

WINDOWS INTO

WATER BY THE SPOONFUL

REAL-WORLD CONNECTIONS

Water by the Spoonful—a play that explores the connections between people—is itself connected to two other plays by Quiara Alegria Hudes: *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* and *The Happiest Song Plays Last*. All three plays in this series known as “The Elliot Trilogy” (the Pulitzer-winning *Water* is the middle play) share another connection: They’re all inspired by Hudes’ cousin Elliot, an Iraq war vet who returned home haunted by his experiences. During her research, Hudes interviewed Elliot and other family members, many of whom she wove into the plays under different names and with invented stories. Using loved ones in a literary work without offending them is a fine line many authors walk, and Hudes’ family has been generally supportive. As she put it in a *New York Times* interview, “I’ve made a fictional story and character out of an emotional truth that they’ve expressed to me.”

THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC

Music plays more than a background role in all three plays in the trilogy. A trained pianist, Hudes says, “I base the world, the language of the play, on music.” For *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue*, she visualized a Bach fugue—a structure in which several voices play in counterpoint around a single theme. For *Water by the Spoonful*, Hudes chose jazz, particularly the compositions of John Coltrane, to punctuate the play’s rapid-fire online dialog and its tension between dissonance and resolution. The final play in the series, *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, features *Jibaro*, folk music from Hudes’ Puerto Rican heritage.