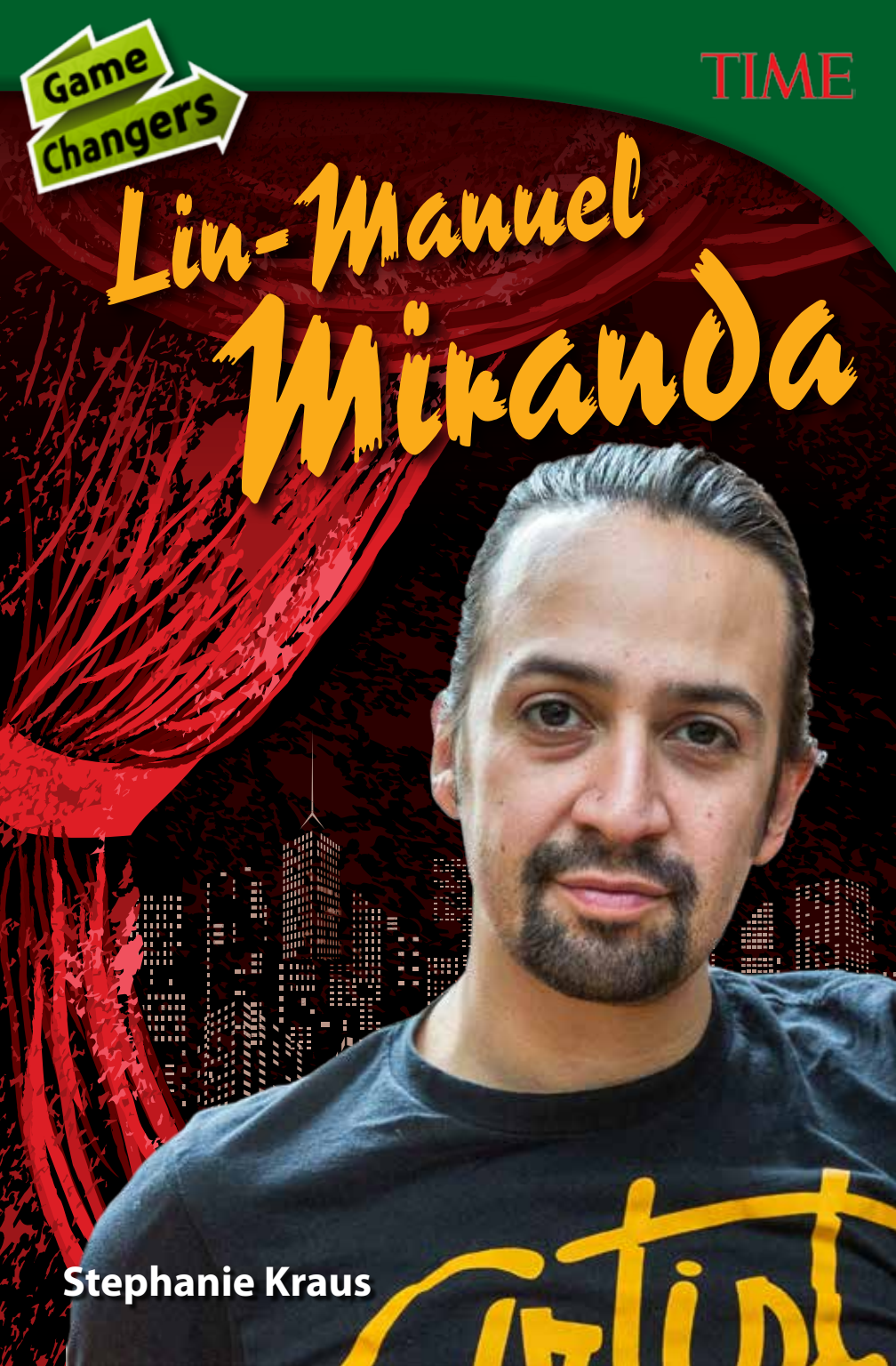
Game Changers

TIME

Lin-Manuel Miranda



Stephanie Kraus



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Rewriting History

Lin-Manuel Miranda was casually looking around a bookstore one day when he came across *Alexander Hamilton* by Ron Chernow. He bought the bestselling biography and began reading it on vacation in Mexico. After a few chapters, Miranda was hooked. The book describes how Hamilton, an orphan from the Caribbean, wrote his way out of poverty and overcame all odds to help shape a new nation. Miranda was inspired. He wanted to bring the Founding Father's journey to life in a new way. He started rewriting the story—this time as a rap and hip-hop musical.



Presidential Praise

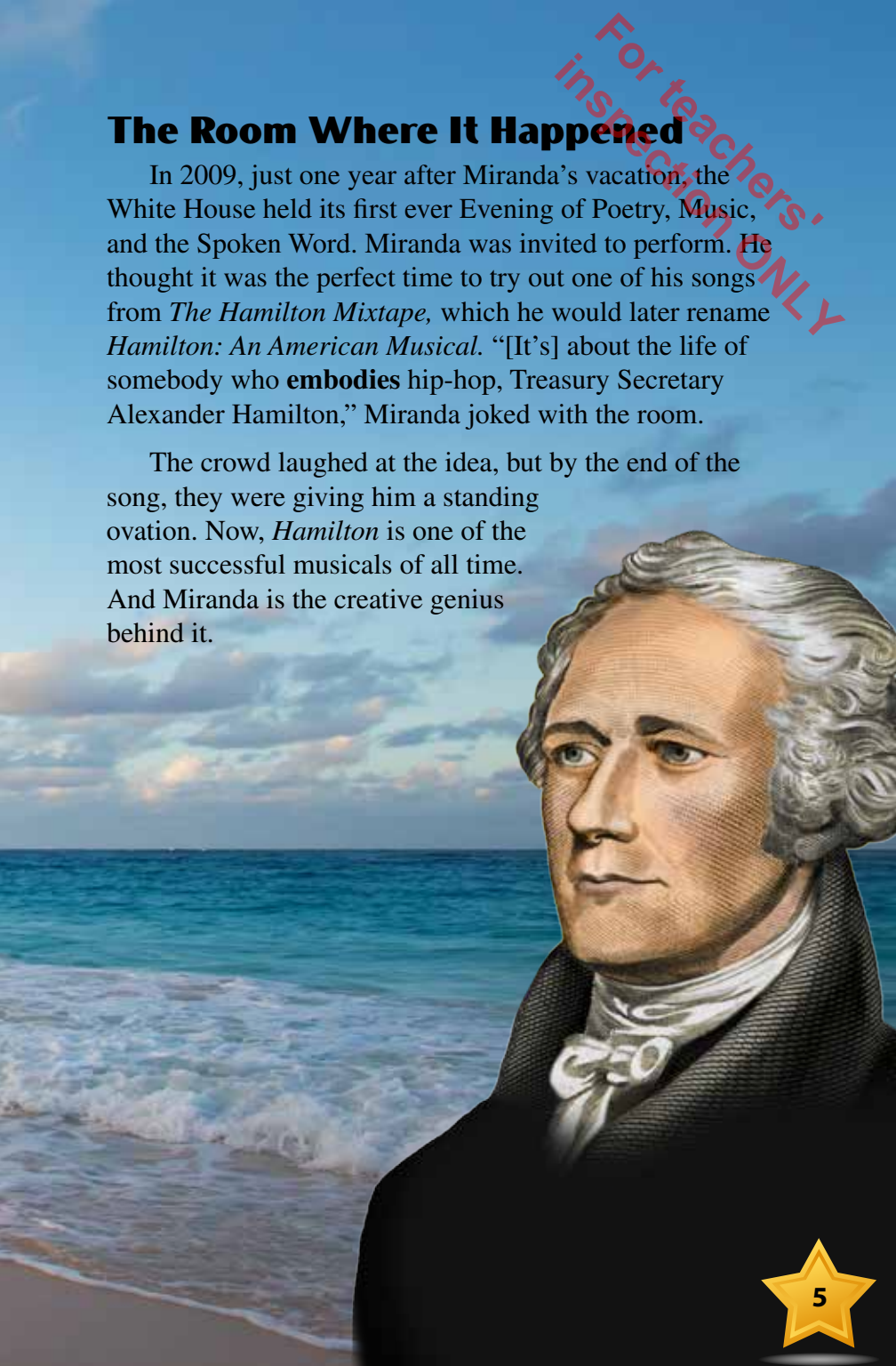
First Lady Michelle Obama called *Hamilton* "the best piece of art in any form that I have ever seen in my life." President Barack Obama said, "The first thing we thought about was what could we do to encourage this kind of creativity in teaching history to our kids."

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The Room Where It Happened

In 2009, just one year after Miranda's vacation, the White House held its first ever Evening of Poetry, Music, and the Spoken Word. Miranda was invited to perform. He thought it was the perfect time to try out one of his songs from *The Hamilton Mixtape,* which he would later rename *Hamilton: An American Musical.* "[It's] about the life of somebody who **embodies** hip-hop, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton," Miranda joked with the room.

The crowd laughed at the idea, but by the end of the song, they were giving him a standing ovation. Now, *Hamilton* is one of the most successful musicals of all time. And Miranda is the creative genius behind it.



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Raised on Hip-Hop and Broadway

Miranda was born on January 16, 1980, in New York City. He was raised in Inwood, a mostly Hispanic neighborhood on the northern tip of Manhattan. His mother, Luz Towns-Miranda, was a clinical psychologist. His father, Luis A. Miranda Jr., worked in politics. He served as an advisor to New York City Mayor Ed Koch and became well known in the Latino community. His parents, both born in Puerto Rico, often returned to the island with Lin-Manuel during the summer months.



A Young Ham

Miranda started taking piano lessons when he was six. At his first recital, Miranda heard the applause and wanted to stay on the stage. "After the fourth round, the teacher gently pushed him off the piano so other kids could play," Luis Miranda told the *New York Times*.



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Luis Miranda loved musical theater, but the family didn't have the money to see many shows. However, a young Lin-Manuel was able to see *Les Misérables*, *Cats*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*—or, as he calls them, "the holy trinity." He says his family home was filled with show tunes and salsa music. Miranda's school bus driver happened to love rap. His daily bus rides were one place where Miranda learned many rap lyrics growing up.

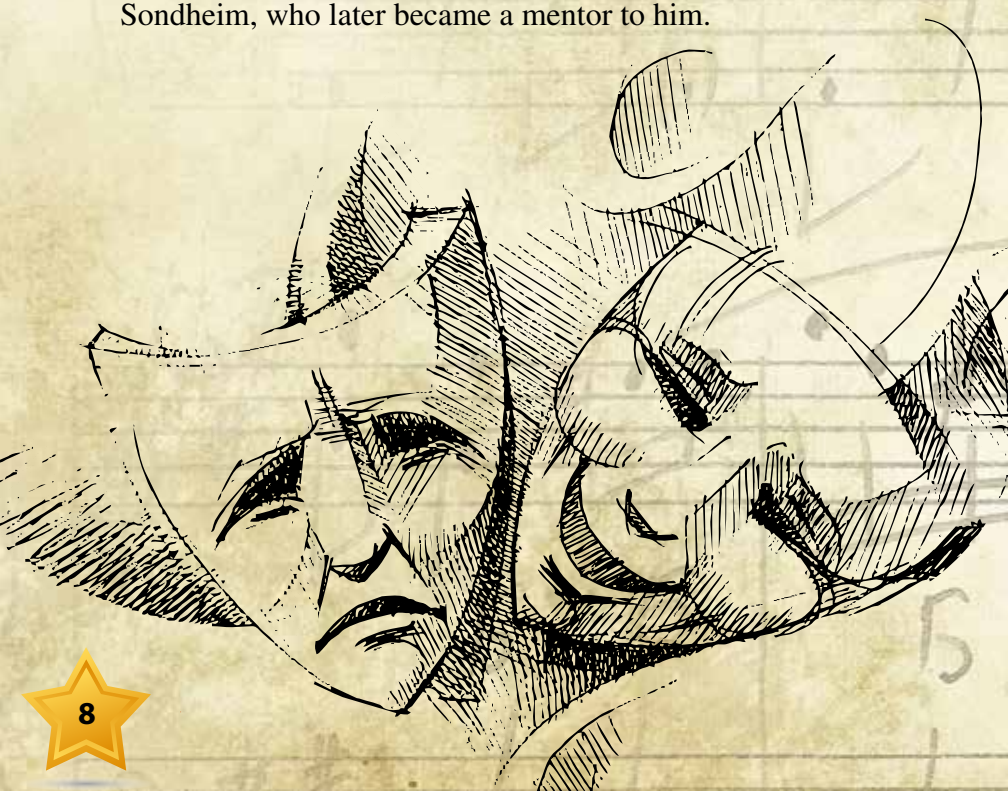


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Playing to His Strengths

Miranda attended Hunter College Elementary School in New York City. He spoke English at school, but he spoke Spanish with his family at home. "It's a great way of creating a writer because you're aware of being an outsider," he says. "You change identities when you go home and any time you can try a different identity that's helpful in being a writer or performer."

Miranda went on to attend Hunter College High School, a school for intellectually gifted students. Miranda says he never felt like the smartest person in the room, so he worked hard to find his **niche**—which he found in musical theater. He became very involved in his school's drama department. In ninth grade, he played one of the lead roles in *The Pirates of Penzance* by Gilbert and Sullivan. During that show, he was able to meet Broadway legend Stephen Sondheim, who later became a mentor to him.



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Sondheim

Composer and **lyricist** Stephen Sondheim has worked in musical theater for over 50 years. His works include *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, and the lyrics in *West Side Story*. In 2008, he worked with Miranda to translate *West Side Story* into Spanish. In return, Sondheim later gave Miranda notes on *Hamilton*.

Lovestruck

In sixth grade, Miranda was cast as Conrad Birdie in *Bye Bye Birdie*. "It's the best part when you're 12 years old because every girl in the grade pretends to be in love with you," he says.



Reader's Guide

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1. In what ways has Miranda's upbringing influenced his work?
2. What aspects of *In the Heights* and *Hamilton* make them so popular?
3. Based on Miranda's work thus far, what sort of legacy do you think he wants to leave behind?
4. Think of another artist who has influenced culture like Miranda has. Compare and contrast Miranda to that person.

