

# LATIN AMERICA THROUGH FILM

Educator's Guide

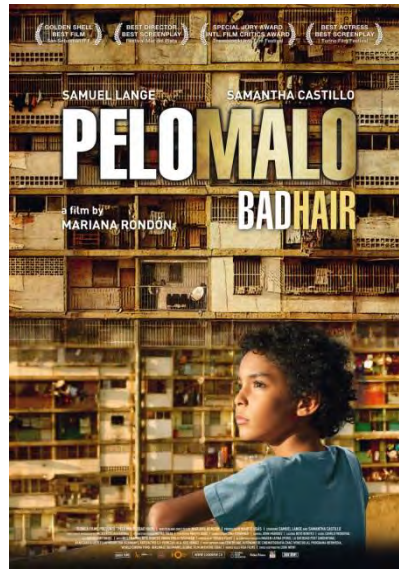
## **PELO MALO**

Directed by Mariana Rondón

Sudaca Films 2013

Length: 93 minutes

In Spanish with subtitles



## **FILM SUMMARY**

Junior is nine years old and has stubbornly curly hair, or "BAD HAIR". He wants to have it straightened for his yearbook picture, like a fashionable pop singer with long, ironed hair. This puts him at odds with his mother Marta. The more Junior tries to look beautiful and make his mother love him, the more she rejects him. He will find himself cornered, facing a painful decision.

## **AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS**

- San Sebastián Film Festival, "Golden Shell" Best Film
  - Mar del Plata Film Festival, "Silver Astor" Best Direction
  - Thessaloniki Film Fest, "Bronze Alexander" Jury Award
  - Torino Film Festival, "Prix Holden Best Script"
- Among many others*

## **ABOUT THE FILM**

Junior is nine years old and has stubbornly curly hair, or “bad hair.” He wants to have it straightened for his yearbook picture, like a fashionable pop singer with long, ironed hair. This puts him at odds with his mother, Marta, a young, unemployed widow.

Marta, Junior, and his baby brother live in a large, multi-family building. Marta, overwhelmed by what it takes to survive in the chaotic city of Caracas, finds it increasingly difficult to tolerate Junior’s fixation with his looks. The more Junior tries to look sharp and make his mother love him, the more she rejects him.

His paternal grandmother, a witness to his rejection, asks Marta to give her the boy so that he can look after her. Marta refuses and tries to correct her son’s obsessions by “setting an example,” a cruel moment which was meant to be a lesson. Junior finds himself cornered, face to face with a painful decision.

[Note: The above text is an excerpt from the film’s press kit.]

## **DIRECTOR’S NOTE**

One of the first images that came to me for this movie was a large multi-family building and the thousands of stories that take place behind those walls: heat, nudity, precariousness, fragility, sensuality, sex, violence, family, mother, child. The little, intimate stories I imagined grew more complex and so my characters were born.

They are helpless characters. Wounded and hurtful adults, and children who are learning how to hurt. Marta, the mother, focused on survival, teaches her son Junior to survive just like her, without resources, without freedom. But Junior is different, he fights with everything he’s got for his desire: to straighten his hair and to dress as a singer for a picture he wants to give his mother: a picture that would show him as he wishes to be seen.

Junior is going through a difficult initiation in life, marked by his mother’s intolerance, who constantly nags him, convinced of his sexual ambiguity. Junior doesn’t understand her anger, however, he tries to set her at ease, even by giving up on his desire.

Caracas is also hostile to them, a city of urban, political and family violence. Dreams encapsulated in multi-family buildings – the result of Le Corbusier’s “Utopian city” project in the 50s – now turned into massive vertical hells. My characters live surrounded by references that fail to include them. The walls are now a canvas for representations of power, ideological statements; an iconography that feeds them on political messianism and beauty pageants. Empty models that end up bringing them back to their hopelessness.

I’m interested in talking about helpless characters, who lack resources for emotional survival. I also wanted to talk about intolerance in a social

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR USING FILM IN THE CLASSROOM**

context that is riddled with dogmas, which don't embrace otherness, where public affairs extend to the private life of its inhabitants, highlighting their differences, be they social, political, or sexual.

Bad Hair is the intimate story of a nine-year-old child's initiation to life. A child who still plays, but who plays with everyday horror.

[Note: The above text is an excerpt from the film's press kit.]

Film can be used in a way similar to diverse literature, transporting students to a different place or time. To show a good film is to give students the opportunity to experience a piece of life through someone else's eyes. If we use films written, directed, produced or acted by those from other countries, we're also providing exposure to another's point of view, one that often is vastly different from our own.

Our students are from a visually and technologically savvy generation. Amid Promethean boards, other smart board technologies, Ipads, and Imovie apps, watching a movie in class isn't necessarily the 'treat' it used to be--some of our students are used to creating their own movies. Too often movies in class have become synonymous with nap time or busy work--a.k.a the teacher has work she/he has to get done, and doesn't have time to teach. So, the idea of a movie itself might not catch a class's attention, but that story that transports them to a country they've never seen, an ecosystem they've only read about, languages or music they've never heard, or art they've never seen--that can grab their attention.

Discussions of films like these are always a great exercise in critical thinking skills. In Spring 2012 the UNM LAII hosted a workshop on "Teaching About the Border Through the Lens of Film." Dr. Liz Hutchison, UNM Professor of History, brought up a number of important points to consider when using film in the classroom--many that could lead to fruitful classroom discussions.

The following is a section from a hand-out she provided. It's full of great questions, both for teachers to consider when choosing films, and to be used in class discussions about films. She specifies Latin America, as that is our focus, but these are applicable to any film.

### **Film as a Source for Teaching About Latin America**

- **Origins:** Why, when, and how was this film produced? Who paid for production and dissemination? Who was supposed to see it?
- **Motives:** What was the film-maker trying to accomplish by writing/directing/producing this film? What were the film-maker's immediate goals (to persuade its audience, to document events, to

- effect political or other change, etc.)?)
- **Perspective:** What can you tell about the film-makers' values and assumptions by watching the film itself? What can you learn about his/her biography, historical context, or career from other sources? How does this affect the credibility or reliability of the film with respect to the events it portrays?
  - **Film:** What major themes and topics emerge in the film itself? If the film claims to be "true," what evidence or techniques does the film-maker use to convey the story or message of the film, and are these assertions believable?
  - **Information:** What does the film say about the events, people, or time period under discussion?

### **Resources for Using Films in the Classroom**

We realize films like these can be hard to come by, but below we've provided information about programs that provide many Latin American films for free to teachers nationwide.

- The [Roger Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies](#) at Tulane University has an incredible [Lending Library](#). It is "the most comprehensive lending collection of educational materials about Latin American topics available for classroom use. They library holds over 3,000 videos, slide packets, culture kits, curriculum units, games, and miscellaneous print items." Films comprise a large part of their resources and they will ship the films to teachers nationwide free of charge.
- The [Institute for the Study of the Americas](#) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has extensive [Film Resources](#) that they, too, freely lend to educators nationally. They also have a section devoted to films for K-12 classrooms with accompanying curricular materials for the majority of the films.

### **Guidelines for Implementing Film in the Classroom**

Below are some guidelines for implementing film in your classroom. These were adapted from Regina Higgins' article "[Teaching Latin America Through Film](#)," available at: [www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/6457](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/6457)

#### **Introduce the theme before you introduce the film**

To make the most of viewing a film, introduce students to the themes in instruction, so you can explain and provide context before you view the film together. Connect with the themes not just in your planning, but in your teaching. Let students know explicitly and in detail just what you want them to watch and listen for. Tell them how their viewing will link to their learning. If there are terms and concepts that may be new to students, give them a thorough grounding in their meaning.

Film, especially documentary film, is powerful and immediate. We see

people affected (and sometimes afflicted) by forces we may have known only in the abstract. Suddenly the consequences of these forces are brought to life for us, made present through individuals we can see and hear. Preparation and context help students to process these images as part of their learning. In fact, many conventional reading strategies work well, with some adaptations, for pre-viewing a film.

### **K-W-L works for viewing as well as reading**

For most films, the standard K-W-L (“what I know, what I want to know, what I learned”) graphic organizer for reading makes a good framing device. This gives students a chance to put into words what they bring to the film, what they expect from the experience of viewing, and then, afterwards, what new information or insights they achieved. If students are already completing K-W-L organizers for reading, they’ll be familiar with the process. It will also give the message from you that viewing the film will be just as important a part of their learning as assigned reading.

The “what I learned” section provides a solid post-viewing assessment. And, to keep the learning going forward, students can re-visit and update their “what I know” notes, and add to their “what I want to know” questions. The final discussion can focus on just how students can learn more about the themes presented in the film.

### **Making predictions**

Even very young students can prepare for a film by predicting what they will see and learn about. When they make their predictions in informal writing or in drawings, students form some basic anticipatory ideas, which give them a context for viewing. Make notes without comment. Now you’ve set up an opportunity to test their assumptions. Will their predictions come true, or will they see and learn things they hadn’t even thought of?

After viewing, students can discuss what they saw that surprised them, and why they were surprised. The post-viewing is an opportunity for assessment, as well as a springboard for more exploration.

### **Asking essential questions**

Every film, documentary or feature, brings up and addresses essential questions about life and the world. A good post-viewing activity is to challenge students to answer specifically and in writing the essential question from the various points of view offered in the film. And, after thoughtful study and viewing, students can add their own answers to the essential question.

### **Building on learning**

When the film is over and you turn the lights back on, be sure to continue the learning through discussion and writing, as well as other projects. At first, especially if the film is emotionally engaging, students will need to respond informally, sharing their surprise or outrage. Let them express their reactions, but be ready to turn their energy and engagement to

further learning.

While interest is high and memory is fresh, students should note not only what they've learned from the film, but what questions remain for them. A class list of further questions to explore can give form and immediacy to a return to the "regular" instruction through reading. Those questions can light students' way back into the textbook chapter, and give them a reason for digging through data. Some films inspire students to action, as well as further study.

**LESSON  
PLANS  
& ACTIVITIES**

**Common Core Standards Addressed:**

**K-12**

Reading

**Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**

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

**Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity**

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

Writing

**Text Types and Purposes:**

- 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.

**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.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**

- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- Integrate and evaluate the content presented in diverse media formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**Dialogue Journals:  
Preparing to Watch the Film**

**Dialogue Journal**

This activity was adapted from an activity found in *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* by Linda Christensen (Rethinking Schools Publications, 2000, p. 48-49). See the end of this guide for the accompanying activity sheets to use in your classroom.

Give each student a copy of Activity Sheet #1. As a class, read over the various themes listed on the sheet, discussing what they mean, and possible examples. Have each student create a table out of paper with two columns labeled “Observations/Quotes” and “Reactions and Reflections” (See Activity Sheet #2 for an example). View the film over a few days. Have students use the table they created to keep a dialogue journal throughout the viewing of the film. Students can keep track of their thoughts as they watch the film, then give them time at the end of each class period to expand on their “Reactions and Reflections” section.

If time allows, expand the activity by having students write a more in-depth review of the movie or reflection on the themes based upon the things they noted in their dialogue journal. Students should include why or why not they would recommend the movie, its usefulness in the classroom, and what their reaction to the film was.

**Geography**

Establish a geographical context for the film. Using a world map, have students find Caracas, Venezuela.

While watching the film, take note of the city landscapes. How would you describe Caracas, Venezuela? Compare it to places you’ve lived. How is it different? How is it the same? What role does the city play in the film?

**Film Comprehension**

**Please note: This film does contain scenes with nudity and sexual content. The times of these scenes are listed here. Please be aware of these before showing this film to your students. If not appropriate for the age group you are working with, plan to show the film in chunks so that you can start and stop in such a way to avoid these parts.**

- 33:10-33:57
- 42:35-47:05
- 1:11:00-1:14:00

Approximate times are given with the majority of questions to aide in the use of the questions with the film viewing.

1. Why are Junior and his mother in the house in the opening scenes?
2. How does Junior’s mother respond to his singing on the bus?
3. Describe the housing development where Junior and his mother live. How is it alike or different from where you live?

4. What game are the two children playing? (4:30)
5. What is Junior trying to do to his hair? (5:45)
6. Describe what Junior does at the breakfast table and how he eats. What could be inferred from this about his personality? Explain. What seems to frustrate his mother about this? (6:30)
7. Why would Junior want to appear chubbier in his school photo?
8. What surprises you about the conversation between Junior and his friend while they're playing? What does Junior tell his baby brother? (9:10)
9. What type of job is Junior's mother applying for? (10:00)
10. What are Junior and his friend watching on TV? Think about the words to the song "Today we celebrate beauty, anyone could win. You, me, her. Anyone could win." Consider the contestants shown on TV. How is that image in contrast to the song? What contradictory message is being communicated? (11:13)
11. Why do you think Junior says "No one can stand idle here?" What does that say about the area they're walking through? (11:45)
12. How does Junior respond to the idea that his photo will be taken as a soldier? What do you notice about the child soldier in the photo? (13:00)
13. How does Junior's dancing compare to the other children? What does the look on his face when he sees his mother communicate? (16:00)
14. Describe Junior's interaction with his mother in the middle of the night. What do you think is happening here? (18:00)
15. Where do they go when Junior's mother can't pay the babysitter? (20:00)
16. Who is Carmen? What does she propose for Junior? How does Carmen describe Junior? (21-22:30)
17. Why do you think Junior is so preoccupied with having his hair straight?
18. How does Junior respond to his grandmother's proposal? (24:00)
19. Junior tells his mother that he will take care of her even when she's old, and then puts a barrette in her hair, telling her she will get the job now that she's pretty. What is his mother's reaction? What message does this send? Would you describe Junior's actions as loving? Would you describe his mother's actions as loving? (28:00)
20. Why do you think Junior's mother takes him to the doctor? What does the doctor say about his health? (30:00)
21. Compare the mother's interactions with Junior to the way she interacts with the baby. (33:00)
22. Why does Junior's mother go to the "Security Guard" party? What is she trying to do? (34:00)
23. Describe the conversation between Junior and his friend. What societal norms are being revealed through the conversation? What is problematic about what the children say? (37:00)
24. What does Junior do while he's at Carmen's? (40:00)
25. Why do you think the two children are so obsessed with getting their photos taken? What standard beauty norm is conveyed



- through the girl's mother's comment that Junior should be a beauty queen because at least he's skinny? (50:00)
26. This is the second time that a reference to something that happened at Carnival has been made (51:00). What do you think happened?
  27. Why does the little girl suggest that Junior dress up as a soldier? What does this say about Junior's mother's conception of masculinity? (51:15)
  28. What does Junior's mother ask the doctor? What does it seem that she is most worried about? What is the doctor's response? (53:00)
  29. Junior appears to love the suit Carmen made until he thinks about what his mother will say. How does this change his feelings about the suit? What does this convey about the way Junior feels about his mother? (55:00)
  30. Why do you think that Junior continues to be so loyal to his mother, despite the way she interacts with him? (57:00)
  31. What does Junior look up on the computer? (58:00)
  32. What does Junior put on his hair? How does his mother respond? What does she do? (59:00)
  33. Think about Junior's interaction with Mario (the young man at the grocery stand). Why do you think he's so drawn to him? Think about the people Junior spends the majority of his time with. Are they men or women? Does Junior have any other interactions with men? (1:00:00)
  34. Does Junior's mother ever tell him he has "pelo malo" or "bad hair?" What does she say to him about his hair? Where do you think he gets the ideas about his hair? (1:01:00)
  35. Why do both Carmen and Junior's mother assume Junior is gay? What types of stereotypes do these reveal? (1:04:00)
  36. Who does Junior's mother invite for dinner? Why do you think she does this? (1:09:00-1:11:00)
  37. What is the boss's response when Junior responds that the baby is a boy and not a girl? How is this a statement of sexism? (1:09:00)
  38. How do Junior and his mother interact during dinner? What is her boss's response to this? (1:11:00)
  39. How does Junior behave the morning after the dinner with the boss? Why do you think he reacts this way? What does his mother do in response? (1:19:00)
  40. Why do you think Junior's mother buys the wireless razor? (1:22:00)
  41. What do the other children yell at Junior and his friend? How do they respond? (1:22:00)
  42. Why are the two children waiting to leave? (1:24:00)
  43. What ultimatum does Junior's mother give him? What does he decide to do? (1:25:00)
  44. Do you think a haircut is going to make any real impact on the issues between Junior and his mother?
  45. What statement do you think the filmmaker is trying to make with the last scene? (1:28:00)

**Post-Viewing  
Reflective  
Writing or  
Discussion  
Questions**

1. Listen to or read NPR's discussion of the film in "['Pelo Malo' Is a Rare Look Into Latin American Race Relations](#)." What do you think of the points the reviewer made? Do you agree with the review? Disagree? Do you think anything important was omitted?
2. The movie engages the concept of gender in a number of ways, both implicitly and explicitly. What are some examples of this? What messages about gender are conveyed through the film? Think about the ways in which Junior's mother seems to define masculinity throughout the film. How are her ideas in conflict with the person Junior is? What message does this convey to Junior?
3. Reflect on the conversations between Junior and his friend. Think about their age. What do the topics of their discussions reveal about the things they've seen and the experiences they've had? Compare this to how you were as a child. Were you knowledgeable and aware of similar things?
4. Think about Junior's interactions with his mother throughout the film (i.e. when she questions him about his dancing, tells him to stop staring at her, etc.). How does he respond? Does he change to please her, or continue 'hold his ground?' What does this demonstrate about his personality? Would you describe him as passive? Strong willed? Rebellious? Docile? Explain.
5. In what ways is the concept of love represented in the film? Does Junior appear to love his mother? How does he show it? Does his mother ever show love? How? To who?
6. Think about Junior's relationships with the adults in his life. Does he receive love, affirmation, or support? Does he allow his own will or desires to be affected by the adults in his life? What does this say about his strength of character?
7. How do you think the haircut will impact Junior? Do you think it will change him? How? Why?

**Extension  
Projects:**

**Social  
construction of  
race and  
beauty**

**Pelo Malo/Bad Hair**

The phrase "pelo malo" or "bad hair" is quite common, and while some may argue that it's so common place it doesn't really mean anything, it could also be argued that the very taken for granted nature of the term "pelo malo" reveals the ways in which racism and societal standards of beauty that favor lighter skin tones are perpetuated. Watch the following clips and discuss the phrases. Are they innocuous or problematic? What do they reveal about societal standards of beauty?

- [Melissa Harris Perry: How Black Hair Matters](#) (approximately 11 minutes)
- [Trailer for Chris Rock's film \*Good Hair\*](#) (PLEASE NOTE: There are references to sexual innuendo in later sections of the trailer, please watch before viewing with your class. You may only want to use the first part of the trailer).

## Music

During the film, Junior's grandmother teaches him how to sing and dance to a particular song, "Limón, Limonero." The singer of this track, Henry Stephen, was an Afrolatino who [straightened his hair](#) during various parts of his career. The actress who plays Junior's grandmother, Nelly Ramos, was an Afrolatino Venezuelan singer; in fact she was a contemporary of Henry Stephen and founded [Grupo Madera](#) in the 1970s. Nelly Ramos also grew up in the same neighborhood, Parroquia San Agustín, of high-rise, low-income housing in Caracas where the film is set. When interviewed by the magazine [El Nacional](#), Nelly Ramos said that she does not like the terms afro-descendant or Afrolatino, rather she prefers the term black, or "negra", because this adjective is that which has confronted discrimination throughout the globe. Ramos said she was scared when approached by the casting director; due to the title, she felt it might be a movie that would reinforce stereotypes against which she'd spent her life fighting. However, once she was involved in the making of the film, she found the opposite to be true. To expose and reflect on experiences of certain people that normally do not get attention by wider audiences has the power to break down stereotypes by fighting ignorance, instead of reinforcing them.

The following links may be of interest for further discussing the music used in the film:

- Webpage with photos of Nelly Ramos' music group [Grupo Madera](#)
- Original music video of "[Limón, Limonero](#)" by Henry Stephen
- [Interview with Nelly Ramos](#) discussing film

## Exploring LGBTQ issues and history

Societal notions and stereotypes of homosexuality are important themes in the film. Below are resources that have been created to facilitate teaching about sexuality, gay history, and gay rights.

- Introduction to Sexual Orientation  
A Lesson Plan from Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: A Toolkit  
Purpose: To learn about issues faced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning people and to promote acceptance and respect for all people irrespective of their sexual orientation. Found at: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/for-professionals/lesson-plans-professionals/237?task=view>
- This article from *The Guardian* gives a background discussion and links to lesson plan resources to examine homosexuality in order to help students to grasp the issues, and help schools to combat homophobia. Found at: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/jul/01/learnlessoplans.secondaryschools>

**RELATED  
RESOURCES  
FOR TEACHING  
ABOUT  
RACE, LGBTQ  
RIGHTS, AND  
IDENTITY**

- This article from the NYT (learning blog) provides a number of lesson plans, articles and other resources to aid in teaching about gay history and issues. Found at: [http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/22/teaching-and-learning-about-gay-history-and-issues/?\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_r=0](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/22/teaching-and-learning-about-gay-history-and-issues/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0)
- Teaching Tolerance offers a number of resources for teaching about homosexuality and gay rights. Below are three lesson plans from their site:
  - The Civil Rights Story Includes Gay Rights <http://www.tolerance.org/blog/civil-rights-story-includes-gay-rights>
  - Bayard Rustin: The Fight for Civil and Gay Rights <http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/bayard-rustin-fight-civil-and-gay-rights>
  - The Role of Gay Men and Lesbians in the Civil Rights Movement <http://www.tolerance.org/LGBT-CRM>

Note: The following titles were selected for their attention to race, ethnicity, and identity for Latin American or Latinx characters. If you would like to expand the conversation to include all ethnicities and nationalities, we encourage you to visit the Teaching for Change website, where they've provided booklists of recommended titles for "Learning about Gender Identity," "LGBTQ," and "Multicultural, Social Justice," among other topics.

**Race and Identity: YA**

*The Tequila Worm* by Viola Canales. Wendy Lamb Books; 2007. 208 pages.

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 and Iberian Institute

*Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal* by Margarita Engle. HMH Books for Young Readers, 2014. 272 pages.

One hundred years ago, the world celebrated the opening of the Panama Canal, which connected the world's two largest oceans and signaled America's emergence as a global superpower. It was a miracle, this path of water where a mountain had stood—and creating a miracle is no easy thing. Thousands lost their lives, and those who survived worked under the harshest conditions for only a few silver coins a day. From the young "silver people" whose back-breaking labor built the Canal to the denizens of the endangered rainforest itself, this is the story of one of the largest and most difficult engineering projects ever undertaken, as only Newbery Honor-winning author Margarita Engle could tell it.

*The Chaos* by Nalo Hopkinson. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2013. 256 pages.

Sixteen-year-old Scotch struggles to fit in—at home she's the perfect daughter, at school she's provocatively sassy, and thanks to her mixed heritage, she doesn't feel she belongs with the Caribbeans, whites, or blacks. And even more troubling, lately her skin is becoming covered in a sticky black substance that can't be removed. While trying to cope with this creepiness, she goes out with her brother—and he disappears. A mysterious bubble of light just swallows him up, and Scotch has no idea how to find him. Soon, the Chaos that has claimed her brother affects the city at large, until it seems like everyone is turning into crazy creatures. Scotch needs to get to the bottom of this supernatural situation ASAP before the Chaos consumes everything she's ever known—and she knows that the black shadowy entity that's begun trailing her every move is probably not going to help. A blend of fantasy and Caribbean folklore, at its heart this tale is about identity and self-acceptance—because only by acknowledging her imperfections can Scotch hope to save her brother.

*Yaqui Delgado* by Meg Medina. Candlewick, 2014. 272 pages.

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 and Iberian Institute

*Shadowshaper* by Daniel José Older. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2015. 304 pages.

Paint a mural. Start a battle. Change the world. Sierra Santiago planned an easy summer of making art and hanging out with her friends. But then a corpse crashes the first party of the season. Her stroke-ridden grandfather starts apologizing over and over. And when the murals in her neighborhood begin to weep real tears... Well, something more sinister than the usual Brooklyn ruckus is going on. With the help of a fellow artist named Robbie, Sierra discovers shadowshaping, a thrilling magic that infuses ancestral spirits into paintings, music, and stories. But someone is killing the shadowshapers one by one -- and the killer believes Sierra is hiding their greatest secret. Now she must unravel her family's past, take down the killer in the present, and save the future of shadowshaping for generations to come. Full of a joyful, defiant spirit and writing as luscious as a Brooklyn summer night, *Shadowshaper* introduces a heroine and magic unlike anything else in fantasy fiction, and marks the YA debut of a bold new voice.

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

*Mexican Whiteboy* by Matt de la Pena. Delacorte Press, 2008. 258 pages.

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.

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

### [American and Iberian Institute](#)

*Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* by Isabel Quintero. Cinco Puntos Press, 2014. 208 pages.

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

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 and Iberian Institute](#)

*Sammy & Juliana in Hollywood* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Cinco Puntos Press, 2011. 240 pages.

It is 1969, America is at war, "Hollywood" is a dirt-poor Chicano barrio in small-town America, and Sammy and Juliana face a world of racism, war in Vietnam, and barrio violence. *Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood* is a Young Adult Library Services Association Top 10 Best Book for Young Adults and a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award for Young Adults.

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

*Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White*, by Lila Quintero Weaver. University Alabama Press, 2012. 264 pages.

*Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White* is an arresting and moving personal story about childhood, race, and identity in the American South, rendered in stunning illustrations by the author, Lila Quintero Weaver. In 1961, when Lila was five, she and her family emigrated from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Marion, Alabama, in the heart of Alabama's Black Belt. As educated, middle-class Latino immigrants in a region that was defined by segregation, the Quinteros occupied a privileged vantage from which to view the racially charged culture they inhabited. Weaver and her family were firsthand witnesses to key moments in the civil rights movement. But *Darkroom* is her personal story as well: chronicling what it was like being a Latina girl in the Jim Crow South, struggling to understand both a foreign country and the horrors of our nation's race relations. Weaver, who was neither black nor white, observed very early on the inequalities in the American culture, with its blonde and blue-eyed feminine ideal. Throughout her life, Lila has struggled to find her place in this society and fought against the discrimination around her.

## **LGBTQ: YA**

*Sammy & Juliana in Hollywood* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Cinco Puntos Press, 2011. 240 pages.

It is 1969, America is at war, "Hollywood" is a dirt-poor Chicano barrio in small-town America, and Sammy and Juliana face a world of racism, war in Vietnam, and barrio violence. *Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood* is a Young Adult Library Services Association Top 10 Best Book for Young Adults and a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award for Young Adults.

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

*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2014. 368 pages.

This Printz Honor Book is a "tender, honest exploration of identity" (Publishers Weekly) that distills lyrical truths about family and friendship. 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 and Iberian Institute](#)

*The Meaning of Consuelo* by Judith Ortiz Cofer. Beacon Press, 2004. 216 pages.

The Signe family is blessed with two daughters. Consuelo, the elder, is thought of as pensive and book-loving, the serious child-la niña seria-while Mili, her younger sister, is seen as vivacious, a ray of tropical sunshine. Two daughters: one dark, one light; one to offer comfort and consolation, the other to charm and delight. But, for all the joy both girls should bring, something is not right in this Puerto Rican family; a tragedia is developing, like a tumor, at its core. In this fierce, funny, and sometimes startling novel, we follow a young woman's quest to negotiate her own terms of survival within the confines of her culture and her family.

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



*Chulito* by Charles Rice-Gonzalez. Magnus Books, 2011. 275 pages.

Set against a vibrant South Bronx neighborhood and the queer youth culture of Manhattan's piers, *Chulito* is a coming-of-age, coming out love story of a sexy, tough, hip hop-loving, young Latino man and the colorful characters who populate his block. *Chulito*, which means "cutie," is one of the boys, and everyone in his neighborhood has seen him grow up--the owner of the local bodega, the Lees from the Chinese restaurant, his buddies from the corner, and all of his neighbors and friends, including Carlos, who was *Chulito's* best friend until they hit puberty and people started calling Carlos a pato...a faggot. *Chulito* rejects Carlos, buries his feelings for him, and becomes best friends with Kamikaze, a local drug dealer. When Carlos comes home from his first year away from college and they share a secret kiss, *Chulito's* worlds collide as his ideas of being a young man, being macho, and being in love are challenged. Vivid, sexy, funny, heartbreaking, and fearless, this knock out novel is destined to become a gay classic.

*The Mariposa Club* by Rigoberto Gonzalez. Alyson Books, 2009. 246 pages.

As they embark on their final year of high school, the Fierce Foursome—Maui, Trini, Isaac, and Liberace—decide to do something big, something that will memorialize their friendships for when they all go their separate ways and begin their new “adult” lives. Already accustomed to the hardships that come with being openly gay in high school (not to mention in their homes), the boys can’t begin to imagine what they will be faced with when they set out to create Caliente Valley High School’s first GLBTQ club. All four boys are remarkably different, and they have been brought together for the time being by their shared feelings of being on the periphery at school, at home, and in the community. But once the Mariposa Club is formed, they will not only have a place where they belong and that is all their own, but it will be a place for future students who feel as displaced as they do. Little do they know that when the town is rocked by a tragic homophobic incident, the high school and entire community will turn to the Mariposa Club as a symbol of their grief and fear.

### **Race, Identity, LGBTQ: Children’s**

*Call Me Tree/ Llamame arbol* by Maya Christina Gonzalez. Children's Book Press, 2014. 24 pages.

In this spare, lyrically written story, we join a child on a journey of self-discovery. Finding a way to grow from the inside out, just like a tree, the child develops as an individual comfortable in the natural world and in relationships with others. The child begins Within / The deep dark earth, like a seed, ready to grow and then dream and reach out to the world. Soon the child discovers birds and the sky and other children: Trees and trees / Just like me! Each

is different too. The child embraces them all because All trees have roots/ All trees belong. Maya Christina Gonzalez once again combines her talents as an artist and a storyteller to craft a gentle, empowering story about belonging, connecting with nature, and becoming your fullest self. Young readers will be inspired to dream and reach, reach and dream . . . and to be as free and unique as trees.

*Antonio's Card / La Tarjeta de Antonio* by Rigoberto Gonzalez. Children's Book Press, 2005. 32 pages.

Antonio loves words, because words have the power to express feelings like love, pride, or hurt. Mother's Day is coming soon, and Antonio searches for the words to express his love for his mother and her partner, Leslie. But he's not sure what to do when his classmates make fun of Leslie, an artist, who towers over everyone and wears paint-splattered overalls. As Mother's Day approaches, Antonio must choose whether — or how — to express his connection to both of the special women in his life.

*Who's in a Family?* By Robert Skutch. Tricycle Press, 199. 32 pages.

Family is important, but who's in a family? Why, the people who love you the most! This equal opportunity, open-minded picture book has no preconceptions about what makes a family a family. There's even equal time given to some of children's favorite animal families. With warm and inviting jewel-tone illustrations, this is a great book for that long talk with a little person on your lap.

*A is for Activist* by Innosanto Nagara. Triangle Square, 2013. 32 pages.

A is for Activist is an ABC board book written and illustrated for the next generation of progressives: families who want their kids to grow up in a space that is unapologetic about activism, environmental justice, civil rights, LGBTQ rights, and everything else that activists believe in and fight for. The alliteration, rhyming, and vibrant illustrations make the book exciting for children, while the issues it brings up resonate with their parents' values of community, equality, and justice. This engaging little book carries huge messages as it inspires hope for the future, and calls children to action while teaching them a love for books.

*Counting on Community* by Innosanto Nagara. Triangle Square, 2015. 24 pages.

Counting on Community is Innosanto Nagara's follow-up to his hit ABC book, A is for Activist. Counting up from one stuffed piñata to ten hefty hens--and always counting on each other--children are encouraged to recognize the value of their community, the joys inherent in healthy eco-friendly activities, and the agency they possess to make change. A broad and inspiring vision of diversity is told through stories in words and pictures. And of course, there is a duck to find on every page!

*Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match / Marisol McDonald no combina* by Monica Brown. Children's Book Press, 2011. 32 pages.

Marisol McDonald has flaming red hair and nut-brown skin. Polka dots and stripes are her favorite combination. She prefers peanut butter and jelly burritos in her lunch box. And don't even think of asking her to choose one or the other activity at recess—she'll just be a soccer playing pirate princess, thank you very much. To Marisol McDonald, these seemingly mismatched things make perfect sense together. Unfortunately, they don't always make sense to everyone else. Other people wrinkle their nose in confusion at Marisol—can't she just be one or the other? Try as she might, in a world where everyone tries to put this biracial, Peruvian-Scottish-American girl into a box, Marisol McDonald doesn't match. And that's just fine with her.

## **ABOUT THIS GUIDE**



Written by staff at the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI), *Latin America Through Film Educator's Guides* provide an excellent way to teach about Latin America through film. For more materials that support teaching about Latin America in the classroom, visit the LAI online at <http://laii.unm.edu/outreach>. This guide was prepared 03/ 2016 by Katrina Dillon, LAI Project Assistant.

## Instructions for Dialogue Journal

The following is adapted from Linda Christensen's book *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* (2000, p. 48-49)

### Dialogue Journal for Film: Guiding Ideas

As you watch the film, keep track of scenes or dialogues that you want the class to come to for discussion, or that you want to think about more. Use your Observations and Reflections table to list the specific scene or dialogue, and to write your reaction. The following are ideas to help you think about what you are viewing.

1. **SOCIAL QUESTIONS:** Look for race, class, and gender inequalities. Write what you notice and how it makes you feel, or why you think it's important.
2. **GREAT WRITING:** Listen for a line, a phrase, or an entire dialogue that you think is great writing (or speaking if this film is a documentary). Think about how you might "steal" some ideas or words to use in your own writing or speaking. Listening for good examples will help you to become a better speaker and writer.
3. **QUESTIONS:** It could be that you don't understand something that is going on in a movie. These questions usually lead to reach classroom discussion.
4. **TALK BACK:** Get mad at a character or narrator. Talk back. Disagree. These are also great discussion starters.
5. **MEMORIES:** Every dialogue or scene changes somewhat depending upon the viewer and his or her experiences. You might hear yourself saying, "That reminds me of . . ." What memories click when you watch the film?
6. **AHA'S:** As you watch a movie, you might start to notice a thread that you want to follow. Keep track of these. When it comes time to write an essay or answer an extended response question, you will have the evidence that you need.
7. **OTHER READINGS OR FILMS:** Sometimes when we watch a film, other films or books come to mind. It's good to write those down.
8. **VISUAL TECHNIQUES:** Above, I asked you to keep track of great writing or speaking, but I'd also like you to watch for great visual techniques: use of imagery, flashback, scenery, filming style, etc. Notice the things that work and how they help to further the purpose of the film.

ACTIVITY SHEET FOR DIALOGUE JOURNAL

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

OBSERVATIONS/QUOTES	REACTIONS & REFLECTIONS