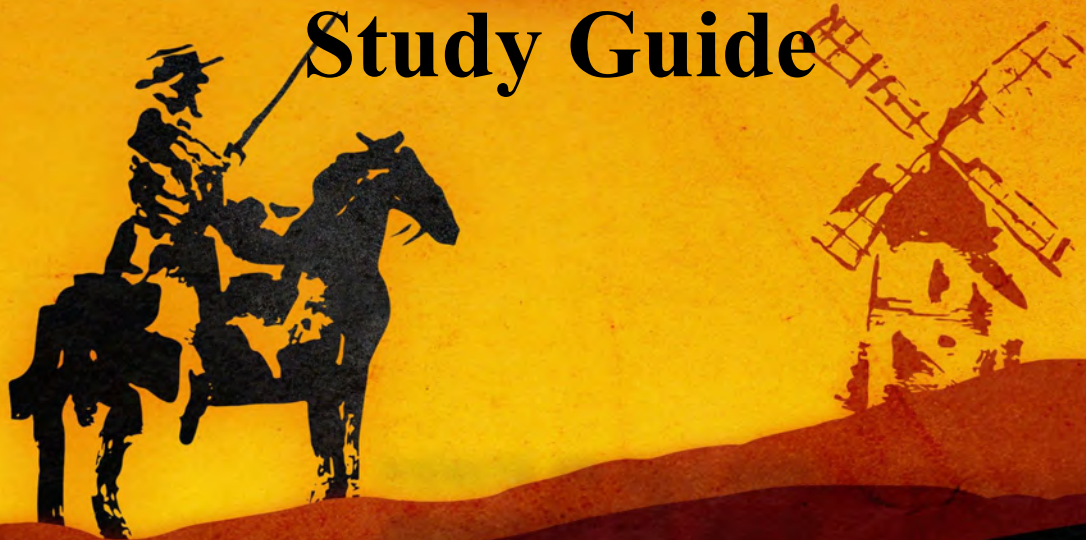


 **MUSICAL THEATRE WEST**

MAN LA OF LA MANCHA

Study Guide



February 2026, at the Carpenter Performing Arts Center



Warning: This story presents themes of domestic violence. If you or a loved one is experiencing violence, please call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or text "START" to 88788 for immediate support.



Synopsis

(Song titles are in bold)

This story is set in Seville, Spain, at the end of the 16th century (**Overture**). Tax collector, soldier, and author Miguel de Cervantes and his squire, Sancho, are cast into the prison common room by the Spanish Inquisition because Cervantes processed the foreclosure on a church for not paying its taxes. The thieves and robbers in the prison are quick to descend upon the new arrivals and ravish their possessions. Cervantes concedes everything but a carefully wrapped package of papers that he begs the prisoners he should be allowed to keep by convincing them that they are of value only to himself (they are his manuscript of *Don Quixote*). The prisoners agree and assist him in dramatizing the fantasies of Cervantes' classic character, Don Quixote (**I, Don Quixote**).

Traveling with his squire, Sancho, the knight-errant tilts at windmills and soon champions an unwilling waitress and prostitute named Aldonza. At an inn, Aldonza and the Muleteers sing of their lives and their relationships (**It's All the Same**).

Quixote sees others as the people they can be so to Quixote's "touched" mind, Aldonza is the fair maiden **Dulcinea**. His kind words and attention inspire Aldonza to see herself as Quixote sees her. She begins to believe in a better way of life.

Meanwhile, Quixote's family and friends are worried about the effect his madness will have on their futures and fortunes (**I'm Only Thinking of Him**). His niece Antonia, the housekeeper, and the local Padre decide to send Antonia's fiancé, Dr. Carrasco, to bring Quixote back to his senses and his home.

Meanwhile, back at the inn, Don Quixote has sent Sancho with a message for Aldonza. In the letter, Quixote asks for a token of her true love. Instead of the customary scarf, Aldonza offers her filthy, torn dishcloth and asks Sancho why he follows this madman. His reply is simple: "**I Really Like Him**." Aldonza leaves and takes a bucket to the well, wondering, "**What Does He Want of Me?**" The Muleteers watch her lustfully as they sing a song to her (**Little Bird, Little Bird**).

The Padre and Dr. Carrasco arrive, hoping to cure Quixote, but the knight will have none of it. Sancho returns with the dishcloth, which Quixote accepts with reverence. A barber enters, singing his **Barber's Song** and encounters the knight. Quixote demands the Barber's brass shaving basin, which he believes to be the **Golden Helmet of Mambrino**. This helmet was believed to make the man who wears it invulnerable to all wounds -if he is noble of heart. The Padre crowns Quixote with the helmet, to which the dishcloth is attached. The Innkeeper agrees to dub Quixote a knight at sunrise. The doctor still wishes to find a cure for

Quixote's madness; the Padre hopes that the cure will not be worse than the disease (**To Each His Dulcinea**).

Aldonza returns and confronts Quixote about his calling her Dulcinea and the other ridiculous things he does. He replies that he only follows his quest to attain "**The Impossible Dream**". Pedro, one of the Muleteers, arrives and is angry because Aldonza has not expressed interest in him. The other Muleteers arrive to join in the fray, and Quixote and Sancho band together to fight against the Muleteers' attempt to torment Aldonza.

Quixote's Dubbing Ceremony takes place, and he becomes known as the **Knight of the Woeful Countenance**. After his dubbing, Quixote leaves, and Aldonza tends to the wounds of the Muleteers from their battle with Quixote and Sancho. But because the Muleteers are embarrassed and furious at losing the battle, they brutally assault her, seeking vengeance and power. When Quixote is forced to return to the inn after all his possessions are stolen, Aldonza bitterly tells him of the crime and her difficult existence (**Aldonza**).

Trumpets sound, and the Knight of Mirrors arrives. It is Dr. Carrasco in disguise, and as Quixote prepares to battle him, Carrasco shows the knight his reflection, "a madman dressed for a masquerade, the clown".

Quixote sees in mirror an old man, not a knight, but just the man that he is, and it breaks his spirit. He is overcome with hopelessness. Sancho tries **A Little Gossip** to lighten the old man's heart. Aldonza arrives and tries to remind him of his **Dulcinea** and his quest, **The Impossible Dream**. His mind stirs, and he tries to stand -"**I, Don Quixote**"- but he falls to the ground. The Padre prays for him (**The Psalm**). Quixote's frail body succumbs in his last moment of triumph.

Moved by his story, the prisoners vote that the tale of *Don Quixote* shall live on. They return the manuscript just as Cervantes is called before the Inquisition (**Finale: The Impossible Dream**).

Content adapted from Cape Fear Regional Theatre



Vocabulary

Tilts at windmills: Fighting imaginary enemies, pursuing futile goals, or wasting energy on a hopeless endeavor. The phrase originates from Miguel de Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*, where the protagonist mistakes windmills for giants and attacks them, a metaphor for engaging in pointless battles against perceived but nonexistent foes.

Foreclosed: A property that has been taken by a lender because the owner failed to make mortgage payments.

Squire: A male attendant (servant). In modern times would be an unpaid assistant.

Quixotism: A form of idealism and delusion which leads to extravagant and absurd undertakings or sacrifices in obedience to a morbidly romantic ideal of duty or honor.

Helmet of Mambrino: A magical and invincibility-granting helmet from the chivalric tales about a Moorish king. The name is used today to evoke the idea of finding extraordinary value in ordinary things.

Muleteers: A person who transports goods using pack animals.

Countenance: A person's face or facial expression.

Knight-errant: A medieval knight wandering in search of chivalrous adventures.

Reverence: Regard or treat with deep respect.



Character List

Man of La Mancha is a “play within a play”-witnessing how characters’ imaginations are altering the truths of their realities and how they view the world. In this case, characters who may be one thing in “reality” are then viewed as someone else in Cervantes’ imagination.

Reality (The Prison of the Spanish Inquisition):

Captain of the Inquisition, Soldiers

Cervantes - A Poet, trained actor, playwright, and tax collector, filled with curiosity and candor. He is imprisoned and awaiting trial by the Spanish Inquisition.

The Governor - Authority among his fellow prisoners, he spearheads Cervantes’ “trial”.

The Duke – Another prisoner, he asks to take charge of Cervantes’ mock trial.

Cervantes’ Manservant – The pragmatic and devoted servant to Cervantes. Also imprisoned for colluding with Cervantes.

The Prisoners - Are enlisted to play characters in the performance of Cervantes’ story.



Imagination (inside the mind of imprisoned Cervantes and the land of La Mancha):

Alonso Quijana/Don Quixote – Quijana, an older country squire disheartened by the cruelty of man, decides to abandon his identity and assume a new one: a chivalrous knight called Don Quixote whose purpose is to right all the wrongs in the world. Cervantes portrays this character.

Sancho Panza – Quixote’s faithful squire, he is portrayed by Cervantes’ manservant.

Aldonza/Dulcinea - a waitress at the Inn, she is tough and suffers no fools. She also works as a prostitute. When Quixote sees her, he falls instantly in love and exclaims, she is his lady, Dulcinea.

The people of the Inn: The Innkeeper, The Innkeeper’s Wife, Fermina, The Barber

Muleteers – They all spend time at the Inn and frequently harass Aldonza.



Quijana’s (Quixote) Old Neighborhood:

Dr. Sansón Carrasco – Antonia’s fiancé, he is self-important and concerned about the embarrassment of marrying into a family with a “lunatic” in it.

Antonia – Alonso Quijana’s niece. She is engaged to Dr. Sansón Carrasco.

Housekeeper – Quijana’s housekeeper of many years, she worries Quixote may return and mistake her for his true love.

The Padre – He has known Quijana all his life. Antonia and the Housekeeper go to him for guidance when Quijana assumes the identity of Quixote.

The Creators of *Man of La Mancha*

Dale Wasserman (Book / Script)

Nov. 2, 1914-Dec. 21, 2008

Dale Wasserman wrote for theatre, television, and film for more than 50 years and is best known for the musical *Man of La Mancha*, a multiple-Tony Award winner. He also wrote the stage play *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, based on Ken Kesey's novel, which has won several Tony Awards. Both shows continue to be produced nationally and internationally with an estimated 300 productions a year.



Mitch Leigh (Music)

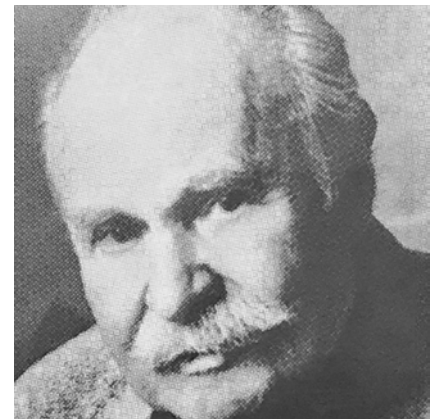
Jan. 30, 1928-March 16, 2014

Mitch Leigh studied at the Yale School of Music. After moving to New York, he organized and founded Music Makers Inc., an enormously successful commercial production house that won every major award for the radio and television commercial music it provided. Leigh wrote everything from jazz to opera and felt at home in almost any musical style. He composed, directed and produced Broadway shows such as *Chu Chem*, *Cry for Us All*, (based on the play *Hogan's Goat*), *Home Sweet Homer*, (starring Yul Brynner), *Saravà*, *Ain't Broadway Grand!*, and *The King and I* (1985 revival starring Yul Brynner).

Joe Darion (Lyrics)

Jan. 30, 1911– June 16, 2001

Joe Darion worked in every field in which words are put to music, from writing pop songs to the concert stage. He wrote songs that have sold tens of millions of records. While Darion also wrote the book and lyrics for the Broadway musical *Shinbone Alley* and lyrics for Broadway's *Ilya, Darling*, *Man of La Mancha* remains his monument piece which earned him a Tony Award for Best Score. Some critics point to this much-revived musical as a precursor to the literature-rooted pop musicals that would arrive in the 1980s (i.e., *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*).



Miguel de Cervantes – Author of *Don Quixote* 1547–1616

Miguel De Cervantes Saavedra was a witness to the decline of Spain's great golden age. He joined the army at age twenty and showed great bravery during his five-year stint. While he was in the army, he experienced a bout of malaria. Despite his sickness, however, he prevailed and threw himself into battle, sustaining two wounds to the chest and a musket ball through his left hand, crippling it.

He returned to Spain at thirty-three and began to write plays, a total of thirty to forty in his lifetime, though almost none have survived. Though his great fame came from his novel *Don Quixote*, written at age fifty-seven, most of his output was for the stage.

He had an affair with a Portuguese woman, who deserted him, and left him with a daughter named Isabel. He married again, this time into money—or so he thought. Soon he had to support his wife, his daughter, his mother, his widowed mother-in-law, and two sisters. During this time, he was also imprisoned twice for owing taxes. The Inquisition tried him under the Purity of Blood laws and, because he had Jewish blood in his family history, he was excommunicated, only barely escaping harsher punishments.

He finished his famous novel, *Don Quixote*, in 1604, and though it was a huge success, he never received any royalties from it. Ten years later, as poor as ever, Cervantes began work on a *Quixote* sequel, but someone else beat him to it and published a sequel of their own. Cervantes' own sequel directly responded to the fake one, incorporating the forgery into its narrative. He died in 1616, a day before William Shakespeare died.

Cervantes' own life was full of contradictions. He had great talent but was unsuccessful and poor most of his life. He was an artist but held ordinary jobs to pay his bills, such as a soldier and a tax collector. Likewise, his character Quixote is also full of contradictions, deeply principled and deeply crazy; an ordinary man, a bad knight, and yet a great philosopher. He can be moved far too easily to anger, and yet treats Aldonza with such profound respect. He tries to make the world a better place, and yet also messes up people's lives everywhere he turns. Clearly, Wasserman's impulse to blend the characters of Cervantes and Quixote was an insightful choice.

Source: Scott Miller (1996), *From Assassins to West Side Story: The Director's Guide to Musical Theatre*. Scott Miller is the founder and artistic director of New Line Theatre, an alternative musical theatre company he established in 1991 in St. Louis, Missouri.



A Brief History of The Spanish Inquisition

excerpt from *Theatre Latte Da. Play guide of Man of La Mancha.*

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, opposition to the Roman Catholic church swept across Europe, and Spain in particular feared being overtaken by Muslims and Jews. Pope Innocent III established a tribunal in 1215 called *The Inquisition* to try people accused of heresy against the church. The word *heresy* comes from the Latin word for *choice*. In other words, choice was not an option when it came to God; you believed what the Pope told you to believe, or else. The Inquisition was originally intended to protect the Church and to protect “civilization” in a world where secular law enforcement was often absent or irrelevant. There was no central authority (other than the Pope) and no single Inquisition, but instead several relatively independent Inquisitions in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, and later in Latin America.

The Pope appointed “inquisitors” who would secretly gather information, opinion, rumor, and gossip, build their case, and then arrest and accuse the alleged heretic. The accused were given two options: to recant or be burned at the stake. These accusations functioned much like the Salem Witch Trials in the 1690s and the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s: if the accused recanted and admitted his heresy, he still had to inform on others, and if the accused would not inform on others, he would be imprisoned anyway and be fined all his possessions. In some cases, people were accused posthumously, and if convicted, their graves would be vandalized and their surviving family would be fined and have to give up all their possessions, left destitute by the accusations.

By the early 1400s, the Inquisition began to fade from public view-except in Spain. During the Middle Ages, Jews had been expelled from most of Europe, and many had settled in Spain, where they lived happily. But by the end of the 1300s, economic and social problems sent Spaniards looking for scapegoats, and they found them in the Jews. Hoping to end the resulting violence and upheaval, the crown declared that all Jews in Spain either had to convert to Christianity or leave the country. Those who did convert could rise to high social, governmental, and religious positions previously off limits to them, but this brought with it resentment and fear from Christians who could not rise as high. Thus, the Inquisition was resurrected.

This Spanish Inquisition, the most feared and brutal of all, reached its height in Spain during the days of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Quite separate from the Inquisition that had come before, this one was controlled not by the Pope, but by Ferdinand, who carried it to extremes, in large part to acquire for himself the great wealth held by the converted Jews of Spain. The Inquisition was used as a cloak for grand larceny as well as political and private revenge, and the inquisitors were known for their fanatical zeal and great cruelties. The Inquisition continued in modified form in Spain until 1820.



Themes in *Man of La Mancha*

The Moral

The primary moral of *Man of La Mancha* is the triumph of idealism, hope, and imagination over cynicism and despair, encapsulated by Don Quixote's "quest" to "reach the unreachable star" and strive for noble ideals even in a harsh reality. The musical encourages audiences to see the best in themselves and others, to live by honor and integrity, and to find beauty and meaning by creating their own reality rather than being defined by it.

The Power of Storytelling and Perspective

- ◆ The prisoners in *Man of La Mancha* attack Cervantes and his servant. To save his manuscript, Cervantes attempts to gain their respect and empathy through the power of storytelling.
- ◆ Cervantes' story is about a man who is disheartened and filled with despair by the world and its human cruelty and suffering. He seeks comfort in novels about times gone by. "The Impossible Dream" (Don Quixote's famous song), embodies the core message: to pursue one's ideals and aspirations with unwavering courage and spirit, no matter how daunting or hopeless the situation.

Imprisonment-Captivity of the Human Condition

- ◆ The story is set in a prison as a constant reminder of captivity, with characters that are trapped both by circumstance and viewpoint. For example, Dr. Carrasco views Quijana (Quixote) as suffering from a "prison of the mind"
- ◆ When Cervantes presents his defense in the form of a story about one man's journey of hope and idealism, he guides the prisoners on a journey to their own psychological freedom.
- ◆ When Aldonza chooses to accept Quixote's vision of her, she is set free from the oppression of her position.

Transforming the World Through Inner Vision

- ◆ Quixote doesn't change the world directly, but transforms it by choosing to see the best in people and situations, influencing those around him to embrace their own potential for good and beauty.
- ◆ The musical suggests that by choosing to live by a personal code of honor and striving for noble goals, individuals can create a more meaningful and virtuous life for themselves, even when the world is full of suffering and cynicism.
- ◆ Quixote believes that one can "know who I am and who I may be if I choose," highlighting the power of self-determination and transformation by adopting ideals.

An Inspiring Call to Action

- ◆ *Man of La Mancha* challenges audiences not to give up on their dreams and to strive for a better world, even when facing immense weariness, sorrow, or opposition.
- ◆ It is a powerful testament to the enduring human spirit, inspiring people to find hope and purpose by living according to their highest ideals.

The Land of La Mancha

Adapted from From A Noise Within's *Man of La Mancha* study guide (2016).

La Mancha is an area in Spain of both historical and agricultural significance. Castile-La Mancha is located south of Madrid and is made up of the provinces of Ciudad Real, Albacete, Cuenca and Toledo.

The name “La Mancha” comes from the old Arabic word ma-ansha (no water). La Mancha is the largest plain in the Iberian Peninsula and is made up of plateaus averaging 500-600 meters in altitude. The region is hydrated by the Guadiana, Javalón, Záncara, Cigüela and Júcar rivers.

Until the 16th century, the easternmost part was called Mancha de Monte-Aragón because of the name of the mountains that were the old border between La Mancha and the Valencia. La Mancha was also divided into Mancha Alta (upper) and Mancha Baja (lower) due to the level and flow of its rivers. La Mancha has always been an important agricultural area. Vineyards abound in Valdepeñas, Manzanares, Ciudad Real and Villarrobledo in Albacete. Other crops are cereals and saffron. Sheep are also raised in this region providing the famous Manchego cheese.

There are two national parks in La Mancha: Las Tablas de Daimiel and Cabañeros; along with one national park: Las Lagunas de Ruidera. The fictional Don Quixote started his last adventures in the Campo de Montiel in the south part of the area.

Some people believe that Cervantes' *Don Quixote* was making fun of the region, as the word ‘mancha’ can also mean a stain on one’s honor. Cervantes’ work could be seen as saying the land was an improper home for a dignified knight. Others think La Mancha is the perfect place for an idealist to originate as it is a very harsh area.

Other notable names of the region include movie director Pedro Almadóvar and painters

Antonio López and Antonio López Torres.



Translation:
Map of the places where Don Quixote wandered and the sites of his adventures.

Class Discussion & Short Writing Activities

Discussion Questions

- ◇ It is interesting to note that the musical adaptation of *Man of La Mancha* was written during the period of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. In fact, it was written in the same year as Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" Speech.
 - ◆ Discuss parallels between this period in American history and the themes that are presented in the musical.
 - ◆ Are any of the themes relevant to what is happening in our county and the world today?
- ◇ *Man of La Mancha* is a "play within a play" where the same actor portrays Cervantes/Don Quixote/Quijana and another actor portrays Prisoner/Aldonza/Dulcinea.
 - ◆ Discuss the choice to have Miguel de Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, tell the story as Don Quixote.
 - ◆ What effect does this choice have on how we view both Don Quixote and Cervantes?
 - ◆ If the musical did not employ this device of casting the same character in multiple roles, how would the structure of the play change? Would the themes alter in any way?
- ◇ Distinguishing between a person's class and a person's worth was a fairly radical idea in Cervantes' time. *Man of La Mancha* addresses the conventional notion that aristocrats are automatically respectable and noble. Aldonza is no more than a kitchen wench, and yet, Quixote sees in her great worth.
 - ◆ How does the social class of each character define their worth in the show?
 - ◆ When is the class system adhered to?
 - ◆ When is it broken?
- ◇ Don Quixote tends to transform everyday people and objects into more dramatic, epic, and fantastic versions of themselves, forcing those around him to choose between adapting to his imaginary world or opposing it. For example, where others see a windmill, he sees a giant. Where others see a wench, he sees a lady...
 - ◆ Is Don Quixote really insane, or is his behavior a conscious choice?
 - ◆ How does Don Quixote's perception of reality affect other characters' perceptions of the world?
- ◇ Don Quixote tries to be the best role model of a knight-errant in an attempt to make his foes face their own views of failure and lead with good character, in this case following the "chivalric code". As presented in the show, this conflict between old and new ideals reaches an absolute impasse.
 - ◆ What is chivalry?
 - ◆ How has chivalry changed since the time of Don Quixote?
 - ◆ What does chivalry mean to you?
- ◇ Why do you think the author chose to have the "frame story" of Miguel de Cervantes acting out the tale of Don Quixote? Why not just tell the story of Don Quixote's adventures?
- ◇ What do you think an "impossible dream" would be in today's world? Can you think of examples of people with "impossible dreams"?

- ◇ Have you ever read a story or seen a television show or movie that changed your opinion about something?
- ◇ Do you think a story can persuade people to change their minds? Why or why not?

Write a Review

The role of a theater critic is to review shows and publish their opinions.

- ◆ For AmericanTheatreCritics.org, critic Sherry Eaker wrote, “My point of view was that it wasn’t the theatre critic’s place to tell the playwright what he or she should be doing; instead, the critic should focus on what is already there and explain either why it works or why it doesn’t work.”
- ◆ The director’s job is to take the words on the script from the printed page to the stage and bring them to life.

After seeing the production, have each student write a review of *Man of La Mancha*. The review should include one paragraph each for:

- Introduction – What did you watch, where and when, and maybe, why?
- The script – Did you like the writing, the story, the characters? Why or why not?
- The score - Did you like the music? Why or why not?
- The acting – Did you believe and care about the characters as portrayed? Why or why not?
- The design – Did you like the set, costume and light designs? Why or why not?
- The staging – How did the director stage the violence? Was it effective?
- The audience – What ways did the audience respond to particular moments?
- Conclusion – What will you remember about this performance?

**If you wish, send your reviews to us at: education-outreach@musical.org
We’d love to hear your opinions of our show!**

Learn More

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