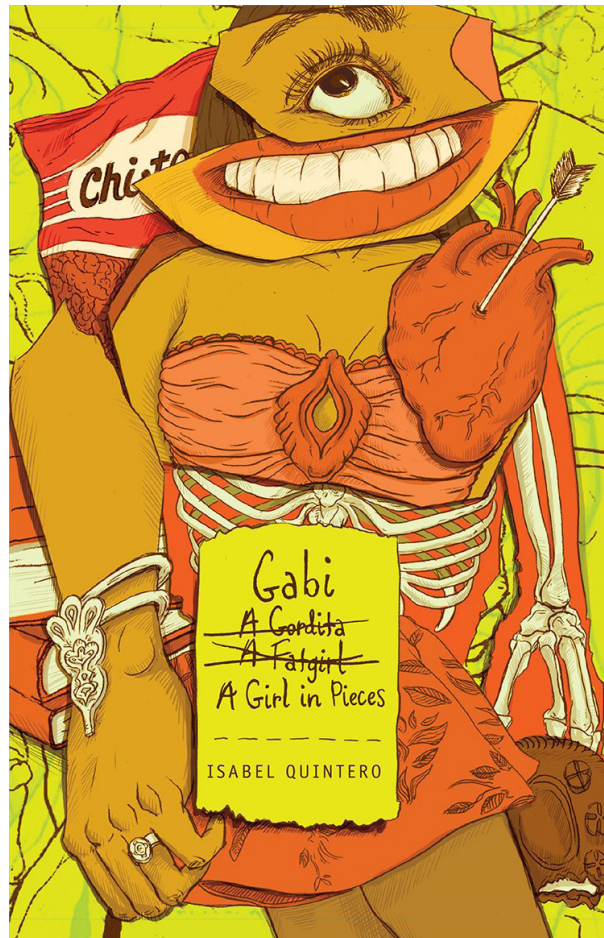


# VAMOS A LEER

*teaching latin america through literacy*



# VAMOS A LEER

## Educator's Guide

### **Gabi, A Girl in Pieces**

Written by Isabel Quintero

Published by Cinco Puntos Press 2014

ISBN: 1935955950

Age Level: 14 and up



### **BOOK SUMMARY**

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.

*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.*

**AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:**

- 2015 William C. Morris Award for YA Debut Novel
- 2015 Capitol Choices: Noteworthy Books for Children and Teens
- 2015 Tomás Rivera Book Award, Works for Older Children
- 2015 YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults
- 2015 YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, Top 10 Selection
- Amelia Bloomer List, part of the American Library Association, Social Responsibilities Round Table's Feminist Task Force
- Booklist Best Books of 2014
- School Library Journal Best Books of 2014
- Kirkus Reviews Best Books of 2014

## AUTHOR'S CORNER

### About Isabel Quintero:

Isabel Quintero is the author behind the now relatively well-known *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces*. If you haven't heard of it yet, just check out some of the award lists from the School Library Journal, the Tomás Rivera Book Award, YALSA, Booklist Best Books, and the Américas Award, among others.



Despite being a new author to the publishing world writ large, Quintero is not new to the field of writing. As she describes on her [author's blog](#), she has been dedicated to writing poetry and fiction throughout her life. It is, in her words, “not a luxury. It is a necessity for my being, for my happiness. It makes me whole.” Not surprisingly, this fascination and dedication to the writing process seems to have permeated Quintero’s professional life. Cinco Puntos Press explains in her biography that she is “an elementary school library technician and loves sharing her passion for the written word with students. She also teaches community college part time and works as a freelance writer for the Arts Connection of San Bernardino. Quintero works as events coordinator for Orange Monkey Publishing and assistant editor for *Tin Cannon*, a literary journal.” Certainly a literary theme seems to run throughout her various roles in life.

Quintero has openly stated that *Gabi* is a culmination of many elements of her childhood – from the bilingual and cross-cultural influences she derived from growing up in a Mexican-American family, to her experiences as a young woman grappling with gender roles, sexuality, and body image.

According to Cinco Puntos Press, Quintero explains her inspiration for the novel by noting that, “I wrote this book because some of it is my story. In a lot of ways *Gabi* and I share the same issues; we both had (have) body image problems, a bicultural experience, a natural distaste for imposed gender roles, and confusion about sex and its role in our life. As I grew older, I realized I wasn't alone, and that the women who had had similar experiences, also felt alone throughout their teenage years.” That universality and willingness to speak truthfully about these issues are two of the reasons why *Gabi* has sparked such a response among its readers.

Quintero has begun her professional writing career with an amazing and, dare we say, groundbreaking protagonist. I speak on behalf of everyone at *Vamos a Leer* when I say that we can't wait to see where she takes us from here.

Isabel Quintero's website:  
<http://laisabelquintero.com/>

## USING *Gabi, A*

Over the last six months rave reviews of Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* were popping up everywhere. As excited as I was to finally read it, I

## ***Girl in Pieces* IN THE CLASSROOM**

was also a little hesitant. I didn't want to be disappointed by expectations that were set too high. I had nothing to worry about. Told from Gabi's point of view, the book is honest, authentic, endearing, and funny. I enjoyed the book so much that I was sad to see it end. I'm fairly certain that my neighbors may think I'm crazy now, as I sat on my porch cackling out loud as I read it.

If you've read much on our blog, you know that we're strong advocates for academically rigorous curriculum that prepares our students to be successful in and out of the classroom. But, as I've said before, success has to do with more than just academics. We also have to address the emotional and social well-being of our students. *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* does this by allowing the reader to experience Gabi's senior year of high school through her diary. The book addresses so many important themes. It can act as a springboard to discuss any of the following in greater depth: gender roles, sexuality, rape, family and societal expectations, body image, self-esteem, ethnicity, race, identity, the power of writing, or addiction. So often we don't make space for these important conversations in our classrooms, but these are issues that our students need to feel encouraged to discuss and process.

One of my favorite aspects of the book is the way in which Gabi's perception of her body changes. As the cover indicates with the crossed out words "A Gordita" and "A Fatgirl", Gabi struggles with her body image. Through her honesty and vulnerability, Gabi voices the feelings that so many girls struggle with, but rarely feel comfortable admitting out loud. Recently, I've come across articles discussing the ways in which shame and body-image are connected, and how harmful this is because so often we respond to shame with silence. We don't want to talk about things that make us feel ashamed, so these thoughts stay trapped inside, operating in what I've seen described as a continuous reel of self-hatred that alienates and isolates. Gabi's diary provides a safe way to broach such conversations as her sense of humor makes what is often a vulnerable topic more accessible. I also really appreciated that Gabi's acceptance of her body wasn't found by changing herself through weight loss, and thus succumbing to norms perpetuated by unhealthy media images. Reading Gabi's struggles to accept her body reminded me of [Tina Fey's thoughts on body image](#). I'm fairly certain Gabi could appreciate Fey's humor.

Societal and family expectations around gender roles are another important theme in the book. Gabi's own hopes, dreams, and ambitions are often in conflict with others' expectations of her. She is often confronted with the double standards that continue to operate for men and women. I think we see through Gabi and her brother not only the way these double standards hurt the women in our communities, but also the men. If this is a topic of interest to you, Dr. Nancy Lopez (one of our own professors at UNM) does a great job discussing this in her book [Hopeful Girls, Troubled Boys](#).

On another note, the role of poetry in the book is particularly powerful,

and provides an easy way to integrate the novel into writing and language arts classes. Gabi's poetry class opens her eyes to the ways in which writing can be empowering and healing, both through reading the words of others and writing one's own. As Gabi writes in one of her poems, "Poetry helps heal wounds./ Makes them tangible" (p. 141). Rethinking Schools' recently released [\*Rhythm & Resistance: Teaching Poetry for Social Justice\*](#), edited by Linda Christensen and Dyan Watson, would be an excellent curriculum resource book to use in conjunction with this novel.

I could go on and on, but for the sake of time I'll stop here in the hopes that you're convinced that this is a book you should read as soon as possible. If my words weren't enough, perhaps Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera's will sway you: "I cannot think of a book today for young adults as voracious, bold, truthful and timely."

If you'd like to read what others have thought about the book, check out the links to other reviews below:

- [Kirkus Review](#)
- [NPR's "This Weekend, Pick Up the Pieces With 'Gabi'"](#)

If you're interested in learning more about the author and hearing what she has to say about her work and other issues, check out the following interviews:

- School Library Journal's "[Constructing a Life | A Conversation with Isabel Quintero](#)"
- [YALSA's 2015 Morris Award: An Interview with Finalist Isabel Quintero](#)
- Stephanie Kuehn's "[Morris Award Finalist Interview: Isabel Quintero, Author of Gabi, A Girl in Pieces](#)"
- [Listen to Isabel Quintero](#) reveal the story behind *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*, courtesy of [TeachingBooks.net](#).
- Listen to a [Gabi playlist](#) that Quintero created for the music blog [largehearted boy](#).

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## **LESSON PLANS & ACTIVITIES**

The following lesson plans include guided reading questions organized by parts of the book and extended response writing prompts. These questions have been written to support the types of reading and critical thinking skills required in standardized reading comprehension tests. The following key words and skills are highlighted: analyze, infer, evaluate, describe, support, explain, summarize, compare, contrast and predict.

In addition to the lesson plans and activities included here, check out the [Teacher's Guide for \*Gabi, A Girl in Pieces\*](#) created by Cinco Puntos Press.

Common Core Standards Addressed:  
K-12

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## 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.

## 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.

### July-October | Pages 7-72

1. How do you think Gabi's mother would react if Gabi were to get pregnant without being married? Why do you say this? Think about the messages Gabi is given through what her grandmother

## **Guided Reading Questions**

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- did to her mother and what her mother tells her every time she goes out with a guy (p. 7)
2. Make an inference: Do you think Gabi is white? Explain (p. 7)
  3. Based on Gabi's entries from July 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> how would you describe her? What kind of personality do you think she has? (p. 7-9)
  4. What does Cindy tell Gabi? How does Gabi react? (p. 11-13)
  5. What does it mean when the stripes turn pink on the pregnancy test? (p. 16)
  6. How does Cindy's mom react when she finds out Cindy is pregnant? (p. 18)
  7. Why does Sebastian decide he's ready to tell his parents that he's gay? While we don't know exactly what they said, did it go as Sebastian had hoped? How do we know? (p. 19)
  8. Who is the homeless looking guy Gabi sees when waiting for the bus? (p. 19)
  9. Why is Gabi surprised by how her mother responds to the news of Cindy's pregnancy? Why did she expect something different? (p. 20-21)
  10. How did Sebastian's parents respond when he told them he was gay? Imagine you are Sebastian, how do you think that would feel? Have you ever had someone you cared about deeply reject you for who you were? How did you deal with it? (21-22)
  11. Why does Gabi hate dresses so much? (p. 24-25) What does sharing these kinds of stories do for the readers' feelings about Gabi?
  12. How does Gabi find out that Georgina is telling people about Gabi's pregnancy? Why do you think Georgina would do that? Why do you think people are so invested in gossiping about each other? (p. 27-28)
  13. How does Gabi treat Martin when he asks about Cindy? Why does she regret it later? (p. 28)
  14. How does Gabi describe her father? How does her family choose to deal with this? (p. 29-30)
  15. Re-read Gabi's letter to her father on pages 30-31. Based on her letter, what is it like to deal with a parent who has an addiction? Have you ever had a similar experience?
  16. Why does it upset Gabi so much that Joshua Moore is going out with Sandra? What kinds of emotions does Sandra trigger for Gabi? (p. 31-33)
  17. What kind of double standard does Gabi's mom reveal when she talks about both Cindy's and Diana's pregnancies? (p. 34)
  18. What happens when Gabi tells people she is Mexican? What does this say about the stereotypes we have around being Mexican? How does this prove or disprove the idea that we live in a colorblind society? (p. 34-36)
  19. What new low has Gabi's father hit? Do you think he's hit rock bottom? Make a prediction: Will Tía Bertha be able to help her brother? Explain your answer. (p. 40-42)
  20. Why does Gabi have a difficult time believing that Eric likes her? (p. 46)



21. What do you think is the answer to Gabi's question: "Why is every mom's concern about sex?" (p. 51)
22. How does Gabi get her first kiss? What does this demonstrate about Gabi's personality? (p. 53-54)
23. How is Gabi's childhood different from her mother's? How do you think this affects their relationship? (p. 55-56)
24. What kinds of conflicted feelings does Gabi have about her boyfriend Eric? What do you think it says about their relationship when she's not comfortable telling him about her father? (p. 63-65)
25. Is Tía Agi really supportive of Sebastian? How does she respond when confronted with the reality that he is gay? (p. 65-67)

### **November –February | Pages 72-164**

1. What was Cindy's experience with German like? How is this different from what is usually presented in the media through movies, TV shows and other YA novels? (p. 75-76)
2. In what way does Beto's arrest demonstrate the double standard Gabi's mother has for her and her brother? (p. 79-80)
3. How does Gabi feel about her mother's pregnancy? (p. 81-82)
4. What do Eric's grandmother's comments demonstrate about racial stereotypes and expectations? (p. 82-83)
5. What do you think of Gabi's thoughts on writing? Do you think writing can be therapeutic? Have you ever been upset about something, written about it, and then felt better? Think about the writing that you've been asked to do for school. Is that writing personal, or is it usually about something or someone else, and not yourself? (p. 83)
6. What is your opinion of Gabi's poem about her grandmother? Do you think it was mean or disrespectful? How was it a poem about being thankful? Have you ever known anyone with Alzheimer's or dementia? What was that like? (p. 86-88)
7. Describe the kind of person Eric is based on what Gabi's shared in her journal. Do you think he is a good match for Gabi? Why or why not?
8. How is Beto affected by his father's alcoholism? (p. 92-94)
9. Who does Gabi see when she takes Beto to the mall? While Beto may have been blackmailing Gabi for the new shoes, he then shows he can also be compassionate. What does he do? (p. 100)
10. How does Gabi break up with Eric? Do you think this was a good decision? (p. 102-103)
11. How does Beto know that Gabi is having someone important over? (p. 112-113)
12. Re-read Gabi's poem about her father (p. 117-122). How does she convey what it's like to live with an addict through the poem? What is the most powerful part of the poem to you? What section resonated with you the most?
13. What is in the surprise package that arrives for Gabi? Who do you think sent it? Why? (p. 125-126)
14. What happens that makes Gabi less than excited about what she thought was a date to the coffee shop with Martin? (p. 130)

15. What changes Gabi's disappointment about the poetry reading with Martin? What does she find out? (p. 136)
16. How does the poetry reading go? (p. 136-137)
17. Re-read Gabi's poem about the poetry reading (p. 140). How had poetry changed for Gabi since the beginning of the year? How has writing poetry helped Gabi? Do you have anything that helps you process difficult or important experiences? (p. 139-142)
18. How do the gifts that Gabi's friends and family give her demonstrate how much they care about her and know her? Have you ever received a gift that made you feel like that person really understood you? (p. 144-145)
19. When Gabi overhears her mother talking to her Tía Bertha about her ex-husband, what she hears is difficult for her to accept. What does Gabi's mother believe about a woman's worth? Why can't Gabi accept that? While Gabi doesn't agree with her mother's beliefs, she still struggles with what she believes about being a woman and society's expectations. What are some of the things that Gabi struggles with the most? (p. 146-149)
20. How does Gabi's father die? Why is this so traumatic for her in particular? (p. 150-152)
21. Why is Gabi so grateful for the mortician? Why do you think this was important to her? (p. 153-154)
22. What do you think about the things Gabi said about her father at the funeral? Are these the kinds of things you would have shared? (p. 154-155)
23. All of the questions and stares aren't really what Gabi needs when she returns to school. What would have been a more appropriate response from her classmates if they really wanted to communicate that they cared about her? (p. 157-158)
24. How does Ms. Abernand reach out to Gabi after her father's death? Why do you think this was more effective than anything the other teachers did? (p. 159-160)

#### **March-June | Pages 164-284**

1. How does Beto seem to be coping with his father's death? How does his behavior send his mother into early labor? (p. 163-167)
2. How does Gabi feel about running? Describe her contradictory feelings? Do you think Martin's right—will running make Gabi feel better? (p. 170-171)
3. Describe Gabi's reaction to seeing Cindy give birth. (p. 172-174)
4. What does Cindy name her baby? Why do you think she chooses this name? (p. 174)
5. What does Georgina admit to Gabi? Instead of enjoying the ways the tables have turned on Georgina, Gabi feels sorry for her. Why? How does Gabi treat Georgina when she confides in her? What does this say about Gabi's character? (p. 175-178)
6. What does Georgina decide to do about her pregnancy? How does it affect her? (p. 180-186)
7. What realization does Gabi have after her conversation with her mom about moving away for college? (p. 184-185)

8. After her acceptance to Berkeley, Gabi's mom's thoughts on moving change. Why do you she changes her mind? (p. 187)
9. What does Gabi decide to write her zine about? How is her zine different from the book her mom gave her about the female body? (p. 190-202)
10. What was Gabi's purpose in writing her zine about the female body? What was it that she wanted readers to think about and question? (p. 204)
11. What does Ian ask Gabi to do? Why does this make her nervous? (p. 209-210)
12. Based on what Ian does, what kind of person do you think he is? How does Gabi handle the situation? (p. 213-214)
13. What does Ian tell Martin? Why do you think he did this? Did Gabi mention what happened to anyone? (p. 219-220)
14. What happens when Gabi does to pick the dress up in Tijuana? (p. 222-224)
15. How does Gabi's mom help fix the prom dress situation? (p. 225-226)
16. What does Cindy admit to Gabi and Sebastian about what happened with German? (p8). 22
17. How does Gabi critique the saying "Boys will be boys"? Is there anything that you would add to Gabi's list? (p. 229-231)
18. What does Gabi decide to do so that she is prepared in case she and Martin have sex on prom night? While deciding to have sex is a serious decision and thinking through protection is important, Quintero also infuses Gabi's experience with some humor. How does she do that? (p. 241-246)
19. How does prom go? (p. 246-248)
20. Quintero uses the character Clementino Noriega to show that despite all the progress that's been made in terms of advocating for the equality of all people prejudice and bias still exist. Are there students like Noriega in your own school? Does anyone confront them about their prejudice? Do you think Ms. Abernand handled the situation well? Have you seen teachers deal with similar situations? How did they handle it? What was the outcome? (p. 250-252)
21. Gabi is mortified after her mother's conversation with Martin's dad. Have you ever been embarrassed by something a parent or adult did or said? How did you handle the situation? (p. 253-254)
22. How is Marin's father's response to sex different from Gabi's mother's? Which do you think is more likely to encourage responsibility? (p. 255)
23. Why does Gabi feel such a strong hatred for German? How does she deal with it? Do you think Gabi should have handled it differently? (p. 257-261)
24. What are the consequences of Gabi's actions with German? How does Cindy respond when she finds out what Gabi did? Why do you think Cindy is so upset by what Gabi did? (p. 262-271)
25. What does Gabi say that Tía Bertha overhears? How does it affect Tía Bertha? (p. 264-265)

**Reflective  
Writing  
Questions**

26. On Senior Ditch Day Gabi has to decide if she's going to let her weight determine whether or not she enjoys the day. How does Gabi handle this decision? How does she talk herself through her fear of wearing a swimsuit in front of others? Do you think she handled it well? How did her day at the beach go? (p. 272-274)
27. How are Gabi's mother's expectations for Gabi contradictory? How does this represent the challenges that many young women face when trying to decide how to be a woman in the world today? (p. 274-276)
28. How do Gabi and her mother finally reconcile about Gabi moving away? (p. 278-279)
29. Sebastian tells Gabi some pretty insightful things about dealing with her father's death and addiction. What advice does he give her? Are there any situations where you could apply Sebastian's advice? (p. 278)
30. How does Tía Bertha surprise Gabi at the graduation celebration? (p. 282)

1. Think about the women in the story (Cindy, Tía Bertha, Georgina, Gabi's mother). In different ways, they are all trying to navigate what it means to be a woman in society. Pick one of the women and describe how they come to terms with their individual struggle and how they decide what it means to be a woman. What does Gabi learn from each of them? What kind of woman does Gabi decide to be?
2. Compare Gabi's poetry from the beginning of the year with her poetry at the end of the year. How is it different? What does this show about Gabi?
3. How would you characterize Gabi? How does Quintero communicate this through the writing in the novel? What does she do so that we hear Gabi's voice and personality in the words?
4. Poetry writing becomes an incredibly helpful way for Gabi to process the events and people that have greatly impacted her life. She writes two moving poems about her grandfather and grandmother. These poems are similar to poetry writing activities like "[Where I'm From](#)" or "[Conjuring Poetry](#)". Choose one of these two types of poems and write one about a person who has impacted your life.
5. What is Gabi's relationship with food like? In what ways is it healthy? In what ways is it unhealthy?
6. Describe how Gabi's weight influences her relationship with her mother, friends, and boyfriends. How does her body image affect the way she sees herself and interacts with the world? Why does something like being overweight have so much control over the quality of a person's life?
7. While Gabi may struggle with her body image and self-doubt, you

could still argue that she's a strong role model in a lot of ways. In what ways does she stand up for what she believes in, think for herself, and resist pressure to conform to expectations she doesn't agree with? (Think about her relationship with Eric, especially the scene at the mall; the conflict with her mother over college; Senior Skip day at the beach; her loyalty to Cindy; and any other examples you can identify). What do you think—is Gabi a good female role model? Explain your answer.

8. Choose one of the poems listed below that Ms. Abernand assigns the class. Read it and then answer the following questions. Why do you think Ms. Abernand chose this poem for the class? How does it apply to Gabi? Now that you've read the poem, what do you think of it? Can you apply it to anything in your life?

- Still I Rise by Maya Angelou
- We Real Cool by Gwendolyn Brooks
- Loose Woman by Sandra Cisneros
- Lady Lazarus by Sylvia Plath
- Anyone lived in a pretty how town by ee cummings
- Howl by Allen Ginsberg
- Dead Pig's Revenge by Michele Serros
- The Raven by Edgar Allen Poe

## **ABOUT US & THIS GUIDE**

The Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI) receives resources from the U.S. Department of Education to support K-12 teaching about Latin America. Our goal is to provide a supportive environment for teaching across grade levels and subject areas so educators can bring regional and linguistic knowledge of Latin America into their classrooms. For more information and materials that support teaching about Latin America in the classroom, visit our website at <http://laii.unm.edu/outreach>

Written by staff at the LAI, **Vamos a Leer Educator's Guides** provide an excellent way to teach about Latin America through literacy. Each guide is based upon a book featured in the Vamos a Leer book group. For more on Vamos a Leer, visit our blog at [bit.ly/vamosaleer](http://bit.ly/vamosaleer). This guide was prepared by Katrina Dillon, LAI Project Assistant.

To complement this guide, the LAI oversees the **Vamos a Leer blog**, which provides a space for exploring how to use literature to teach about Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinos in the United States. In addition to promoting discussion, the blog shares relevant resources and curriculum materials. Visit the blog at the following address: <http://bit.ly/vamosaleer>.