

Produced by the consortium for Latin American Studies Programs

Written by Katrina Dillon



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This educator's guide was written to support using *Out of Darkness* in high school classrooms. Produced by the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) on behalf of the Américas Award, it was written in 2017 by Katrina Dillon, a project assistant at the University of New Mexico. Editorial support was also provided by UNM graduate assistant Alice Donahue.

ABOUT THE AMÉRICAS AWARD

CLASP founded the Américas Award in 1993 to encourage and commend authors, illustrators and publishers who produce quality children's and young adult books that portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinos in the United States, and to provide teachers with recommendations for classroom use. CLASP offers up to two annual book awards, together with a commended list of titles. For more information concerning the Américas Award, including additional classroom resources, please visit the [CLASP website](#).

The awards are administered by CLASP and coordinated by both Tulane University's Stone Center for Latin American Studies and Vanderbilt University's Center for Latin American Studies. Generous support is also provided by Florida International University, Stanford University, University of Florida, University of New Mexico, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the University of Utah.

ABOUT CLASP

CLASP's mission is to promote all facets of Latin American studies throughout the world. Its broad range of activities include the encouragement of research activities, funding of professional workshops, advancement of citizen outreach activities, and development of teaching aids for the classroom.

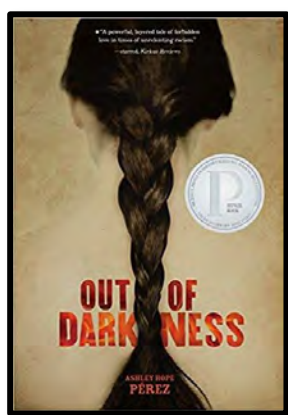


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OVERVIEW



Out of Darkness

Written by Ashley Hope Pérez

Published 2015 by Carolrhoda Lab

ISBN: 978-1467742023

THEMES

Abuse, Coming of Age, Discrimination, Family, Interracial Relationships, U.S. Latino History, Racism, Race Relations in the Jim Crow Era, Survival, Texas History

SYNOPSIS

New London, Texas. 1937. Naomi Vargas and Wash Fuller know about the lines in East Texas as well as anyone. They know the signs that mark them.

"No Negroes, Mexicans, or dogs."

They know the people who enforce them.

"They all decided they'd ride out in their sheets and pay Blue a visit."



An Educator's Guide to *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez

But sometimes the attraction between two people is so powerful it breaks through even the most entrenched color lines. And the consequences can be explosive.

“More than grief, more than anger, there is a need. Someone to blame. Someone to make pay.”

Ashley Hope Pérez takes the facts of the 1937 New London school explosion—the worst school disaster in American history—as a backdrop for a riveting novel about segregation, love, family, and the forces that destroy people.

READING LEVEL

Grades 9 and up / Ages 15 and up

REVIEWS

- “[This] layered tale of color lines, love and struggle in an East Texas oil town is a pit-in-the-stomach family drama... A tragedy, real and racial, swallows us whole, and lingers.” – *The New York Times Book Review*
- ★ “A powerful, layered tale of forbidden love in times of unrelenting racism.” – starred, *Kirkus Reviews*
- ★ “The work resonates with fear, hope, love, and the importance of memory.... Pérez ...gives voice to many long-omitted facets of U.S. history.” – starred, *School Library Journal*
- “Elegant prose and gently escalating action will leave readers gasping for breath at the tragic climax and moving conclusion.” –*Booklist*
- “As stunning as it is truthful, a narrative shaped by history and love that honestly explores racism, abuse and a young woman’s tenacity to fashion a life on her own terms.” –Daniel A. Olivas, *Huffington Post*

AWARDS

- Michael L. Printz Honor for Excellence in Young Adult Literature (2016)
- Tomás Rivera Book Award Winner (2016)
- Américas Award Winner (2016)
- *School Library Journal* Best Book of 2015
- *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book of 2015



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- 2016 Top Ten TAYSHAS selection
- 2016 Spirit of Texas book
- Children's Book Committee at Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year
- YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults



APPLICABLE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

K-12 READING

Key Ideas and Details

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

K-12 WRITING

Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.



Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: ASHLEY HOPE PÉREZ



Out of Darkness, Hope Pérez's most recent book, has been acknowledged with a range of awards and accolades, including, in addition to the Américas Award, the 2016 Printz Honor for Excellence in Young Adult Literature and the 2016 Tomás Rivera Book Award.

The story is powerful and compelling. The [New York Times](#) writes of the book, “*Her layered tale of color lines, love and struggle in an East Texas oil town is a pit-in-the-stomach family drama that goes down like it should, with pain and fascination, like a mix of sugary medicine and artisanal moonshine.*”

Hope Pérez works as a professor of world literatures at Ohio State University and earned her PhD in comparative literature at Indiana University. Her husband is also a professor at Ohio State University, and they live in Columbus, Ohio, with their two sons. Hope Pérez identifies as an avid lover of reading, writing, and teaching. Before becoming a university professor she taught at the kindergarten, middle and high school levels. According to her personal website, Hope Pérez's experience teaching young students was a transformative time in her life and career as a writer. She writes, “*I especially enjoyed my three years teaching high school in Houston, where many of my students were convinced they hated to read and write at the beginning of the year and equally persuaded of the opposite by the end of the year. I credit them with transforming me into an author, and I jump at the chance to reconnect with young readers through school visits and events.*” Despite a profound love for books, Hope Pérez admits she would probably not have made it as a librarian, explaining, “*Reading is one of my passions, and maybe if I hadn't also fallen in love with teaching, I might have become a librarian just so that I could be around as many books as possible. But I'm also a big talker, a tendency that doesn't evaporate when I cross a library's threshold. No doubt I would have been blacklisted before I even got through my library science degree or, at the least, branded 'The Loud Librarian.'*”

Out of Darkness, Hope Pérez's most recent novel, offers a window into her work, values, and life. She writes, “*Out of Darkness deals with layers of tragedy, and pieces of my own broken heart are embedded in it.*” In a Huffington Post piece, [Black and Brown Bodies in Public Spaces: An Interview with Novelist, Ashley Hope Pérez](#), Daniel A. Olivas praises Hope Pérez's writing: “*This novel is as stunning as it is truthful, a narrative shaped by history and love that honestly explores racism, abuse and a young woman's tenacity to fashion a life on her own terms. Pérez has contributed an important, meticulously crafted book to young adult literature.*” Olivas also interviewed Hope Pérez on some of the choices she made while writing the book, where her inspiration came from, and what kind of responses she has received. When asked about the book's impact, Hope Pérez shares, “*I'm especially honored when readers make important*



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connections between the novel and the injustices that persist in our society, especially the vulnerability of black and brown bodies in public spaces. Above all, I hope Out of Darkness shows how reckoning with the darkness of the past can make us hunger for light — and for a more just future.” Part of what makes *Out of Darkness* such a powerful teaching tool is its ability to show students how writing becomes a means for supporting the fight for social justice and giving a voice to the voiceless.

Hope Pérez's work is an incredibly valuable contribution to Latinx literature, multicultural literature, and the general goal of diversifying children's literature and promoting social justice through books. Her thoughts on the historical context of the book demonstrate why novels such as *Out of Darkness* are so important. She reflects, *“I also knew early on that my book would center on characters from the margins of mainstream history... I imagined these possibilities because the historical record only addressed the white experience in New London. I wanted to write from that erasure, to narrate from that silence.”*

For more information about Pérez, here are some additional links:

- Ashley Hope Pérez's [personal website](#)
- Ashley Hope Pérez's [Facebook](#) page
- Latinx in Kid Lit [Q&A with Ashley Hope Pérez](#) (a blog to which she contributes regularly)
- Brazos Bookstore [Q&A with Ashley Hope Pérez](#)



IN HER WORDS: THE AUTHOR'S NOTE

The 1937 New London school explosion ravaged a community about ten miles from my hometown; it is still on record as the deadliest school disaster in the United States. With the exception of the explosion, the tragedies that unfold in the novel are products of my imagination. Still, they are generally consistent with documented occurrences in other parts of Texas and the South during the 1930s. There is considerable historical precedent for the racism, sexual abuse, violence against minorities, and other distressing facets of life portrayed in the novel.

An understandable protective impulse sometimes inspires efforts to conceal, diminish, or disavow such painful histories. The work of this book, however, was to bring to light experiences and narratives that might otherwise go unacknowledged. I have tried to balance the heartbreak, cruelty, and ignorance of my characters' world with a profound attention to the forms of kindness and connection that are also possible in it.

All characters in *Out of Darkness* are fictional; any resemblance to actual persons is coincidental. Despite my interest in the history of the New London school explosion, I've also taken many liberties with details, circumstances, dates, and local geography. For example, I placed Beto and Cari's classroom in the building that exploded when in fact this part of the school did not house the lower elementary grades. The scene at Wash's home and the tragic outcome of Wash and Naomi's romance are not based on any events in the New London area, although comparably gruesome events did occur elsewhere in the South.

Lynchings and vigilante acts were especially likely in periods of economic difficulty or following a major community disruption like the explosion.

Factual details catalyzed some of my imaginings. For example, I learned that mounted Texas Rangers were sent to the homes of school board members, where they succeeded at diffusing threats of violence. This information caused me to consider what might have happened to a potential scapegoat not afforded this kind of protection.

The relative absence of historical information about the African American community in East Texas during the oil boom left me wondering: how might the school explosion have been felt by families whose children were spared precisely because they had been denied access to the state-of-the-art New London school? Similarly, when I discovered that at least one of the children killed in the New London explosion was likely Hispanic (though her family may have well downplayed this background, as the twins and Naomi are encouraged to), I began to consider what might have brought a Latino family to the primarily



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black and white community of 1930s East Texas. The educational experiences of Naomi, Wash, and the twins allowed me to incorporate glimpses of the tripartite segregation system present in Texas before the Civil Rights Movement, a system that separated children into “white,” “colored,” and “Mexican” schools. In researching this novel, I was struck by the many ways in which whole swaths of lived experience have been largely excluded from historical accounts, in part because certain communities were not deemed worthy of note in newspapers and other sources considered authoritative and reliable. These silences need to be amended; I hope my fiction gives readers an appetite for stories lived in the margins of spotlight scenes.



CLASSROOM RELEVANCE AND APPLICATIONS

Ashley Hope Pérez's *Out of Darkness* is a book that is perhaps best described as *'brutiful'* because it is both a beautiful and brutal reading experience. Despite the significant number of honors and awards it has received, some continue to question the book's appropriateness for high school students because it deals with racism, racial violence, and sexual abuse. To a certain degree, this is understandable. There is the idea that we must protect the innocence of our students for as long as possible, but we need to stop and unpack this idea of protection and childhood innocence. When we look more critically at this notion, we must address a number of questions: Who gets to remain innocent? Whom or what are we protecting when we refuse to give voice to the trauma many of our students experience? As [Malinda Lo](#) notes, *"It is natural to want to protect young people from horrible truths, but all too often we forget to question whom exactly are these young people we want to protect? Typically, they're white. Young people of color have already experienced racism; they are beyond this kind of protection."* Bringing to light the stories of those who have been silenced or marginalized can be painful, but that does not mean that those stories should not be told. Books like *Out of Darkness* can be painful to read, but choosing not to read such a book can be evidence of our own privilege. For many of us, *Out of Darkness* is not a mirror; it is not reflective of our own life experience. Instead, it is more like a window or door. As such, we have the privilege of choosing when, how, or where we engage with the story. Yet, unfortunately, the same cannot always be said of our students. Many of our students have experienced abuse, and it is our job to provide the spaces for them to safely process these experiences.

As the [We Need Diverse Books](#) movement continues to reiterate, we all deserve to have empowered protagonists that reflect our own realities. To not provide those for our students is to create a shame of invisibility. According to Brené Brown (2008), *"Invisibility is about disconnection and powerlessness. When we don't see ourselves reflected back in our culture, we feel reduced to something so small and insignificant that we're easily erased from the world of important things. Both the process of being reduced and the final product of that process—invisibility—can be incredibly shaming."* As if living through racism, sexism, bullying, or sexual, emotional, and physical abuse is not painful enough, we add another layer of shame in erasing these experiences from the literature we use in our classrooms. For more on this topic, check out *The Atlantic's* article [How Banning Books Marginalizes Children](#).

Recently there have been a flurry of articles discussing the importance of teaching empathy to our students (read more about this [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). This is a significant part of discussing appropriate literature and the protection of our students. No one is advocating for the use of *Out of Darkness* in an elementary or middle school classroom. *School Library Journal* suggests it is for grades 9 and up. For the majority of high school students, this has the potential to be an incredibly powerful



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reading, and not just for those who find themselves reflected in the characters. It is just as important for those who do not. If empathy is an essential skill, as research continues to suggest, then our students must be exposed to stories and points of view that are different from their own. For more on this, consider reading Hope Pérez's article "[Embracing Discomfort in YA Literature](#)."

Many are likely familiar with the quote, "*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it*" (Santayana, 1905). The current situation of race relations in the U.S. didn't occur in a vacuum. There is a history of racism and white privilege that continues to be glossed over in classroom curricula demonstrating the truth in the saying, "*History is written by the victors*." As long as we continue to read the victors' versions, we are going to continue to make the same mistakes. Books like *Out of Darkness* provide the opportunity to read another version, a narrative counter to what is often presented in mainstream literature and textbooks.

Out of Darkness is a profoundly affecting book. There is a continued state of suspense that keeps the book moving forward and readers engaged. The injustice is painful. Hope Pérez creates characters the reader truly cares about. Yes, they are fictional, but, as Hope Pérez writes in the "Author's Note," the suffering these characters endure is based on similar documented events throughout the South. So, while fictional, the stories of Naomi, Wash, Beto, and Cari provide an understanding of what life was like in the South during this historical period.

Many others have already critiqued the tendency to sugar coat historical literature to make it more palatable or pleasant, while sacrificing the authenticity of the story. *Out of Darkness* resists such a narrative. While the ending is brutal, it is likely realistic. It is doubtful that in the South in the 1930s a young biracial couple like Wash and Naomi would have been allowed to survive. While the last scenes are violent, it is important to not allow them to eclipse or erase Naomi's resistance throughout the book. She is an orphaned Latina in Texas during the 1930s. She's oppressed and dehumanized by her school peers and the adults in her community. She receives no support from any of the adults who were in a position to help her. Though she has little social power, her intelligence provides the means through which she resists being victimized again throughout the novel. To overlook Naomi's agency is to disempower her again. One approach to evaluating a book is to consider what it can accomplish in a classroom setting through considering the following questions: What can be taught through the book? What discussions can be broached? What can students learn through the book? How might we be changed through the process of reading the book? The discussion above has touched on a number of issues *Out of Darkness* addresses, but there are a few more that should be mentioned. Racism and abuse are explicit themes throughout the book, but there is also a critique of sexism and gender norms that is perhaps more implicit. Henry (the



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father/stepfather) represents a more stereotypical and dehumanizing social norm of masculinity. He hunts, he works, and he expects to be unquestionably waited on and obeyed by the women in his home. He is also one of the most unstable and mentally unhealthy characters in the book. He attempts to force Beto into taking on this same type of masculinity, but Beto resists. Beto does not conform to this social norm, and that may be part of why he survives, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The book also provides an engaging context for teaching about fiction and non-fiction, and the ways in which those boundaries can be blurred through historical fiction. Hope Pérez's "Author's Note" is useful here, particularly in discussing why one may choose to write a fictional account of an historical event and how this could be a more effective way to teach about a period in history.

For those who teach Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Out of Darkness* provides the opportunity for an interesting comparative study as both are tragedies about star-crossed lovers. "The Gang" is an interesting character in *Out of Darkness*. As both Shakespeare and many of the Greek dramatists use a Chorus, students familiar with either of these could do a comparative study on the role of these group characters. "The Gang" in *Out of Darkness* provides a segue to critically discuss groupthink and its role in bullying. *Out of Darkness* is clearly deserving of the Américas Award. The perspective and experience offered through reading it, makes it an obvious choice for young adult classrooms and libraries.



LESSON PLANS AND ACTIVITIES

TEACHER PREPARATION

Due to the serious nature of the book's content, some may struggle to decide if they should use it in the classroom and/or how to appropriately implement it. The following provides background information on why one may choose to use this book, and resources to support teachers and students who read the book. National statistics demonstrate that sexual violence effects a significant portion of the U.S. population, and very likely some of the students in our classrooms.

- 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives.
- In 8 out of ten cases of rape, the victim knew the person who sexually assaulted them.
- 1 in four girls and 1 in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old.
- 12.3% of women were age 10 or younger at the time of their first rape/victimization, and 30% of women were between the ages of 11 and 17.
- 27.8% of men were age 10 or younger at the time of their first rape/victimization.
- 34% of people who sexually abuse a child are family members.

Statistics compiled from the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](https://www.nsvrcenter.org/).

The statistics above demonstrate the high probability that there will be students in our classes who are or have been victims of sexual abuse, given this, it is essential that schools provide the spaces to support them in seeking any help or support that they may need.

Obviously, no educator should introduce a book like *Out of Darkness* without significant forethought and planning. The following are recommendations for how to prepare for teaching this book.

First, we suggest that the educator contact the school's social worker or counselor and let them know that she/he will be using the book in the classroom, and that it deals with issues of sexual violence and abuse.

Second, we suggest contacting a local organization that provides resources and support for sexual assault, violence, or abuse. Often, these organizations have staff trained to come into classrooms to present on these topics. Such presentations provide students a context from which to understand the topics they are reading and discussing, and can inform students about the community resources available for survivors of sexual violence.



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Third, we suggest viewing the documentary [*Audrie & Daisy*](#). The film is an urgent real-life drama that examines the ripple effects on families, friends, schools and communities when two underage young women find that sexual assault crimes against them have been caught on camera. It takes a hard look at American teenagers who are coming of age in this new world of social media bullying, spun wildly out of control. It is currently (as of October 2016) available to stream on Netflix.

Fourth, we suggest that the educator have an alternate reading available. When a person has had his/her power taken away through sexual violence, it is very important that he/she have options for how to choose to heal from that experience. Some survivors find it empowering to read about other survivors, but for some, it triggers PTSD. For this reason, this book should never be forced or required reading. For some survivors, reading a book like *Out of Darkness* could be empowering. For others, it could trigger PTSD, in which case it is of great importance that they have an alternative option.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: REVIEW OF GENRE

Review the genre of historical fiction with students. Read the “Author’s Note” at the back of the book together. Review which aspects of the book are non-fictional and which are fictional. Discuss the ways in which the fictional parts are based on historical research. Hope Pérez writes that she was “struck by the many ways in which whole swaths of lived experience have been largely excluded from historical accounts, in part because certain communities were not deemed worthy of note in newspapers and other sources considered authoritative and reliable” (p. 399).

Before beginning the novel, create a table, chart, or grid to track student reflections and responses to the content of the book in relation to the genre. Review the following questions with students and explain that they will be points of discussion throughout the reading of the novel. Ask students to note the different ways the novel attempts to give voice to these silenced communities. As they read, ask them to reflect on why Hope Pérez may have decided to write a fictional account rather than a non-fictional account of this Texas community and the school explosion. What is she able to do in writing a fictional account that she may have been unable to do in writing a non-fictional account? Which do you think conveys a stronger message?

ACTIVITY 2: DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

Out of Darkness engages with a number of serious topics and themes, as has already been discussed above. In addressing the racism of the historical period, racial slurs are used in parts of the dialogue. While the use of these words is an accurate reflection of the time period, this does not mean that they should be used in classroom discussion. One example of this is the word “nigger.” Discuss with the class that this is not an appropriate term to be used in its entirety in classroom dialogue or even read aloud. If it comes up in student dialogue or during a read aloud, a replacement (such as “n-word”) should be used.

For more on this, consider reading the following articles, some of which may be useful resources for classroom discussion.

- [“Discussing Sensitive Topics in the Classroom”](#) from Facing History and Ourselves.
- [“Straight Talk about the N-Word”](#) from Teaching Tolerance.
- [“In Defense of a Loaded Word”](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates from the New York Times
- [“Huck Finn in Context: The Curriculum”](#) from PBS.



GUIDED READING QUESTIONS

Prologue | Pages 1-3

1. When and where is *Out of Darkness* set?
2. Once the immediate rescue work is done, what is the greatest need among the community dealing with the school tragedy? Make a prediction: who do you think the community will find to blame? In these types of scenarios, when blame is placed, is this more often based on emotions or facts? Consider other similar historical events. (p. 2)

The Explosion | Pages 4-7

1. How much does Wash make working for the superintendent? What is he saving for? (p. 6).
2. What is his reaction when the school explodes? What does he do? What can be inferred about his character from this? (p. 6-7)

Before | Pages 8-288

1. When does “Before” begin? How many months before “The Explosion” is this section set? (p. 10)
2. What has recently changed in Beto, Cari, and Naomi’s lives? (p. 10)
3. What does the word “despot” mean? Why do you think Cari calls Naomi this? (p. 11)
4. What other language do Beto, Cari, and Naomi speak? (p. 11)
5. Who is Henry? (p. 11)
6. What is the good luck game? (p. 11)
7. What can you tell about Beto and Cari from these first few pages? How would you describe their personalities? How are they different from each other? (p. 8-12)
8. How does Naomi feel waiting outside the school on her first day? (p. 13)
9. Why does Abuelito want Naomi to stay in school? (p. 13)
10. What do we learn about Naomi’s mother? (p. 14)
11. When will Wash start school? (p. 16)
12. What do Beto and Cari decide—do they like Miss Bell? (p. 19)
13. What law keeps Wash’s mother from teaching? Who benefits from this law? (p. 21)
14. What does ‘paying Booker’ mean in Wash’s home? Who is Booker T. Washington and why is this significant in the context of a college education? (p. 21)
15. What has Wash’s father taught him about interacting with whites? (p. 22)



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16. How does Henry change the children's names? Why does this bother Naomi? (p. 24)
17. Why does Henry bring the twins to live with him in East Texas? (p. 26)
18. What does Naomi remind Henry of? How do you think this affects their relationship? (p. 28)
19. How do the twins react when they see Naomi's letter? How does this affect Naomi? Do you think the twins realize how their reaction makes her feel? What does this suggest about Naomi's educational experience? (p. 30-31)
20. Hope Pérez uses "the gang" as a group character. What does "the gang" represent? (p. 32-33)
21. What sorts of descriptions do they connote with Naomi's Mexican identity? Do they view it as a positive? (p. 32)
22. How would you describe their treatment of Naomi? (p. 33)
23. How do the women at the church make Naomi feel? Based on the questions some of them ask, what are they trying or find out about Naomi? (p. 38)
24. What is the "Mexican wing" of Naomi's school in San Antonio like? How does the school in New London compare? (p. 39)
25. What does Naomi's braid symbolize to her? (p. 40)
26. What do you think Henry is referring to when he talks about "that time before," "saving grace," and a "promise that he had changed"? Is this an apology? If so, what do you think he's apologizing to Naomi for? (p. 42)
27. Why is Naomi embarrassed that she brought tortillas to the picnic? What do the young girls think they are? (p. 43)
28. What happens when Naomi tries to do the grocery shopping at the Turner store? What does Mrs. Turner mean when she says "The hours for your kind are posted at the back door"? (p. 45)
29. How do Cari and Beto act around Wash? What does this imply about how they've been taught to interact with blacks? How is their behavior different from the Turners' behavior or Naomi's classmates' behavior? (p. 47)
30. How could Naomi's interaction with the grocery shop owners make trouble? Why is she worried? (p. 49)
31. What do you think Cari is referring to when she whispers "Our best find yet" (p. 51)?
32. What solution to the grocery store problem does Wash offer Naomi? (p. 54)
33. What reading gift does Cari have? (p. 56)



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34. What warning does Mr. Turner give Naomi about shopping at the store in Egypt Town? (p. 56-57)
35. Who is Miranda? How does she feel about Naomi? How would you describe Miranda's social power or control in the high school? (p. 58)
36. What racist stereotypes about Mexicans do many of the students at Naomi's school seem to have based on the thoughts and actions of "The Gang"? (p. 58-60)
37. Based on the thoughts of "The Gang," what is the racial hierarchy in Texas? (p. 59)
38. What does Henry do to Naomi after her mother's third miscarriage? (p. 68)
39. How does Naomi's mother, Estella, die? What role does Henry have in her death? (p. 69)
40. Who becomes responsible for caring for the newborn twins? (p. 70)
41. How does Muff help Naomi? How is Muff's home different from Naomi's? (p. 71-72)
42. Why does Henry suggest they choose another diner besides the Cozy Table? What would be the issue with all four of them trying to eat there? (p. 82)
43. Make an inference about Naomi: What do you think is the "whole truth hidden in some inner pocket of her heart"? (p. 84)
44. How is Henry's relationship with the twins progressing? Explain. (p. 86)
45. How did Naomi's father die? (p. 88)
46. Make an inference: What has Naomi's school experience been like? Explain using examples from the text. (p. 89)
47. How are the educational expectations placed on Wash different from those Naomi experiences? (p. 89)
48. While Wash's school isn't as well funded or as fancy as Naomi's new school, who has been taught more in their classes? How do you know? (p. 89-91)
49. According to Cal's story, what happened to Blue? What does this demonstrate about white society? (p. 95)
50. Why did Miranda's father interfere with Gilbert's football scholarship? What does this say about his character? Does Miranda seem to care about what her father did? (p. 100-102)
51. When Naomi's in the bathroom she overhears two women from the PTA talking. What do they say about the twins? What do they say about her? What gendered stereotypes does their conversation reveal? (p. 102-104)
52. How does Wash's mom respond when he gives pies to the twins? (p. 110-111)



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53. How does Naomi misinterpret Wash walking Miss Fannie home? Why does Wash need to walk her home? (p. 110-113)
54. How does Henry deal with the twins being sick? (p. 114-120)
55. Who finds Henry on the riverbank? Where has Henry been? (p. 124-125)
56. How long did Henry stay away? (p. 131)
57. How does Henry react when Naomi tells him she's been buying the groceries at Mason's? (p. 132-133)
58. What do the twins want for Thanksgiving? Why? (p. 140)
59. What does Katie ask Naomi as they're walking to get ice cream? What does Katie think the racial slur means? Make an inference: How do you think this term makes Naomi feel? (p. 145)
60. What does Wash propose to his father that would save the white school three hundred dollars? (p. 149-150)
61. What warning and advice does Wash's father give him when they discuss Wash talking to Mr. Crane about using the raw gas? What does Wash criticize about his father when they disagree? (p. 150-151)
62. Why is Naomi so diligent about cleaning up after Henry? What does it make her feel? (p. 153)
63. Make an inference: Why is Naomi so scared when she finds the revolver? What does she fear could happen? (p. 154)
64. Where does Naomi take Wash once she realizes he didn't lie to her? (p. 158-159)
65. What does Naomi do to make sure she never ends up sitting next to Henry? (p. 164)
66. What does the fabric that Henry gives Naomi for Christmas remind her of? (p. 165)
67. What was Nana to Naomi? (p. 166)
68. How was this Christmas different for Naomi and the twins? (p. 167)
69. What do the twins give Wash for Christmas? What affect does it have on Wash and Naomi? What does it represent? (p. 170)
70. What does Wash give Naomi for Christmas? What wish for Naomi does it represent? (p. 170)
71. What is it that Naomi longs and despairs for that she and Wash can never have? Why isn't this possible for the two of them? (p. 170)
72. Why do you think the notebook feels heavy to Beto? What does a notebook represent? How could a notebook be powerful? (p. 172)



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73. Make a prediction: Why do you think Beto has a bad feeling about the yellow dress? What do you think is going to happen? (p. 174)
74. What does being a man mean to Henry? What kinds of stereotypes and social norms does this perpetuate? (p. 174)
75. While Gilbert's comments to Naomi were meant to make her feel better, they also perpetuate a sexist and racist social norm. What did Gilbert say and how is it sexist and racist? (p. 175)
76. What does Mr. Gibbler say to Wash and his father? What condition were the books and furniture in that the white school donated to the black school? Contrast Wash's approach to talking to Mr. Gibbler with his father's. How are they different? What line is Wash's father attempting to walk? (p. 179-181)
77. What racial slur does Miranda use to describe Naomi? Where does this term come from? (p. 182)
78. What does The Gang mean by "Miranda's diamond leash" and "Naomi's wetback freedom"?
79. What memory do the tortillas and the red dress bring back for Henry? (p. 190)
80. Because Henry is drunk, he shares some thoughts with Naomi that he wouldn't normally? What is Henry worried about? (p. 193-194)
81. What does Henry do to Naomi when he comes back into the kitchen? (p. 196-197)
82. What do you think is Henry's solution for how to fix things? How is he attempting to make Naomi responsible for fixing him, or as he thinks, making him "clean and strong and redeemed"? What is the problem with this solution? (p. 202)
83. When Naomi falls asleep in Mr. Pittluck's class he punishes her. What do the other students say? Why doesn't Mr. Pittluck stop these comments? What's wrong about these comments? How are they an example of harassment? (p. 204)
84. When Naomi finally sleeps, she has a series of dreams. What do you think the dreams represent? Explain. Do you think her dreams are a foreshadowing? Explain. (p. 207)
85. What is Henry's solution to Tommie's problem? What had Henry been saving? What do you think his special occasion was going to be? How would this gift make you feel if you were Naomi? (p. 217)
86. Why does Naomi think of San Antonio when pastor Tom asks her how things are at home? (p. 218)
87. Make an inference: During Naomi's conversation with Pastor Tom he makes two remarks: first, in response to Naomi's comment that Henry isn't her father, he says "And thank goodness."



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Then, he says “I thought surely by now you’d considered. . .” but isn’t able to finish his thought. What do you think these comments mean?

88. Who does Muff think Naomi is in love with? According to Muff, who else thinks it’s a good idea for Naomi and Henry to get married? (p. 225)
89. Why does Naomi decide to let Muff think she’s interested in Henry? (p. 226)
90. How are guns and masculinity connected for Henry? (p. 227-228)
91. How is Beto affected by his shooting lesson? (p. 227-228)
92. How are the twins connected in a way beyond most siblings? (p. 231)
93. What does Henry see while Naomi is napping? Who does he think it’s for? Who do you think it’s for? (p. 233)
94. What does it say about Henry that he thinks Naomi would want to marry him? Explain. (p. 233-234)
95. What do Beto and Cari give Wash for his birthday? Why did they make two? What does this say about the twins’ character? (p. 238)
96. What does Miranda see when she’s out with Chigger. Make a prediction: What do you think will happen as a result of this? (p. 241)
97. What does Naomi realize about Henry’s marriage proposal? What is it an attempt to do? Who else has he used this way? (p. 242)
98. What important details do the twins include in their scarecrow design that make it more effective? (p. 250)
99. What does Naomi learn of her grandfather through the letter from her grandmother? (p. 252)
100. What does Naomi’s grandmother encourage her to do in regards to Henry’s proposal? Why do you think her grandmother offers this advice? Is what her grandmother asks fair to Naomi? (p. 253-254)
101. What effect does her grandmother’s letter have on Naomi? How would you feel if you were in Naomi’s position? (p. 254)
102. Who does Naomi go to when trying to deal with the news in her grandmother’s letter? What does this say about their relationship? (p. 255)
103. What does the home economics cottage look like? How is it designed? In what way does this support and perpetuate gender norms and beliefs of ‘women’s work’? (p. 259)



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104. How does Tommie react to the news of Henry's proposal? What doesn't Tommie understand? How are Tommie and Muff the same? Can either support or defend Naomi? (p. 260-261)
105. What possible solution does Wash find when researching where a safe place could be for Naomi, the twins, and himself? Why is it so hard for them to find a place where they'll be safe? (p. 262)
106. What advice does Wash's uncle give him about Mexico? Does it seem like a promising possibility for escaping New London? Why or why not? (p. 264-266)
107. Why is Wash's teacher in a bad mood? In what way is this practice discriminatory? How is it putting the students at Wash's school at a disadvantage? (p. 266)
108. What job is Wash helping the custodian with? What could happen if there were a gas leak? (p. 267)
109. How does Wash have to behave in the school? Who taught him this? Do you think similar expectations exist today? Explain. (p. 267-268)
110. Do Wash and the janitor check each of the heaters? (p. 268)
111. What does Cari want from Naomi? Why hasn't Naomi ever given Cari this? (p. 270-271)
112. What does Cari do while the twins are back at the house? What do they think of the contents of the guitar case? What were they expecting? (p. 276-277)
113. What do you think Cari is planning to do on March 18th that would start with an 'S'? Explain. (p. 278)
114. How does Henry respond to Naomi's suggestion that they wait until after graduation? What does Naomi do to survive the trauma of being with Henry and telling him she'll marry him? (p. 281-282)
115. Who does Naomi find in the school closet? What are they doing? (p. 283-284)
116. What does Naomi realize as she sends the twins back to class? (p. 284)
117. How does Beto let Cari know that he's mad at her, that she's gone too far? (p. 285)
118. What happens as Naomi is turning back to get the baking soda she forgot? (p. 288)

After | Pages 290-393

1. Who carries Beto out of the explosion? (p. 292)
2. What does Beto realize when he sees Wash and Naomi together? (p. 292)
3. What does Wash see when he finds Cari? (p. 294)



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4. What does Beto do when he sees Cari's body? What emotions is he dealing with? Why can't he let go of her? (p. 298)
5. What happened to Tommie and Dwayne in the explosion?
6. Initially, what are people saying might have caused the explosion? (p. 301)
7. How does Henry respond when he finds out it was Wash who brought the twins out of the school after the explosion? (p. 305)
8. How do some of the men treat Wash when he's back at the school helping? What is this interaction really about? What becomes clear as the men continue to talk? (p. 307-308)
9. Why does Beto pull away from everyone, even Naomi? What emotions is he struggling with? (p. 312, 316)
10. What effect does Cari's death have on Henry's faith? (p. 317-318)
11. What do you think of the way Pastor Tom interacts with Naomi and Henry when he comes by the house? Do you think it was appropriate? Do you think it was comforting? How would you have approached visiting Henry, Naomi, and Beto if you were in Pastor Tom's position? (p. 317-320)
12. What are the things that Wash and Naomi don't say? Why do you think these things remain unsaid? (p. 323)
13. How does the explosion change the agreement that Naomi had with Henry about waiting until graduation? (p. 320, 324,
14. How does the explosion make the racism of New London even more obvious and more dangerous for the black community? (p. 307-309, 324
15. Imagine you were one of the "lucky." How would you feel? How might you change? (p. 326)
16. Why is Henry so upset about the funeral schedule? What is Naomi's solution? (p. 328)
17. How is the coffin representative of Henry's approach to life and relationships? (p. 329-331)
18. What is it about Wash that really bothers Henry? It's more than just that Wash is black. Wash makes Henry feel something he doesn't want to admit. What do you think it is? (p. 334-335)
19. How does the community respond when they find out that no individuals were to blame for the explosion? Who do they go after first? (p. 341-343)
20. What role does Miranda play in shifting the blame from her father to Wash? How does her father respond? What does this say about his character? (p. 343)
21. Make a prediction: What do you think the men are going to do in Egypt town? (p. 343)



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22. Where do you think Henry is going? What important clues does Naomi miss? (p. 344-345)
23. What disagreement do Wash's parents have? Who do you think is right? Do you think they'll be safe in Egypt Town or should they go? (p. 347-348)
24. What lesson does Henry attempt to teach Beto when the men arrive to beat and lynch Wash and his father? How does Beto respond? What does he do? (p. 355-356)
25. What does the mob do to Wash's home? (p. 357)
26. How does "The Gang" know what's going to happen to Wash and his father? What have they seen before? What's especially disturbing about their description of the mementos? (p. 357)
27. Why do you think Wash is thinking about Naomi? What does he believe is about to happen? How would you react in a similar situation? (p. 359).
28. What does Naomi think of as she waits for Wash? Consider what both Naomi and Wash think about to get them through this difficult night. What does that say about the significance of their relationship? (p. 360).
29. How does Naomi get Beto to talk to her? (p. 362)
30. What does Naomi find when she gets to Wash's home? What does she see? (p. 363).
31. Who awakes Naomi in the tree? Why is she surprised? What did Naomi see hanging in the trees? (p. 364)
32. What is Wash's plan to get away from New London? (p. 364-365)
33. How do Wash's parents react when he arrives with Naomi and Beto? (p. 366-367)
34. Why do they delay leaving? What does Naomi go back to get? Make a prediction: do you think this is a good idea? (p. 367-368)
35. Why is Wash's father so adamant that Wash and Naomi can't stay together? What is his father afraid will happen? (p. 371)
36. Why is Mexico so appealing to Wash? Do you think the reality would live up to Wash's hopes? Explain. (p. 372)
37. What wakes Henry when Naomi returns to the house to get Edgar and the money? (p. 373)
38. When Henry realizes that Naomi is running, he decides to "set out to track down what was his" (p. 375). How does this language communicate Henry's feelings for Beto and Naomi? Does he want them to live with him because he loves them? Or does he think of them as objects that he 'owns' or 'has rights to'? Share your opinion: Is it ever right to think that one person can own another person? Historically, what has come from this perspective?
39. Who does Henry choose to blame for everything that has gone wrong? Why do you think this is his response? What does it say about Henry's character? (p. 378)
40. What does Henry make Beto do to Wash? (p. 380)
41. What does Henry do to Naomi? (p. 380)



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42. Henry represents a very toxic form of masculinity. How do his actions demonstrate this? What makes Henry feel powerful? (p. 378-384)
43. What does Henry try and force Beto to do? (p. 382)
44. Who does Henry shoot? (p. 384)
45. What do Naomi and Wash die thinking about? (p. 386-387)
46. When Henry shoots Naomi and Wash, how does he try and make Beto feel as if it was his fault? (p. 388)
47. Who does Beto shoot? (p. 388-389)
48. Who finds Beto and takes him away? (p. 389-390)
49. What memory does Beto cling to as they drive to San Antonio? (p. 390-391)
50. Re-read Beto's "mental note"—"The dead are not always right. The dead are not saints. But the dead are ours. We carry them with us like it's our job. And maybe it is" (p. 391). What do you think of this statement? What does it mean to you? What do you think it means in the context of Beto's life?

Epilogue | Pages 393-396

1. How does Beto learn to survive without Cari, Naomi, or Wash? (p. 394)
2. How do Beto's accomplishments in school speak to the segregation and/or inequality of schooling for Mexican-Americans in Texas? (p. 393-394)
3. How did the San Antonio Express rewrite the events of Naomi, Wash, and Henry's death? (p. 393)
4. Why do you think that Beto has to tell the story? Explain your answer. (p. 394).
5. Re-read one of the last lines of the book: "They had been happy, for a time, before the rules found them. Before the terrible price was exacted for their transgressions. For the crossing of lines. For friendship, for love" (p. 394). What do you think this line means in the context of *Out of Darkness*? What were the rules? What were their transgressions? What price did they pay? Can you think of other contexts outside of the story told in *Out of Darkness* where this statement would also apply? Are there other historical periods where individuals paid the price for breaking rules or social norms? Has anyone in your own life had such an experience?
6. The last line echoes the title of the book: "This strange song, gathered out of darkness" (p. 396). Having read the book, what do you think the title means?



POST READING ACTIVITIES

PROMPTS FOR EXTENDED RESPONSE

1. How does “The Gang” represent group think or bullying? Have you seen or experienced anything like “The Gang” in your school? Describe it and explain.
1. Racial slurs are used throughout the book. While some aren’t used today, others have replaced them. What slurs (race, gender, or class based) have you heard? What ways can such discriminatory language be challenged and resisted? What are possible empowering responses when someone uses such language?
2. How do you think a person moves on from experiencing a trauma like the school explosion? How does one deal with the “what if” questions when processing the trauma and the guilt? What advice would you give to Tommie who suggests that if she had skipped like Dwayne wanted, they would both be alive? What advice would you give to Naomi and Beto? Can Beto be sure that Cari would have survived if he had been sitting next to her? Can Naomi be certain the twins would be okay if she hadn’t sent them back into the building?

COMPLEMENTARY LESSON PLANS AND RESOURCES

- In addition to the lesson plans and activities created for this guide, the following are other available curricular resources to support the use of *Out of Darkness*.
- Lerner Books created a [Discussion Guide](#) for the book.
- [The Texas Library Association’s Spirit of Texas Round Table](#) created a number of resources to support using the book in the classroom:
- [Annotated list of “readalikes”](#) to display or recommend to readers of *Out of Darkness*
- [Academic guide](#) to journaling and point-of-view activity related to *Out of Darkness*
- [Oral history programming](#) related to *Out of Darkness*
- [Low-prep “passive” programming](#) related to *Out of Darkness*



COMPLEMENTARY LITERATURE

In addition to the “Readalikes” included above in the Texas Library Association materials, below is a list of award-winning Latinx or Latin American literature. Each book engages with themes complementary to those of *Out of Darkness*, such as coming of age, racism, race relations, racial and cultural identities, and empowered youth. Links to curricular resources are included with each title.

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Simon and Schuster, 2010. Grades 9+

Aristotle is an angry teen with a brother in prison. Dante is a know-it-all who has an unusual way of looking at the world. When the two meet at the swimming pool, they seem to have nothing in common. But as the loners start spending time together, they discover that they share a special friendship—the kind that changes lives and lasts a lifetime. And it is through this friendship that Ari and Dante will learn the most important truths about themselves and the kind of people they want to be.

Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Cinco Puntos Press, 2004. Grades 9+

The Hollywood where Sammy Santos lives is not one of glitz and glitter, but a barrio at the edge of a small New Mexico town. In the summer before his senior year, Sammy falls in love with the beautiful, independent, and intensely vulnerable Juliana. Sammy's chronicle of his senior year is both a love story and a litany of loss, the tale of his love not only for Juliana but for their friends, a generation from a barrio: tough, innocent, humorous, and determined to survive.

Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to Sammy & Juliana in Hollywood](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

Gabi, A Girl in Pieces by Isabel Quintero. Cinco Puntos Press, 2014. Grades 9+

Gabi Hernandez chronicles her last year in high school in her diary: college applications, Cindy's pregnancy, Sebastian's coming out, the cute boys, her father's meth habit, and the food she craves.



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And best of all, the poetry that helps forge her identity.

July 24

My mother named me Gabriella, after my grandmother who, coincidentally, didn't want to meet me when I was born because my mother was unmarried, and therefore living in sin. My mom has told me the story many, many, MANY, times of how, when she confessed to my grandmother that she was pregnant with me, her mother beat her. BEAT HER! She was twenty-five. That story is the basis of my sexual education and has reiterated why it's important to wait until you're married to give it up. So now, every time I go out with a guy, my mom says, "Ojos abiertos, piernas cerradas." Eyes open, legs closed. That's as far as the birds and the bees talk has gone. And I don't mind it. I don't necessarily agree with that whole wait until you're married crap, though. I mean, this is America and the 21st century; not Mexico one hundred years ago. But, of course, I can't tell my mom that because she will think I'm bad. Or worse: trying to be White.

Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to Gabi, A Girl in Pieces](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

Mexican Whiteboy by Matt de la Peña. Ember Press, 2010. Grades 9+

Danny's tall and skinny. Even though he's not built, his arms are long enough to give his pitch a power so fierce any college scout would sign him on the spot. Ninety-five mile an hour fastball, but the boy's not even on a team. Every time he gets up on the mound he loses it.

But at his private school, they don't expect much else from him. Danny's brown. Half-Mexican brown. And growing up in San Diego that close to the border means everyone else knows exactly who he is before he even opens his mouth. Before they find out he can't speak Spanish, and before they realize his mom has blond hair and blue eyes, they've got him pegged. But it works the other way too. And Danny's convinced it's his whiteness that sent his father back to Mexico.

That's why he's spending the summer with his dad's family. Only, to find himself, he may just have to face the demons he refuses to see--the demons that are right in front of his face. And open up to a friendship he never saw coming.

Set in the alleys and on the ball fields of San Diego County, *Mexican Whiteboy* is a story of friendship, acceptance, and the struggle to find your identity in a world of definitions.



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Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to Mexican Whiteboy](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano by Sonia Manzano. Scholastic Press, 2012. Grades 6+

There are two secrets Evelyn Serrano is keeping from her Mami and Papo? her true feelings about growing up in her Spanish Harlem neighborhood, and her attitude about Abuela, her sassy grandmother who's come from Puerto Rico to live with them. Then, like an urgent ticking clock, events erupt that change everything. The Young Lords, a Puerto Rican activist group, dump garbage in the street and set it on fire, igniting a powerful protest. When Abuela steps in to take charge, Evelyn is thrust into the action. Tempers flare, loyalties are tested. Through it all, Evelyn learns important truths about her Latino heritage and the history makers who shaped a nation. Infused with actual news accounts from the time period, Sonia Manzano has crafted a gripping work of fiction based on her own life growing up during a fiery, unforgettable time in America, when young Latinos took control of their destinies.

Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

Shadowshaper by Daniel José Older. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2015. Grades 6+

Sierra Santiago was looking forward to a fun summer of making art, hanging out with her friends, and skating around Brooklyn. But then a weird zombie guy crashes the first party of the season. Sierra's near-comatose abuelo begins to say "Lo siento" over and over. And when the graffiti murals in Bed-Stuy start to weep.... Well, something stranger than the usual New York mayhem is going on.

Sierra soon discovers a supernatural order called the Shadowshapers, who connect with spirits via paintings, music, and stories. Her grandfather once shared the order's secrets with an anthropologist, Dr. Jonathan Wick, who turned the Caribbean magic to his own foul ends. Now Wick wants to become the ultimate Shadowshaper by killing all the others, one by one. With the help of her friends and the hot graffiti artist Robbie, Sierra must dodge Wick's supernatural creations, harness her own Shadowshaping abilities, and save her family's past, present, and future.



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Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to Shadowshaper](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

The Tequila Worm by Viola Canales. Random House Books, 2007. Grades 6+

Sofia comes from a family of storytellers. Here are her tales of growing up in the barrio, full of the magic and mystery of family traditions: making Easter *cascarones*, celebrating *el Día de los Muertos*, preparing for *quinceañera*, rejoicing in the Christmas *nacimiento*, and curing homesickness by eating the tequila worm. When Sofia is singled out to receive a scholarship to an elite boarding school, she longs to explore life beyond the barrio, even though it means leaving her family to navigate a strange world of rich, privileged kids. It's a different *mundo*, but one where Sofia's traditions take on new meaning and illuminate her path.

Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to The Tequila Worm](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

Under the Mesquite by Guadalupe Garcia McCall. Lee & Low Books, 2011. Grades 6+

Lupita, a budding actor and poet in a close-knit Mexican American immigrant family, comes of age as she struggles with adult responsibilities during her mother's battle with cancer in this young adult novel in verse.

When Lupita learns Mami has cancer, she is terrified by the possibility of losing her mother, the anchor of her close-knit family. Suddenly, being a high school student, starring in a play, and dealing with friends who don't always understand, become less important than doing whatever she can to save Mami's life.

While her father cares for Mami at an out-of-town clinic, Lupita takes charge of her seven younger siblings. As Lupita struggles to keep the family afloat, she takes refuge in the shade of a mesquite tree, where she escapes the chaos at home to write. Forced to face her limitations in the midst of overwhelming changes and losses, Lupita rediscovers her voice and finds healing in the power of words.

Told with honest emotion in evocative free verse, Lupita's journey toward hope is captured in



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moments that are alternately warm and poignant. *Under the Mesquite* is an empowering story about testing family bonds and the strength of a young woman navigating pain and hardship with surprising resilience.

Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to Under the Mesquite](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute

Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass by Meg Medina. Candlewick Press, 2012. Grades 6+

One morning before school, some girl tells Piddy Sanchez that Yaqui Delgado hates her and wants to kick her ass. Piddy doesn't even know who Yaqui is, never mind what she's done to piss her off. Word is that Yaqui thinks Piddy is stuck-up, shakes her stuff when she walks, and isn't Latin enough with her white skin, good grades, and no accent. And Yaqui isn't kidding around, so Piddy better watch her back. At first Piddy is more concerned with trying to find out more about the father she's never met and how to balance honors courses with her weekend job at the neighborhood hair salon. But as the harassment escalates, avoiding Yaqui and her gang starts to take over Piddy's life. Is there any way for Piddy to survive without closing herself off or running away? In an all-too-realistic novel, Meg Medina portrays a sympathetic heroine who is forced to decide who she really is.

Classroom Resources: [Vamos a Leer Educator's Guide to Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute